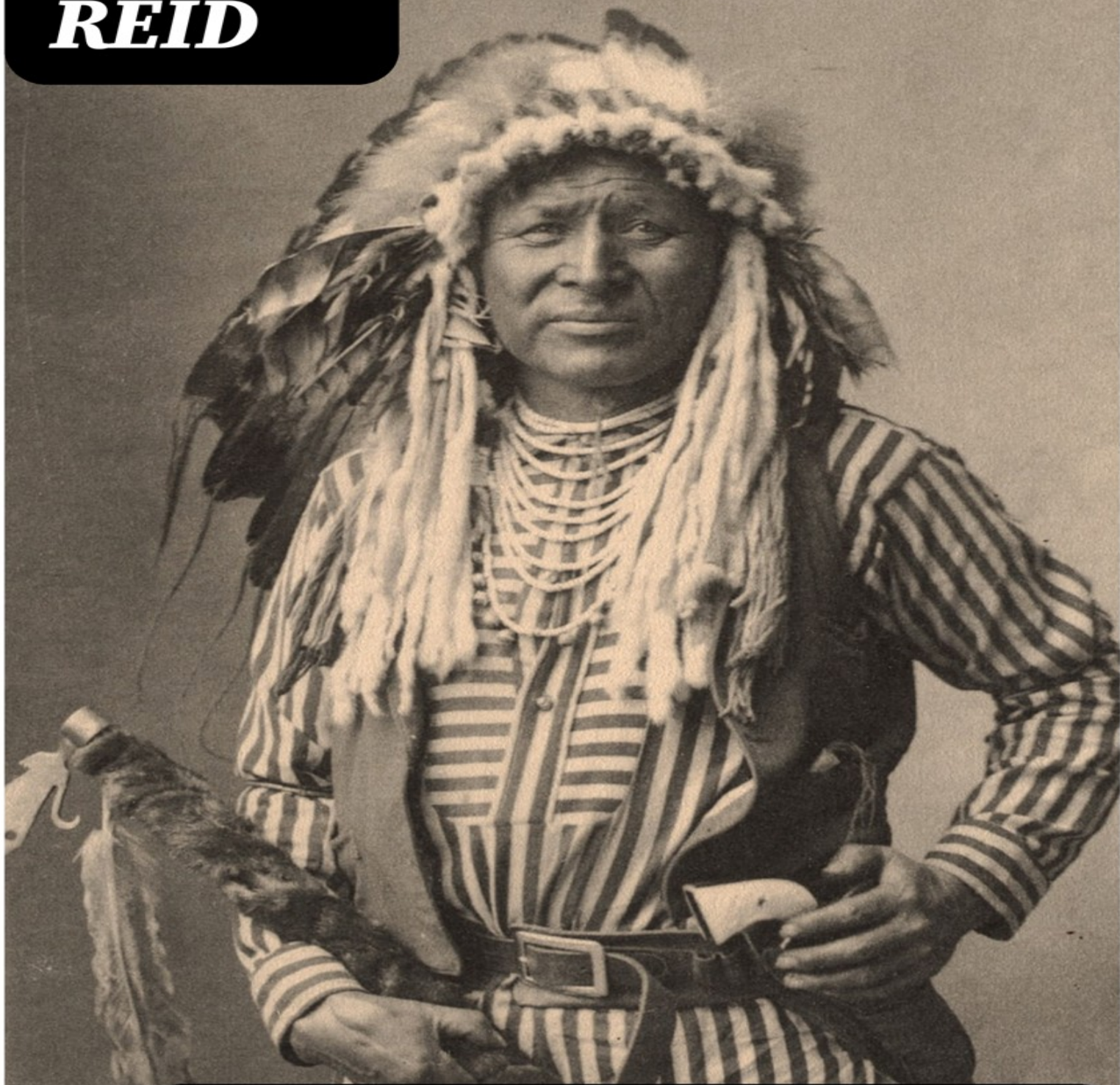


**MAYNE
REID**



**THE YELLOW
CHIEF**

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The Yellow Chief

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Chapter One.](#)

