

LITTLE FOXES

by John Colwell

Colwell's exposition based on Song of Solomon 2:15, 'Catch the little foxes that spoil the vines,' examining the small sins and seemingly minor compromises that gradually undermine the believer's spiritual life.

7 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. 01 - Chapter 1
2. 02 - Chapter 2
3. 03 - Chapter 3
4. 04 - Chapter 4
5. 05 - Chapter 5
6. 06 - Chapter 6
7. 07 - Chapter 7

01 - Chapter 1

Chapter 1. Introduction. The Importance of Little Things.

Those who affect to despise the importance of little things, are in danger of becoming little people. Certainly no great man will ever do so. He will the rather prove his greatness by a hearty recognition of the truth of the wise saying, "He who despises little things, shall fall little by little." The Great Teacher drew some of His most beautiful and important lessons from little things, such as little flowers, little birds, little dew-drops, little children. He insisted on faithfulness in littles. My friend, life is great because it is the aggregation of littles. As the coral reefs which rear themselves high above the crawling sea beneath, are all made up of minute skeletons of microscopic animalcules; so life, mighty and solemn as having eternal consequences — life that towers over the sea of eternity, is made up of these minute incidents, of these trifling duties, of these small tasks; and only those who are faithful in the least are, or can be, faithful in the whole.

Little things make either . . .

the joy — or the sorrow,

the success — or the ruin,

the safety — or the danger,

the grandeur — or the smallness

— of human life. Illustrations of this principle abound.

Little NEGLECTS lead to great ruin. A captain who should say, "I have my vessel well built and well manned, my cargo is well secured, my men are at their posts, my charts and compasses are of the best, and all bids fair for a safe and speedy voyage; true it is, that I have no helm, but then that is such a little matter that I can well dispense with it" — would find neither passengers nor sailors to voyage with him. But would he be more unwise than those Christian moralists, who overlook the little things on which the safety and completeness of all true Christian morality turn?

Little PRECAUTIONS lead to great safety. The Syrian warrior refused to wash in Jordan according to the prophet's direction, because he could not see how so little a thing could effect his cure; but, when persuaded to it by wise and faithful servants, he found that, as little as it was, it wrought his salvation.

Little WASTINGS make great losses. If we waste the pennies, we shall never save the dollars. Wasted moments make lost minutes and ill-used hours. So many lives are thrown away because their possessors do not understand the value and utility of small portions of time. "Gather up the fragments" said our Lord, "that nothing be lost." Henry Martyn, the martyr missionary, earned the noble reputation of being "the man who never lost an hour." What wonder, then, that his life, as a whole, was, despite its brevity, so complete and effective. How did Wesley accomplish so much? "Leisure and I have parted company!" he said; and yet again, "No period lingers unemployed,

Or unimproved below."

Little SAVINGS make great gains. He would be a good friend to mankind, who would teach them how to save the littles. "Only a penny," is thought to be a sufficient excuse for spending it on any trifling folly.

Little TROUBLES make us miserable. Great ones do not often come, perhaps only once in a lifetime, and rarely more than two or three times in any life. When they do come, we brace ourselves up for the occasion — like a man who is about to carry a heavy burden, and bring in all the aids of philosophy and religion. The most treacherous of life's ills are the small cares, the petty annoyances, and the little irritations that attend our daily path. For not only do they come more frequently than larger troubles, but they have, for many reasons, far more power to embitter life. The sting of a wasp is much more serious than the buzz of a fly, and yet, we suppose, the man does not live who has had a fraction of the annoyance from wasps that he has had from flies. "Do go away," said the dog to the fly; "I hate you."

"Why?" replied the fly, "I never bite you."

"I wish you would bite, and have done with it," retorted the dog. "I would rather have one bite than this everlasting buzz."

Happy the man who is free from little ills; happier still he who is blessed with so equal a temper, or who has cultivated so serene a piety, that these small annoyances fall upon him with as little effect as snowflakes upon

02 - Chapter 2

CHAPTER 2. FRETTING.

We begin with this fox because, though he is one of the smallest, he is, nevertheless, one of the ugliest and most destructive. He looks very much as though he had walked backwards through a hedge, for his hair is always brushed the wrong way. His eyes are suffused with a watery substance which takes away all their brightness, and he manifests his presence by a continual whine.

