

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis
Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Crane
Leslie Stockton Vatsyayana Verne
Burroughs Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Curtis Homer Tolstoy Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato
Potter Zola Lawrence Stevenson Dickens Harte
Kant Freud Jowett Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse
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In Connection with the De Willoughby Claim

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A SPECIAL LIMITED EDITION

IN CONNECTION
WITH THE
De WILLOUGHBY CLAIM

BY

FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT

AUTHOR OF

“A LADY OF QUALITY,” “LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY,” ETC.

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In Connection with The De Willoughby Claim

CHAPTER I

High noon at Talbot's Cross-roads, with the mercury standing at ninety-eight in the shade—though there was not much shade worth mentioning in the immediate vicinity of the Cross-roads post-office, about which, upon the occasion referred to, the few human beings within sight and sound were congregated. There were trees enough a few hundred yards away, but the post-office stood boldly and unflinchingly in the blazing sun. The roads crossing each other stretched themselves as far as the eye could follow them, the red clay transformed into red dust which even an ordinarily lively imagination might have fancied was red hot. The shrill, rattling cry of the grasshoppers, hidden in the long yellow sedge-grass and drouth-smitten corn, pierced the stillness now and then with a suddenness startling each time it broke forth, because the interval between each of the pipings was given by the hearers to drowsiness or heated unconscious naps.

In such napping and drowsiness the present occupants of the post-office were indulging. Upon two empty goods boxes two men in copperas-coloured jean garments reclined in easy attitudes, their hats tilted over their eyes, while several 2 others balanced their split-seated chairs against the house or the post-porch and dozed.

Inside the store the postmaster and proprietor tilted his chair against the counter and dozed also, though fitfully, and with occasional restless changes of position and smothered maledictions against the heat. He was scarcely the build of man to sleep comfortably at high noon in midsummer. His huge, heavy body was rather too much for him at any time, but during the hot weather he succumbed beneath the weight of his own flesh. Hamlin County knew him as "Big Tom D'Willerby," and, indeed, rather prided itself upon him as a creditable possession. It noted any increase in his weight, repeated his jokes, and bore itself patiently under his satire. His indolence it regarded with leniency not entirely untinged with secret exultation.

"The derndest, laziest critter," his acquaintances would remark to each other; "the *derndest* I do reckon that ever the Lord made. Nigh unto three hundred he weighs, and never done a lick o' work in his life. Not one! Lord, no! Tom D'Willerby work? I guess not. He gits on fine without any o' that in his'n. Work ain't his kind. It's a pleasin' sight to see him lyin' round thar to the post-office an' the boys a-waitin' on to him, doin' his tradin' for him, an' sortin' the mail when it comes in. They're ready enough to do it jest to hear him gas."

And so they were. About eight years before the time the present story commences, he had appeared upon the scene apparently having no object in view but to make himself as comfortable as possible. He took up his quarters at one of the farm-houses among the mountains, paid his hostess regularly for the simple accommodations she could afford him, and, before three months passed, had established his 3 reputation and, without making the slightest apparent effort, had gathered about him a large circle of friends and admirers.

"His name's D'Willerby," Mrs. Pike would drawl when questioned about him, "an' he's kin to them D'Willerbys that's sich big bugs down to D'Lileville. I guess they ain't much friendly, though. He don't seem to like to have nothin' much to say about 'em. Seems like he has money a-plenty to carry him along, an' he talks some o' settin' up a store somewhars."

In the course of a month or so he carried out the plan, selecting Talbot's Cross-roads as the site for the store in question. He engaged hands to erect a frame building, collected by the assistance of some mysterious agency a heterogeneous stock consisting of calicoes, tinware, coffee, sugar, tobacco, and various waif and stray commodities, and, having done so, took his seat on the porch one morning and announced the establishment open.

Upon the whole, the enterprise was a success. Barnesville was fifteen miles distant, and the farmers, their wives and daughters, were glad enough to stop at the Cross-roads for their calico dresses and store-coffee. By doing so they were saved a long ride and gained superior conversational advantages. "D'Willerby's mighty easy to trade with," it was said.