[Chapter Two.](#)

[Chapter Three.](#)

[Chapter Four.](#)

[Chapter Five.](#)

[Chapter Six.](#)

[Chapter Seven.](#)

[Chapter Eight.](#)

[Chapter Nine.](#)

[Chapter Ten.](#)

[Chapter Eleven.](#)

[Chapter Twelve.](#)

[Chapter Thirteen.](#)

[Chapter Fourteen.](#)

[Chapter Fifteen.](#)

[Chapter Sixteen.](#)

[Chapter Seventeen.](#)

[Chapter Eighteen.](#)

[Chapter Nineteen.](#)

[Chapter Twenty.](#)

[Chapter Twenty One.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Two.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Three.](#)

[Chapter Twenty Four.](#)

Chapter One.

[Table of Contents](#)

The Punishment of the Pump.

“To the pump with him! And see that he has a double dose of it!”

The words were spoken in a tone of command, earnest and angry. They were addressed to the overseer of a cotton-plantation not far from Vicksburg, in the State of Mississippi, the speaker being Blount Blackadder, a youth aged eighteen, and son to Squire Blackadder, the owner of the plantation.

Who was to receive the double douche?

Near by stood a personage to whom the words evidently pointed. He was also a youth, not very different either in age or size from him who had given the order; though his tawny skin and short crisped hair bespoke him of a different race—in short, a mulatto. And the time—for it is a tale of twenty years ago—along with other attendant circumstances, proclaimed him a slave of the plantation.



THE YELLOW CHIEF.

And why ordered to be thus served? As a punishment, of course.

You may smile at the idea, and deem it a joke. But the “punishment of the pump” is one of the most severe that can be inflicted; far more so than either the bastinado, or castigation by the lash. A man may writhe while his back is being scored by the cowskin; but that continuous stream of cold water, at first only refreshing, becomes after a time almost unendurable, and the victim feels as though his skull were being split open with an axe.

What had “Blue Dick”—the plantation sobriquet of the young mulatto—what had he done to deserve such chastisement?

The overseer, hesitating to inflict it, put this question to Blount Blackadder.

“That’s my business, and not yours, Mr Snively. Enough when I say he has deserved; and darn me if he don’t have it. To the pump with him!”

“Your father won’t be pleased about it,” pursued the overseer. “When he comes home—”

“When he comes home; that’s my affair. He’s not at home now, and during his absence I’m master of this plantation, I guess. I hope, sir, you’ll recognise me as such.”

“Oh, sartinly,” grumbled the overseer.

“Well, then, I’ve only to tell you, that the nigger’s got to be punished. He’s done enough to deserve it. Let that satisfy you; and for the rest I’ll be answerable to my father.”

What Blue Dick had done the young planter did not condescend to explain. Nor was it his passion that rendered him reticent; but a secret consciousness that he was himself in the wrong, and acting from motives of the meanest revenge.

They had their origin in jealousy. There was a quadroon girl upon the plantation to whose smiles Blue Dick had aspired. But they were also coveted by his young master—the master of both.

In such a rivalry the end is easily told. The honest love of Blue Dick was doomed to a harsh disappointment; for Sylvia, the quadroon, had yielded her heart less to the dictates of natural partiality, than to the combined influence of vanity and power. It was a tale oft told in those days of the so-styled patriarchal institution—happily now at an end.

Maddened by the discovery of his sweetheart's defection, the young mulatto could not restrain himself from recrimination. A collision had occurred between him and his master's son. There had been words and threatened blows, quickly succeeded by the scene we are describing.

Mr Snively was not the man to hold out long against the threats of authority. His place was too precious to be risked by an act of idle chivalry. What to him was the punishment of a slave: a ceremony at which he was accustomed to assist almost every day of his life? Besides, he had no particular liking for Blue Dick, who was regarded by him as a "sassy fellow." Assured against blame from Squire Blackadder, he was only too ready to cause execution of the order. He proceeded to do so.