Woe be to the vineyard disturbed by his daily or nightly visits! That which he eats or destroys, is as nothing compared to that which he sours and soils! His presence would spoil the glories of Heaven, and make the angels themselves weary of their blessed estate. Of all the unhappy ills with which man plagues himself — or allows the devil to plague him — fretfulness is one of the very worst. For although there are doubtless many evils that are more deadly in their influences, there are few that bring such an aggregate of evil to mankind. Let us then, by all means, keep this fox out of the vineyard. In order that we may do so, however, we must inquire for those gaps in the fence by which he enters. The CAUSES of fretfulness are manifold, a few only of which we have space to name.

Sometimes fretfulness arises from constitutional tendency or disposition. It is as natural for some people to fret, as it is for some people to have dark hair; whining is as much a part of some constitutions, as tallness is of others. When that is the case, we must not be too hard upon the offender; nor must he be too hard upon himself. But, on the other hand, just as no man would continue to bear any mark of physical deformity which was possible to remove — neither ought he tamely to submit to a mental or moral defect because it — or the tendency to it — is natural. Rather let him show that true nobility of soul which will make all about him subservient to him, and that Christian grace which makes loveliness and beauty grow even in an uncongenial soil. No man should willingly submit to the control of fretfulness.

Sometimes fretfulness arises from physical indisposition, or ill-health. Perhaps nothing produces so much fretfulness as this. Violent headaches, lack of sleep, shattered nerves, overwrought brains — sadly interfere with serenity of disposition and sweetness of temper.

Such people merit our pity, much more than they deserve our blame. And in such cases it is not always possible for religion alone to work a perfect or lasting remedy. If the cause is physical, so must be the cure. Fresh air, cold water, rest or change — with freedom from care — are the medicines most likely to give relief.

Sometimes fretfulness is produced by unfortunate surroundings. How the poor of our large cities can avoid fretful uneasiness and querulousness of temper, it is not easy to see. Crowded together as they are, surrounded by unhealthy sanitary conditions, breathing a vitiated atmosphere, worried by sickly children, ground down by hard poverty, and, above all, given up to the tender mercies of the tavern and the gin-seller — is it to be wondered at that they sometimes turn away with fretful,

even savage, impatience from those who would gladly lead them to a sweeter and purer life? Human beings cannot live like animals — and act like gentlemen. But the cause and cure of such things would open up questions too large to be discussed here.

Fretfulness is often induced by an overheated, or too powerful, imagination. Our readers may question this at first sight, but a little consideration will suffice to convince them that we state no more than the sober truth. Fretting is more frequently produced by what is feared — than by what is suffered; by what the imagination borrows from the future — rather than by what the mind or body endures in the present. And who has a pen sufficiently graphic to paint the horrors that may be produced by a powerful imagination, when it is of a gloomy or foreboding nature? A friend of the writer's tells him that his imagination is his greatest foe. Many times has he sat in his study and buried his wife and every one of his seven children. He has seen them suffer and die, and has wept real tears over it all. Suddenly awaking, he has discovered it to be a trick of his old enemy, and has had to pinch himself or stamp the floor in order to assure himself of the blessed fact that it was only a dream. How many times he has seen his boys do wrong and get committed to prison, he does not remember; yet better boys never lived. A recent writer gives the following amusing instance of the power of the imagination in making people fretful. Two maiden ladies sat at an open window, looking out upon a beautiful landscape, but weeping most bitterly.

"Whatever is the matter?" said a friend on entering the room.

"O! it is too dreadful," replied the ladies in chorus.

"What is?"

"Positively awful," was the rejoinder. "We were thinking. And we supposed we had been married, and one of us had been sitting by this open window with her little baby, and the baby had been reaching out of the window after the flowers, and had fallen into the water below and been drowned." And then the salt sea of their sorrows flowed again like a rising tide. It was only by the aid of pocket-handkerchiefs, smelling-salts, and much persuasion, that the visitor quieted the good ladies at all.

Though this may be putting the thing in a ridiculous light, it will perhaps help us to laugh off our foolish fears, and thus serve a good purpose. Many people fret because their imaginations make airy nothings appear to be sad realities; let us not be among the number.