There was always a goodly number of "critters" tied to the fence-corners, and consequently to business was added the zest of society and the interchanging of gossip. "D'Willerby's" became a centre of interest and attraction, and D'Willerby himself a county institution.

Big Tom, however, studiously avoided taking a too active part in the duties of the establishment. Having with great forethought provided himself with a stout chair which could be moved from behind the counter to the door, and from the door to the store as the weather demanded, he devoted himself almost exclusively to sitting in it and encouraging a friendly and accommodating spirit in his visitors and admirers. The more youthful of those admirers he found useful in the extreme.

"Boys," he would say, "a man can't do more than a thousand things at once. A man can't talk a steady stream and do himself justice, and settle the heftiest kind of questions, and say the kind of things these ladies ought to have said to 'em, and then measure out molasses and weigh coffee and slash off calico dresses and trade for eggs. Some of you've got to roust out and do some clerking, or I've got to quit. I've not got the constitution to stand it. Jim, you 'tend to Mis' Pike, and Bill, you wait on Mis' Jones. Lord! Lord! half a dozen of you here, and not one doing a thing — not a derned thing! Do you want me to get up and leave Miss Mirandy and do things myself? We've got to settle about the colour of this gown. How'd you feel now, if it wasn't becoming to her complexion? Just help yourself to that plug of tobacco, Hance, and lay your ten cents in the cash drawer, and then you can weigh out that butter of Mis' Simpson's."

When there was a prospect of a post-office at the Cross-roads, there was only one opinion as to who was the man best calculated to adorn the position of postmaster.

"The store's right yere, Tom," said his patrons, "an' you're right yere. Ye can write and spell off things 'thout any trouble, an' I reckon you wouldn't mind the extry two dollars comin' in ev'ry month."

"Lord! Lord!" groaned Tom, who was stretched full length on the floor of the porch when the subject was first broached. "Do you want a man to kill himself out an' out, boys? Work himself into eternal kingdom come? Who'd do the extra work, I'd like to know — empty out the mail-bag and hand out the mail, and do the extra

cussin'? That would be worth ten dollars a month. And, like as not, the money would be paid in cheques, and who's goin' to sign 'em? Lord! I believe you think a man's immortal soul could be bought for fifty cents a day. You don't allow for the wear and tear on a fellow's constitution, boys."

But he allowed himself to be placed in receipt of the official salary in question, and the matter of extra labour settled itself. Twice a week a boy on horseback brought the mail-bag from Barnesville, and when this youth drew rein before the porch Big Tom greeted him from indoors with his habitual cordiality.

"Light, sonny, 'light!" he would call out in languidly sonorous tones; "come in and let these fellows hear the news. Just throw that mail-bag on the counter and let's hear from you. Plenty of good water down at the spring. Might as well take that bucket and fill it if you want a drink. I've been waiting for just such a man as you to do it. These fellows would sit here all day and let a man die. I can't get anything out of 'em. I've about half a mind to quit sometimes and leave them to engineer the thing themselves. Look here now, is any fellow going to attend to that mail, or is it going to lie there till I have to get up and attend to it myself? I reckon that's what you want. I reckon that'd just suit you. Jehoshaphat! I guess you'd like me to take charge of the eternal universe."

It was for the mail he waited with his usual complement of friends and assistants on the afternoon referred to at the opening of this chapter. The boy was behind time, and, 6 under the influence of the heat, conversation had at first flagged and then subsided. Big Tom himself had taken the initiative of dropping into a doze, and his companions had one by one followed his example, or at least made an effort at doing so. The only one of the number who remained unmistakably awake was a little man who sat on the floor of the end of the porch, his small legs, encased in large blue jean pantaloons, dangling over the side. This little man, who was gently and continuously ruminating, with brief "asides" of expectoration, kept his eyes fixed watchfully upon the Barnesville Road, and he it was who at last roused the dozers.

"Thar's some un a-comin'," he announced in a meek voice. "'Tain't him."

Big Tom opened his eyes, stretched himself, and gradually rose in his might, proving a very tight fit for the establishment, especially the doorway, towards which he lounged, supporting himself against its side.