The scene was transpiring in an inclosed court-yard to the rear of the "big house" (Negro nomenclature for the planter's dwelling), adjoining also to the stables. On one side stood the pump, a tall obelisk of oak, with its massive arm of iron, and spout five feet above the level of the

pavement. Underneath traversed a trough, the hallowed trunk of a tree, designed for the watering of the horses.

In the hot summer sun of the Mississippi Valley it should have been a sight to give gladness to the eye. Not so with the slaves on Squire Blackadder's plantation. To them it was more suggestive of sadness and fear; and they were accustomed to regard it with the same feelings as one who looks upon a gallows, or a guillotine. More than one half their number had, one time or another, sat under that spout till its chilly jet seemed like a sharp spear piercing their wool-covered crania.

The punishment of the pump was too frequent on Squire Blackadder's plantation to need minute directions as to the mode of administering it. Mr Snively had only to repeat the order received, to some half-dozen stalwart slaves, who stood around ready to execute it. The more ready, that Blue Dick was now to be the victim; for, even with these, the mulatto youth was far from being a favourite. Full of conceit on account of his clearer skin, he had always shown himself too proud to associate with them, and was thus deprived of their sympathies. It was his first punishment, too; for, although he had often before offended in a different way, Squire Blackadder had refrained from chastising him.

It was thought strange by all, though none knew the reason; and this immunity of which he had been accustomed to boast, rendered his now threatened punishment a thing for his fellow-slaves to rejoice at.

They who were ordered to administer it, went about their work with a will. At a sign from the overseer, Blue Dick was seized by two of the field hands, and dragged up to the

pump. With cords procured from the adjacent stable, he was lashed to the trough in such a position that his crown came directly under the spout, eighteen inches below it. By stays stretching right and left, his head was so confined that he could not turn it an inch one way or the other. To have attempted moving it, would have been to tighten the noose, by which the rope was rove around his neck.

“Now, give him his shower-bath!” vociferated young Blackadder to the huge negro who stood by the handle of the pump.

The man, a savage-looking monster, who had himself more than once been submitted to a similar ducking, obeyed the order with a gleeful grin. The iron lever, rattling harsh upon its pivot, moved rapidly up and down; the translucent jet shot forth from the spout, and fell plashing upon the skull beneath.

The by-standers laughed, and to the victim it would yet have been only pleasant play; but among those who were jeering him was Sylvia the quadroon! All were abroad—both the denizens of the negro quarter, and the domestics of the house—spectators of his suffering and his shame.

Even Clara Blackadder, the sister of his tyrant torturer—a young lady of about twenty summers, with all the seeming graces of an angel—stood on the back porch contemplating the scene with as much indifference as if, from the box of a theatre, she had been looking upon some mere spectacle of the stage!

If she felt interest in it, it arose from no sympathy with the sufferer.

On the face of her brother was an expression of interest vivid and pronounced. His features bespoke joy—the joy of a malignant soul indulging in revenge.

It was a sad picture, that presented by these two young men—the one exulting in despotic power, the other suffering torture through its exercise. It was but the old and oft repeated tableau of master and slave.

And yet were they strangely alike, both in form and feature. With the ochreous tint extracted from his skin, and the curl combed out of his hair, Blue Dick might have passed for a brother of Blount Blackadder. He would have been a little better looking, and certainly showing a countenance of less sinister cast.

Perhaps not at that moment; for as the agony of physical pain became added to the mental anguish he was enduring, his features assumed an expression truly diabolical. Even the jet of water, spreading like a veil over them, did not hide from the spectators the fiendlike glance with which he regarded his oppressor. Through the diaphanous sheet they could see white lips tightly compressed against whiter teeth, that grinned defiance and vengeance, as his eyes rested on Sylvia. He uttered no groan; neither did he sue for mercy; though the torture he was enduring caused him to writhe within his ropes, at the risk of their throttling him.