We have enumerated the causes of fretfulness at some length, in the hope that to know the disease will help the cure; and fretfulness must be cured, before our characters can be either attractive or complete. In closing this chapter, let us suggest some REMEDIES:

1. Think what it would be to have REAL sorrow. Remember the sorrows of the past; look at the sorrows of other people. Then it will be found that our own little trials, or dreaded woes — will grow smaller by degrees, until they disappear. The mill-dam looks large until we behold the river, which in its turn appears small when we gaze upon the sea. In like manner, a mole-hill trouble assumes its proper dimensions when contrasted with a mountain sorrow.

2. Avoid worry. For worry is, after all, the cause of very much of our fretfulness. And worry is almost inseparable from a highly-civilized — or artificial — way of living. One suggests that it would be well if some clever man would write an essay on the art of taking things coolly. That art

may be learned in the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles.

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

"I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content," says Paul when speaking of himself, and when advising others, "We beseech you, brethren, that you study to be quiet." If our Lord taught the blessedness of a calm and quiet spirit in the far-off days in which He lived, and great men recognize the special force and application of such teaching to the present state of society — surely it will be our wisdom to put it into daily practice without more ado. He who can go through the tumults of life without tumultuousness — or being worried by them — will not have great difficulty in avoiding a fretful spirit. "Come unto Me," said Jesus, "and I will give you rest."

3. Cultivate contentment and cheerfulness. They are not plants natural to the soil of humanity, and that is why we call attention to the fact that they must be cultivated. And they may be. In uncongenial climates, unproductive soils, under forbidding skies, in a word, in soul-gardens that seem most uncongenial to their growth, they are often brought to the most beautiful perfection. Their cultivation will well repay us. They will help us to live, to live well, to live long. They will beautify life, sweeten goodness, add grace to nobility, glorify love, brighten home, and rob even sorrow of half its terror. If we are Christians, we must cultivate them. To be cheerful and contented is a moral virtue, a Christian grace, a religious duty.

4. Seek a deep trust in God. "I cannot choose my way — and I would not if I could." Just so. But if we do leave God to undertake for us, to guide us, to save us — then surely we can trust Him to do it fully — all in all. Bringing us to the end, involves taking care of us by the way; the fact that God is conducting us to an eternal home, surely carries with it the assurance that He will be mindful of us while we are exposed to the dangers of our pilgrimage there. Then why fret over the present? It is God's ordering. And why fret in reference to the future? God will be with us then, as He is with us now. "When I am afraid, I will trust in You!"

03 - Chapter 3

CHAPTER 3. GRUMBLING AND SCOLDING.

We link these two foxes together because they are as like each other as twin brothers, which, indeed, they are. They generally — though not invariably — hunt in company, and may be recognized by their scowling brows and savage demeanor. The grumbling fox is known by his constant growl, and the scolding fox by his snappish bark. They are an unlovely pair, and as they are so much alike, however, we need only deal with one. Which shall it be? Suppose we take the GRUMBLER.

After such an introduction, nobody will expect us to say one word in the grumbler's defense, and yet we intend to do so. For, despite his uncomfortable appearance and the undesirableness of his companionship, there is something to be said in his favor. If we question it, let us ask ourselves what would have been the present condition of the world — had there never been any grumblers in it — no people who were dissatisfied with things as they found them? Had there been no grumblers among men, we should be still in the dark ages, without houses, roads, conveyances, comforts, or knowledge. "But the men who have given us these things, were not mere grumblers." Exactly so; we intended to make that very remark at the close of this chapter. But for the present let it suffice that grumbling has done good, and, under proper restrictions, may yet do good. With Englishmen grumbling is often a safety-valve. We grumble and retain our loyalty, while our friends across the Channel are silent for a while, and then suddenly flame up into revolution. Our grumbling relieves us — while for the lack of it they rebel. Besides, the freedom which permits us to grumble at our abuses, lessens and eventually destroys them, and thus more serious consequences are averted. On the whole, then, it is, we think, clear that this grumbling fox must not be turned out of the vineyard, but rather be well trained, securely tied up within proper bounds, and made our servant rather than our master. Let us suggest some DIRECTIONS.