"Who is it, Ezra?" he asked, almost extinguishing the latter cognomen with a yawn.

"It's thet thar feller!"

All the other men awakened in a body. Whomsoever the individual might be, he had the power to rouse them to a lively exhibition of interest. One and all braced themselves to look at the horseman approaching along the Barnesville Road.

"He's a kinder curi's-lookin' feller," observed one philosopher.

"Well, at a distance of half a mile, perhaps he is," said Tom. "In a cloud of dust and the sun blazin' down on him like thunderation, I don't know but you're right, Nath."

"Git out!" replied Nath, placidly. "He's a curi's-actin' 7 feller, anyway. Don't go nowhar nor hev nothin' to say to nobody. Jest sets right down in that thar holler with his wife, as if b'ars an' painters was all a man or woman wanted round 'em."

"She's a doggoned purty critter," said the little man in large trousers, placidly. He had not appeared to listen to the conversation, but, as this pertinent remark proved, it had not been lost on him.

His observation was greeted with a general laugh, which seemed to imply that the speaker had a character which his speech sustained.

"Whar did ye see her, Stamps?" was asked.

The little man remained unmoved, still dangling his legs over the porch side, still ruminating, still gazing with pale, blinking eyes up the road.

"Went over the mountain to 'tend court to Bakersville, an' took it on my road to go by thar. She was settin' in the door, an' I see her afore she seen me. When she hearn the sound of my mule's feet, she got up an' went into the house. It was a powerful hot mornin', 'n' I wus mighty dry, 'n' I stopped fur a cool drink. She didn't come out

when fust I hollered, 'n' when she did come, she looked kinder skeered 'n' wouldn't talk none. Kep' her sunbonnet over her face, like she didn't want to be seen overmuch."

"What does she look like, Ezry?" asked one of the younger men.

Mr. Stamps meditated a few seconds.

"Don't look like none o' the women folk about yere," he replied, finally. "She ain't their kind."

"What d'ye mean by that?"

"Dunno eggsactly. She's mighty white 'n' young-lookin' 'n' delicate—but that ain't all." 8

Tom made a restless movement.

"Look here, boys," he broke in, suddenly, "here's a nice business—a lot of fellows asking questions about a woman an' gossiping as if there wasn't a thing better to do. Leave 'em alone, if they want to be left alone—leave 'em alone."

Mr. Stamps expectorated in an entirely unbiased manner. He seemed as willing to leave his story alone as he had been to begin it.

"He's comin' yere," he said, softly, after a pause. "The't's whar he's comin'."

The rest of the company straightened themselves in their seats and made an effort to assume the appearance of slightly interested spectators. It became evident that Mr. Stamps was right, and that the rider was about to dismount.

He was a man about thirty years of age, thin, narrow-chested, and stooping. His coarse clothes seemed specially ill-suited to his slender figure, his black hair was long, and his beard neglected; his broad hat was pulled low over his eyes and partially concealed his face.

"He don't look none too sociable when he's nigher than half a mile," remarked Nath in an undertone.

He glanced neither to the right nor to the left as he strode past the group into the store. Strange to relate, Tom had lounged behind the counter and stood ready to attend him. He asked for a few neces-

sary household trifles in a low tone, and, as Tom collected and made them into a clumsy package, he stood and looked on with his back turned towards the door.

Those gathered upon the porch listened eagerly for the sound of conversation, but none reached their ears. Tom moved heavily to and fro for a few minutes, and then the parcel was handed across the counter. 9

"Hot weather," said the stranger, without raising his eyes.

"Yes," said Tom, "hot weather, sir."

"Good-day," said the stranger.

"Good-day," answered Tom.

And his customer took his departure. He passed out as he had passed in; but while he was indoors little Mr. Stamps had changed his position. He now sat near the wooden steps, his legs dangling as before, his small countenance as noncommittal as ever. As the stranger neared him, he raised his pale little eyes, blinked them, indulged in a slight jerk of the head, and uttered a single word of greeting.

"Howdy?"

