

**THE RED  
MOCCASINS:  
A STORY**

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The red moccasins: a story by Morrison Heady

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BY  
MORRISON HEADY

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## A STORY.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### Portrait of Our Hero.

Once, in the spring-green years of the good old times, when our great-grandfathers were great-grandchildren themselves, there lived in the land of green Kentucky a sprout of a man, some dozen years old, who went by the name of Sprigg. And "Sprigg," for aught I know to the contrary, was his real name; though it has so little the sound of a name, I sometimes wonder his father and mother should ever have thought of giving it to him, when any grandmother of common capacity for naming babies could have suggested a better one. "Jeems," for example, or "Weeliam." Be this as it may, "Sprigg" was the name to which our hero always answered, whenever addressed as cousin, or uncle, or friend; and which, before going the way of all good grandfathers, he left at the end of his will, where it was thought real enough, not only to make

that instrument good in the eyes of the law, but his heirs highly respectable in the eyes of the world. We have no choice, then, but to call our hero "Sprigg," just as everybody else did; though were we allowed to christen him more to our liking, we should certainly call him Jack. Jack, in our humble opinion, being the fittest name in the world for giving pointedge and moral force to a juvenile novel. Especially would we be allowed this liberty in the present instance, where the hero, whose fortune we propose to follow, is described as being of a wild and run-away turn, and, hence, well fitted to figure as a warning example to all dissatisfied youngsters, who not content to stay at home and do their sliding on dry ground, go seeking for ice on a summer day at imminent risk of getting drowned.

Now green Kentucky, in the days of Sprigg, was *green* Kentucky, indeed! Mrs. Daniel Boone and her daughters had not yet distinguished themselves by being the first white women who ever set foot upon the banks of the Kentucky River, when Sprigg was already a three-years' child, the joy and pride of a home in a hewn log house in western Virginia; as merry and saucy, and every whit as well pleased with himself as were he the rising hope and promise of one of the "F. F. Vs." The eight or nine years of pioneer activity which had followed the historical event just noticed, had made many a wide gap in the forest, yet had not changed the general aspect

of the country so much but that the fields, as viewed by the eagle who sailed with the clouds, must have appeared no more than as the prints of man's feet, left impressed in the otherwise universal verdure. As you may well imagine, so wild and savage a region must still have been the home of a thousand wild and savage creatures, the like whereof we never dream of now-a-days, even in our loneliest woodland rambles. There, too, was the terrible red man, who, though he built not his wigwam in these wilds, made it his frequent custom of resorting thither, sometimes to follow the chase, but oftener to war with the whites, who lived in great terror of him the whole year round.

The Christian name of our hero's father, whom he called "Pap," was Jervis; the Christian name of his mother, whom he called "Mam," was Elster, and the surname was Whitney. They dwelt in a roomy cabin, rudely built of logs and boards, with a clay-topped chimney at each end, and a porch or shed on each side. Under the front porch Jervis hung his saddle, fishing tackle, beaver traps and the like. Under the back porch Elster kept her spinning wheel, crockeryware, garden seed, a big cedar water bucket, with its crooked-handle gourd, and the like; while in there, on the earthen floor of the kitchen, stood her huge, unwieldy loom. The cabin was situated in the midst of a small patch of cultivated ground, hemmed in on every side by dense and lofty



woods, which spread their waving shadows for miles and miles away to the north and south, to the east and west, with only here and there, at wide intervals, a similar clearing, or a natural glade to speck the boundless green.

Now Sprigg, you must know, happened to be an only child—a most uncommon circumstance in backwoods life—your backwoodsman, like your poor woodcutter, who makes such a figure in old-time story-books, rarely stopped short of a baker's dozen, as a replenisher of the earth. Such being the case, "Pap" and "Mam" must need, of course, do their very utmost to make their one chub as troublesome as six, in order to realize, so it would seem, how much kind Providence had done for them; *i. e.*, by overdoing the thing to make him happy; underdoing the thing to make him good enough to be what they most desired. To exemplify: If there chanced to be a little bread in the cupboard and a little milk in the springhouse (these were luxuries then in the Hunter's Paradise), all of it, though there might be quite enough for two, was sure to find its way to Sprigg's tin cup and pewter spoon; and Sprigg's pewter plate always received the tit-bits of venison and bear's meat. The best feather bed in the house was Sprigg's; so was the warmest place by the fire, which he would share with nobody, but Pow-wow, the dog—the only creature, four-footed or two-footed, with whom he could be in contact for a

whole day without coming to hard rubs. If a deer-skin proved, upon dressing, an uncommonly nice piece of buckskin, fine, fair and soft, straight, it was cut up and made into moccasins, breeches and hunting shirt for Sprigg; and should a fat raccoon take a fancy to quarter himself for the night in "Pap's" trap, its fresh, sleek skin would be seen in less than a fortnight thence on Sprigg's head, in the form of a cap, with the ringed tail left on behind, as ornamental there as a cue, if not more so. In short, there was nothing rare, or choice of its kind and within the bestowal of the Hunter's Paradise, which did not, sooner or later, find its way to the hands or feet, to the head or back, or to the selfish little belly of master Sprigg. But these were trifling indulgences compared with others, and would, in all likelihood, have left upon his disposition no other lasting evil effect than to render him overwatchful of his own ease and comfort. What was far worse, he was allowed to say, with his saucy young tongue, whatever he should choose to say; and to do, with his meddling young hands, whatever he should choose to do; and to go, with his wayward young feet, whithersoever his foolish young nose should choose to lead him; so that, by the time he had walked into his twelfth year, a worse spoilt boy, a vainer boy, a more self-conceited boy, a more self-willed boy than master Sprigg was not to be found in the land—ransack the Paradise from Big Bone Lick to the Mammoth Cave.

And yet, to put the question to such parents, as Jervis and Elster—though with little expectation of receiving an audible answer—what other result could reasonably have been looked for in a boy, brought up, like Sprigg, to know no will but his own? This was the very thing to render it next to impossible for him to know what his own will really was and how he should use it, not knowing that of his elders and wisers. This, in turn, was the very thing to keep him but ill at ease with himself, and iller at ease, if not at downright loggerheads, with everybody else.

Now, had Jervis and Elster been as wise as we are—you and I—they would, at the very outset of their son's existence, have laid their own will down, as the rule, whereby he should order his steps until the beard on his lip announced him qualified to follow his own nose, without too great danger of forgetting to allow that organ the help of his eyes and ears. But as it was, they would have done a wiser and more benevolent part by their boy had they given him a scalping knife, without sheath, for a plaything, or a young bear, without a muzzle and chain, for a pet. The knife might have cut off a few of his fingers, and the bear might have clawed off some of his flesh, but the mischief done would have been slight, compared to that of letting him have his will to play with.

So, it were hardly to be laid to poor Sprigg's charge that he was mad enough to figure as a warn-