1. Do not grumble too frequently or too loudly. "It is the worst wheel that creaks most." "To overdo, is to undo." And in nothing is this so true, as in grumbling. A little while ago, the writer called upon a lady of his acquaintance, and found her much disturbed. It appeared she was tried by a careless and untidy servant, which, as she herself was a pattern of neatness and order, was a sore trial indeed. She immediately began to recite her sorrows — thus:

"Never was Job as tried as I am. Here have I been trying and trying to teach my servant some degree of order, and I cannot. If I am to judge her by her actions, she thinks the proper place for the saucepan is on the drawing-room rug, and that the best fireirons are first to be well cleaned and then carefully stowed away in the cellar. I have called her back fifty times this morning, if I have once." To have made any remark calling the lady's wisdom in question, would have been rude — but we did mentally reflect that she must be a clever servant indeed, who could be called back fifty times in one morning, and yet do her work. Were not fifty times rather too many? But perhaps the lady was a little excited, and really meant to say fifteen or twenty-five times. However that might be, she had grumbled away her servant's possibility of improvement. For when we were

afterwards thrown into the girl's way, we found her crying and exclaiming, "It's no use, I can't please her, and I won't try!" In this age, perhaps, parents who are not sufficiently particular with their children, are more common than those who are too much so; but the grumbling spirit sometimes takes unhappy possession of a father's or mother's heart. Said a youth to me a little while ago: "I would be very glad to win the approval of my father, but I find it impossible. He is always down upon me. When I make my appearance in the morning, he grumbles at my dirty boots; or, if they are clean, at my untidy boot-laces; or, if there is nothing wrong with my feet, he grumbles at something that is wrong about my head. He is so particular that nothing escapes him, and he grumbles as loudly about a misplaced hair, as about the loss of a hundred dollars." From what we know of the young man's father, we fear this is true. Yet, when out of his son's hearing, he speaks well of him, and knows full well that he is a worthy lad. But we need not multiply illustrations; they will occur to every mind. What we would do is to suggest, to all whom it may concern, the old maxim — "fair and softly." Let us remember, even in our legitimate grumbings, the courtesies of life, that true generosity which is a mark of noble-mindedness; and, above all, let us never carry our grumbings too far. Which leads us to say —

2. Do not form the habit of grumbling. Like other habits, it grows, and like other habits, it will hold us fast at last. The only way to avoid arriving at the terminus, is to abstain from taking a ticket and becoming a daily passenger. The reader will, perhaps, remember, as we do, many otherwise estimable Christian men who are utterly spoiled — both for their own good and that of others — by the fact that this unpleasant little fox is always at their heels! As a blind beggar is always accompanied by his dog — so are they by this unsavory little fox! He is forever snapping at the clouds for keeping off the sun and making it so cold; or snarling at the sun for shining and making it so hot; or complaining at the parson for preaching so long; or railing at him for not finishing his sermon while he was at it. You cannot satisfy them any way. When you suggest a new scheme to them, you see the face elongating, and the sledge hammer of criticism being uplifted for a blow. Or, that like flies, they are looking for the sore place, and when they have found it — as they assuredly will — upon that place will they settle. And since with them it is, "Love me — love my dog," and since you cannot love his fox, you are compelled to shun the master, much as you may, in some respects, esteem him. As no man who renders himself distasteful can do very much good — the grumbler destroys his own usefulness. In many instances this is mainly the result of habit; it does not spring from an unkindly heart. Perhaps, however, the grumbler does more harm to himself than to others. He embitters his own life, mars his happiness, and brings upon himself evils from which a more happy disposition would entirely save him. May we suggest that not only that grumblers may bring evil upon themselves, but also that some of the persons and things at which they grumble, may be better than they take them to be, after all.

3. Do not be MERE grumblers. We intimated earlier, that we would make this remark, and here it is. That spirit which in small and ignoble minds evaporates in fault-finding, passes — in larger and nobler ones minds, translate into self-sacrificing labors and earnest activities, having for their object the removal of those evils at which mere grumblers only complain. It was so with Wilberforce, Clarkson, and others who attacked and destroyed the slave-trade. Many had grumbled at it; so, perhaps, did they; but they did more.

Grumbling may sometimes serve a good purpose — or it may become a pest; just as the steam may drive the train — or be allowed to escape, with continual hissing, through a puncture in the

boiler. In the one case, it is a great power for good; while in the other, it is a useless annoyance. Just so, a reformer of abuses is a national blessing — while a mere grumbler is a paltry fellow. An old countryman once gave me some good advice which I have never forgotten:

"There are two things," said he, "at which you should never grumble — first, at things which you can change; and, secondly, at things which you cannot change. If you can change them — then change them. And if you cannot change them — then leave them alone."