The stranger started, glanced down at him, and walked on. He made no answer, untied his horse, mounted it, and rode back over the Barnesville Road towards the mountain.

Mr. Stamps remained seated near the steps and blinked after him silently until he was out of sight.

"Ye didn't seem to talk none, D'Willerby," said one of the outsiders when Tom reappeared.

Tom sank into his chair, thrust his hands into his pockets, and stretched his limbs out to their fullest capacity.

"Let a man rest, boys," he said, "let a man rest!"

He was silent for some time afterwards, and even on the arrival of the mail was less discursive than usual. It was Mr. Stamps who finally aroused him from his reverie.

Having obtained his mail—one letter in a legal-looking envelope—and made all other preparations to return to the bosom of his family, Stamps sidled up to the counter, and, leaning over it, spoke in an insinuatingly low tone:

“She was bar’foot,” he said, mildly, “‘n’ she hadn’t been raised to it—that was one thing. Her feet wus as soft ‘n’ tender as a baby’s; ‘n’ fur another thing, her hands wus 10 as white as her face, ‘n’ whiter. Thet ain’t the way we raise ‘em in Hamlin County—that’s all.”

And, having said it, he slipped out of the store, mounted his mule, and jogged homeward on the Barnesville Road also.

CHAPTER II

Before the war there were no people better known or more prominent in their portion of the State than the De Willoughbys of Delisle County, Tennessee. To have been born a De Willoughby was, in general opinion, to have been born with a silver spoon in one's mouth. It was indeed to have been born to social dignity, fortune, courage, and more than the usual allowance of good looks. And though the fortune was lavishly spent, the courage sometimes betrayed into a rather theatrical dare-deviltry, and the good looks prone to deteriorate in style, there was always the social position left, and this was a matter of the deepest importance in Delisleville. The sentiments of Delisleville were purely patrician. It was the county town, and contained six thousand inhabitants, two hotels, and a court-house. It had also two or three business streets and half a dozen churches, all very much at odds with each other and each seriously inclined to disbelieve in the probable salvation of the rest. The "first families" (of which there were eight or ten, with numerous branches) attended the Episcopal Church, the second best the Presbyterian, while the inferior classes, who could scarcely be counted at all, since they had not been born in Delisleville, drifted to the Methodists.

The De Willoughbys attended the Episcopal Church, and, being generally endowed with voices, two or three of them sang in the choir, which was composed entirely of members 12 of the attending families and executed most difficult music in a manner which was the cause after each service of much divided opinion. Opinion was divided because the choir was divided—separated, in fact, into several small, select cliques, each engaged in deadly and bitter feud with the rest. When the moon-eyed soprano arose, with a gentle flutter, and opened her charming mouth in solo, her friends settled themselves in their pews with a general rustle of satisfaction, while the friends of the contralto exchanged civilly significant glances; and on the way home the solo in question was disposed of in a manner at once thorough and final. The same thing occurred when the contralto was prominent, or the tenor, or the baritone, or the basso, each of whom it was confidently asserted by competent Delisleville judges might have rendered him or herself and Delisle-

ville immortal upon the lyric stage if social position had not placed the following of such a profession entirely out of the question. There had indeed been some slight trouble in one or two of the best families, occasioned by the musical fervour of youthful scions who were in danger of being led into indiscretions by their enthusiasm.