There were few present who did not know that he was suffering extreme pain, and many of them from self-experience. And it was only when one of these, stirred by vivid memories, ventured to murmur some slight words of expostulation, that the punishment was suspended.

“He’s had enough, I reckon?” said Snively, turning interrogatively toward the young planter.

“*No*, darn him! not half enough,” was the reply; “you haven’t given him the double. But never mind! It’ll do for the present. Next time he offends in like manner, he shall be pumped upon till his thick skull splits like a cedar rail!”

Saying this, Blount Blackadder turned carelessly upon his heel, and went off to join his sister in the porch—leaving the overseer to release the sufferer at his discretion.

The iron handle discontinued its harsh grating; the cruel spout ceased to pour; and Blue Dick, disengaged from his garotte, was carried fainting to the stable.

But he was never again subjected to the punishment of the pump. The young planter did not have the chance to carry out his threat. Three days after, Blue Dick disappeared from the plantation. And on the morning of that day, almost simultaneous with his disappearance, was found the body of the quadroon girl Sylvia, at the bottom of the peach-orchard, her head split open to the chin!

It had been done by the blade of a wood-axe. There was no mystery about the matter—no speculation as to the author of the deed. The antecedent circumstances pointed directly to Blue Dick; and he was at once sought for.

Sought for, but not found. As soon as the hue-and-cry had gone abroad, the surrounding settlers, planters as well as poor whites, sprang to their arms, and into their saddles. The blood-mastiffs were put upon Blue Dick’s track; but spite their keen scent for such game, and the energetic urging of their owners, they never set fang in the flesh of the mulatto murderer.

Chapter Two.

Table of Contents

The Blackadders.

In the time preceding the extinction of slavery, there was no part of the United States where its chain was so galling as in that region lying along the lower Mississippi, known as the "Coast." More especially was this true of the State of Mississippi itself. In the old territories, east of the Alleghany range, the "institution" was tempered with a certain touch of the patriarchal; and the same might be said of Kentucky and Tennessee. Even in parts of Louisiana the mild indolent habits of the Creole had a softening influence on the condition of the slave. But it was different on the great cotton and tobacco plantations of Mississippi, as also portions of the Louisiana coast; many of whose owners were only half the year residents, and where the management of the negro was intrusted to the overseer—an irresponsible, and, in many cases, severe taskmaster. And among the owners themselves was a large number—the majority, in fact—not born upon the soil; but colonists, from all countries, who had gone thither, often with broken fortunes, and not unfrequently characters as well.

By these men the slave was only looked upon as so much live-stock; and it was not a question either of his happiness or welfare, but the work to be got out of him.

It would be a mistake to say that Mississippian planters were all of this class; as it would be also erroneous to suppose that Southern masters in general were less humane than other men. There is no denying them a certain

generosity of character; and many among them were philanthropists of the first class. It was the institution itself that cursed them; and, brought up under its influence, they thought and acted wrongly; but not worse, I fear, than you or I would have done, had we been living under the same lights.

Unfortunately, humane men were exceptions among planters of the lower Mississippi; and so bad at one time was the reputation of this section of the South, that to have threatened a Virginia negro—or even one of Kentucky or Tennessee—with sale or expulsion thither, was sufficient at any time to make him contented with his task!

The word “Coast” was the *bogey* of negro boyhood, and the terror of his manhood.

Planter Blackadder, originally from the State of Delaware, was among the men who had contributed to this evil reputation. He had migrated to Mississippi at an early period of his life, making a purchase of some cheap land on a tract ceded by the Choctaws (known as the “Choctaw Purchase”). A poor man at the period of his migration, he had never risen to a high rank among the planter aristocracy of the State. But just for this reason did he avail himself of what appeared, to a mind like his, the real privilege of the order—a despotic bearing toward the sable-skinned helots whose evil star had guided them into his hands. In the case of many of them, their own evil character had something to do in conducting them thither; for planter Blackadder was accustomed to buy his negroes *cheap*, and his “stock” was regarded as one of the worst, in the section of country in which his plantation was “located.” Despite their bad