"Why, then, we shall never grumble at anything," I replied.

"Exactly so!" said he.

"Do not grumble against one another, brethren!" James 5:9

04 - Chapter 4

CHAPTER 4. TRIFLING. This fox might be well described as silly, rather than wicked — were it not that his silliness sometimes covers the most wicked propensities, and, not seldom, brings about a long train of evil consequences! When the fretter whines you can retire;

when the grumbler snarls you can run away;

when the scolder snaps you can remonstrate with him;

but when the trifler meets you with his easy smile or his mirthful laugh — you are in danger of catching his attractive but dangerous distemper, for trifling is a spreading malady!

It is, likewise, an unmitigated disease; it is only evil — and evil continually.

Fretting is, often, the little fox which mars an over-conscientious nature .

Grumbling is, often, the little fox that mars a nature over-earnest and anxious for good. Moreover, grumbling may sometimes lead to the destruction of that which is evil and the improvement of that which is good. But trifling is the deadly fox that utterly spoils the vineyard he frequents, tearing the tender vines and crushing the choice grapes beyond all redemption. Innumerable and unutterable evils have come of trifling; and, so far as we know, they have not been attended by one solitary good.

Let us not, however, be misunderstood. By trifling we do not mean innocent mirth, hearty laughter, pungent wit, or stirring humor. We have not a word to say against these things. The same good Book that tells us there is "a time to weep," also tells us there is "a time to laugh." But these good things may be used in a trifling spirit and for trifling purposes — rather than for high and worthy ends. In order to avoid this, we must bear in mind some such RULES as the following:

1. That laughter and fun must never be used without a lawful object. We do not object to hear a witty preacher — not even when he makes his people smile — provided only that his quiet humor is full of earnestness, and has a definite and worthy object before it. But when he forgets himself — as he sometimes does — and says a funny thing because it is funny and makes people laugh — we think we see the trifling fox coming into the pulpit, and doing his best to spoil the good man's sermon! A friend of ours informs us that it was his misfortune, he says, to hear that wonderful man, Mr. Comic Merryman, deliver his popular sermon on "Windbags," to a very large audience, a little while ago. The merriment, laughter, and applause were overwhelming. As the people retired, they made a great variety of comments.

"A startling genius!" said one.

"One of the wonders of the age!" said another.

"A base comedian, who mistook a chapel for a theater!" said Mr. Crusty.

"None of them stated my opinion," said our friend, "which was this: that three-fourths of the humor was given because it was funny; it had no connection with the subject, and no worthy object. It was given in order to amuse the people. And," he added, "I think all such action is sinful trifling, a waste of the people's time, and sacrilegious. Such a thing may not be out of place in a country fair or theater — but it certainly is in God's house, and when done by religious men." We are bound to confess to some sympathy with our friend. If laughter, or wit, is without an object of some worthy kind — then it becomes trifling.

2. Our merriment and fun should be kept within due bounds. Is not change, recreation, play, becoming with many people rather the rule, than the exception? Within due bounds, recreation is most beneficial — but when carried to an extreme it seems to rob life of nobility of purpose, and power to accomplish anything that is worth accomplishing. This reduces life to a kind of butterfly existence, and degrades it to a solemn trifle.

If the miller's horse is made to work seven days a week he becomes a poor, dejected hack; but if he is allowed to roam the fields six days out of seven, he will be so frolicsome on the seventh day as to be unmanageable, not to speak of the fact, that a horse who would only work one day out of seven would ruin any miller in the kingdom!

"Salt is good," but you may have too much of it. If little Johnny's father insists on putting a cupful of salt on Johnny's potato — alas for little Johnny! Just so, laughter, fun, and recreation may be the relish of our lives, and thus help us to do better and more effective service; while, if they are taken in too large doses, they may waste our powers, and make our lives unlovely and unfruitful.

Trifling may be described either as the absence of a sober and earnest spirit — or as the presence of a light and thoughtless one. The effect of it, is to make men incapable of careful and patient toil, and restless under the needful restraints of life.

It evidences its presence in the Church and the world, in rich and poor, in old and young. To discuss it exhaustively in one brief chapter is, of course, out of the question, but we may suggest some of the more prominent ways in which it is, just now, manifesting itself.