The De Willoughbys occupied one of the most prominent pews in the sacred edifice referred to. Judge De Willoughby, a large, commanding figure, with a fine sweep of long hair, mustache and aquiline profile; Mrs. De Willoughby (who had been a Miss Vanuxem of South Carolina), slender, willowy, with faded brunette complexion and still handsome brunette eyes, and three or four little De Willoughbys, all more or less pretty and picturesque. These nearly filled the pew. The grown-up Misses De Willoughby sang with two of their brothers in the choir. There were three sons, Romaine, De Courcy, and Thomas. But Thomas did not sing 13 in the choir. Thomas, alas! did not sing at all. Thomas, it was universally conceded by every De Willoughby of the clan, was a dismal failure. Even from his earliest boyhood, when he had been a huge, overgrown fellow, whose only redeeming qualities were his imperturbable good-humor and his ponderous wit, his family had regarded him with a sense of despair. In the first place, he was too big. His brothers were tall, lithe-limbed youths, who were graceful, dark-eyed, dark-haired, and had a general air of brilliancy. They figured well at college and in their world; they sang and danced in a manner which, combining itself with the name of De Willoughby, gave them quite an ennobled sort of distinction, a touch of patrician bravado added to their picturesqueness in the eyes of the admiring; and their little indiscretions were of a nature to be ignored or treated with gentle consideration as the natural result of their youth, spirit, and Southern blood. But at nineteen Thomas had attained a height of six feet five, with a proportionate breadth and ponderousness. His hands and feet were a disgrace to a De Willoughby, and his voice was a roar when he was influenced by anything like emotion. Displays of emotion, however, were but rare occurrences with him. He was too lazy to be roused to anger or any other violent feeling. He spent his leisure hours in lying upon sofas or chairs and getting very much in everybody's way. He lounged through school and college without the slightest *éclat* attending his progress.

It became the pastime of the household to make rather a butt of him, and for the most part he bore himself under the difficulties of his position peaceably enough, though there had been times when his weighty retorts had caused some sharp wincing.

"You're an ill-natured devil, Tom," his brother De 14 Courcy said to him, as he stood fingering the ornaments on the mantel after one such encounter. "You're an ill-natured devil."

Tom was stretched on a sofa, with his big hands under his head, and did not condescend to look around.

"I'm not such a thundering fool as you take me for, that's all," he answered. "I've got my eyes open. Keep to your side of the street, and I will keep to mine."

It was true that he had his eyes open and had more wit and feeling than they gave him credit for. No one understood him, not even his mother, who had deplored him from the first hour of his overweighted babyhood, when she had given him over to the care of his negro nurse in despair.

In the midst of a large family occupied with all the small gaieties attendant upon popularity and social distinction in a provincial town, he lived a lonely life, and one not without its pathetic side if it had been so looked upon. But even he himself had never regarded the matter from a sentimental point of view. He endeavoured to resign himself to his fate and meet it philosophically.

"I wasn't cut out for this sort of thing, boys," he had said to his friends at college, where he had been rather popular. "I wasn't cut out for it. Go ahead and leave me behind. I'm not a bad sort of fellow, but there is too much of me in one way and too little in another. What the Lord made such a man as me for after six thousand years' experience, I haven't found out yet. A man may as well make up his mind about himself first as last. I've made up mine and nobody differs from me so far as I've gone."

When he left college his brothers had already chosen their vocations. Delisle County knew them as promising young lawyers, each having distinguished himself with much fiery eloquence in an occasional case. The cases had not always been gained, but the fervour and poetry of the appeals to the rather muddled and startled

agriculturists who formed the juries were remembered with admiration and as being worthy of Delisleville, and were commented upon in the *Delisleville Oriflamme* as the "fit echoings of an eloquence long known in our midst as the birthright of those bearing one of our proudest names, an eloquence spurred to its eagle flights by the warm, chivalric blood of a noble race."

But the "warm, chivalric blood" of the race in question seemed to move but slowly in veins of its most substantial representative. The inertness of his youngest son roused that fine old Southern gentleman and well-known legal dignitary, Judge De Willoughby, to occasional outbursts of the fiery eloquence before referred to which might well have been productive of remarkable results.

"Good God, sir!" he would trumpet forth, "good God, sir! have we led the State for generation after generation to be disgraced and degraded and dragged in the dust by one of our own stock at last? The De Willoughbys have been gentlemen, sir, distinguished at the bar, in politics, and in the highest social circles of the South; and here we have a De Willoughby whose tastes would be no credit to— to his overseer, a De Willoughby who has apparently neither the ambition nor the qualification to shine in the sphere in which he was born! Blow your damned brains out, if you have any; blow your damned brains out, and let's have an end of the whole disgraceful business."

This referred specially to Tom's unwillingness to enter upon the study of medicine, which had been chosen for him.

"I should make a better farmer," he said, bitterly, after a prolonged discussion. "I'm not the build for women's bedrooms and children's bedsides. De Courcy would have suited you better."

"De Courcy is a gentleman—a gentleman, sir! He was born one and would shine in any profession a gentleman may adorn. As for you, this is the only thing left for you, and you shall try it, by G— —!"

"Oh," said Tom, "I'll try it. I can only fail, and I've done that before."

He did try it forthwith, applying himself to his studies with a persistence quite creditable. He read lying upon sofas and lounging in

the piazzas, and in course of time was sent to attend lectures in Philadelphia.

Whether he could have gained his diploma or not was never decided. Those of the professors who commented on him at all, spoke of him as slow but persevering, and regarded him rather as a huge receiving machine of orderly habits. The Judge began to congratulate himself upon his determination, and his mother thought it "a good thing poor Tom was disposed of."

But one terrible morning just before the first course of lectures was completed, he suddenly returned, walking into the Judge's office without any previous intimation of his intention.

When he turned in his seat and confronted him, the Judge lost his breath.

"You!" he cried; "you!"

"Yes," said Tom, "I've come back." He was rather pale and nervous, but there was a dogged, resigned look in his eyes. "I've made up my mind," he added, "that I cannot stand it. Turn me loose on one of your plantations to—to boss niggers. You said once I was fit for an overseer. Perhaps you weren't wrong. Say the word and I'll start to-morrow."

The Judge's aquiline countenance turned gray with fury. His fine mustache seemed to curl itself anew.

"You—you accursed scoundrel!" he gasped. "You accursed, underbred hound! Tell me what this means, or I'll strangle you."

"You'll say I'm a fool," said Tom, "and I suppose it's true, and—and—" with a tremour in his voice, "I've no need to be particular about the names you call me. I ought to be used to them by this time."

"Speak out," thundered the Judge, "and tell me the whole disgraceful truth!"

"It won't take long," said Tom; "I told it when I said I'd made up my mind I couldn't stand it. I've been walking the hospitals and attending the clinics for the last three months, and I've had a chance to see what my life would be if I went through. I've seen things to make a man tremble when they came back to him in the dead of

night—agony and horror—women and children! Good Lord! I can't tell you. De Courcy could, but I can't. I'd rather be in hell than live such a life day after day. I tried to stand up against it at first. I thought I might get used to it, but I haven't the nerve—or something was wrong. It got worse and worse, until I used to start up out of my sleep in a cold sweat, hearing screams and groans and prayers. That was the worst of all—their prayers to us to help them and not to hurt them. Four days ago a child was brought in—a child four or five years old. There was an operation to be performed, and I was the man chosen to hold it still. Its mother was sent out of the room. My God! how it screamed when it saw her go and knew it was to be left 18 to us. They told me to hold it because I was the strongest, and—and I put my hands on it. I'm a big fellow to look at, and I suppose it knew there was no help for it when I came near. It turned as white as death and looked up at me with the tears streaming down its face. Before the operation was half over it hadn't the strength left to scream or struggle, and it lay and looked at me and moaned. I should have given up the job, but somehow I couldn't make up my mind to—to leave it. When it was all done, I gave it back to its mother and went to my rooms. I turned sick on the way and had to sit down to rest. I swore then I'd let the thing drop, and I bought my ticket and came back. I'm not the man for the work. Better men may do it—perhaps it takes better men. I'm not up to it." And his shaken voice broke as he hung his great head.

A deadly calm settled upon the Judge. He pointed to the door.

"Go home to your mother, sir," he said, "I've done with you. Go and stay with the women. That's the place for you."

"He's a coward as well as a fool," he said afterwards in the bosom of his family; "a white-livered fool who hasn't the nerve to look at a sick child."

It was a terrible day for the household, but at last it was over. Tom went to his room in an apathy. He had been buffeted and scorned and held up to bitter derision until he had ceased to feel anything but a negative, helpless misery.

About a week later Delia Vanuxem appeared upon the scene. Delia Vanuxem was a young cousin of Mrs. De Willoughby's, and had come to pay her relatives a visit. It was the hospitable custom of