We see it in the READING of the day. Some authors write trifling books. Books in which they trifle with the understandings of their readers, with the most important elements of human nature, and with the most solemn questions that affect human destiny. Great controversies that have agitated the greatest minds for centuries, are sought to be settled by an offhand stroke of some flippant pen. Great questions affecting human happiness and well-being, are discussed in a spirit scarcely more serious than that which animates Gulliver's Travels.

And, worse still, in much of our cheap literature, no great questions at all are discussed, but uninterrupted and unmitigated froth and foolishness hold undisputed sway. If anyone will be at the pains to examine the majority of the books heaped upon the respectable bookstalls — not to speak of the "catch-pennies" so freely sold in the poorer parts of our large cities — we do not think they will condemn us for speaking strongly of much of our current literature, that it is mere trash.

"But the authors produce what the public desires; to a great extent the demand creates the supply." Too true. We admit that the public is the greater sinner. How many trifling readers there are! Observe the character of the books read by Miss Blushrose on her railway journey, "my lady"

in her boudoir, and Polly Longstitch the dressmaker. They differ, certainly — in the binding. Otherwise they are "too near akin." They consist of the same plot — or no plot — and are filled with the same "lingering nonsense long drawn out." Our libraries lend out more fiction than anything else, and more of the insipid and of the morally questionable books, than of any other kind. Young men, who have never read for an hour those immortal poets who have made our mother English an imperishable tongue, who have never delved in the golden mines of Butler or Paley, nor ever gathered the pearls that glitter on the pages of Macaulay like sparkling dew, and to whom the stores of "honeyed wisdom" which lie around us are all unknown — do, nevertheless, eagerly follow the sorrows, joys and adventures of the most insipid people that were ever conceived in the weak brain of a fashionable novelist!

Those who read trifling books, must run a very serious risk of becoming trifling people!

We see it in the CONVERSATION of the day. Conversation should, no doubt, be a pleasant relaxation from graver cares. But that is no reason why it should be trifling. It is impossible to give a better definition of what it should be, than in the oft-quoted words of Lord Bacon: "It is good in conversation to vary and intermingle: speech of the present occasion — with arguments; tales — with reason; asking of questions — with telling of opinions, and jest — with earnest." And is it possible to give a description more unlike what it often is? How frequently do the jests and funny stories jostle the reason and arguments out of the room! The power to converse profitably and pleasantly, is a great gift which few possess, but the avoidance of trifling is within the reach of all.

Other instances of trifling are not lacking. Some people's DRESS seems to be made up of trifles, rather than of substantial articles of apparel. If you should take the trifles off some young ladies and gentlemen of our acquaintance, they would hardly seem to be dressed at all; certainly they would not be "presentable."

"O dear, how shall I get warm?" said a lady of this sort, as she shivered in the winter wind. "I cannot tell you, unless you should put on one more piece of jewelry," replied the Quaker.

How much time is trifled away in preparing these trifles, we dare hardly contemplate.

How many of the youth of both sexes trifle with their AFFECTIONS. "Engagements" are triflingly formed, and as triflingly broken. To have somebody to date is a matter of course; whether the heart is concerned in it or not, is hardly thought of. And yet such things are of grave importance."

Trifling, anywhere and everywhere, is both unworthy and injurious, and those who would aspire to true nobility of life must guard their vineyards securely against this little fox. The late Charles Simeon, of Cambridge, kept a painting of Henry Martyn — who had once been his pupil — hung up in his study. "Whenever I look at it," he said, it seems to preach a sermon to me. The patient eyes beam tenderly upon me, and the silent lips seem to say, 'Don't trifle!' And I give the promise while I gaze upon his face and think of his life."

Reader, "Don't trifle!" So say all the noble dead whose faces look down upon us from the galleries of the past!

05 - Chapter 5

CHAPTER 5. OVER-SENSITIVENESS. By over-sensitiveness, we mean an abnormal, unhealthy, or over-active condition of either the physical, mental, or spiritual senses. This "little fox" is often seen, and destroys much good. He is wide awake, has the quickest eye, the keenest sense, the strongest scent, and the most finely-strung nervous organization. Unhappily, he always frequents the best vineyards. Vines of coarse growth, crude foliage, and average fruit are not often molested by him — but the most precious vines and the most luscious grapes, rarely escape his unwelcome attentions.

Very able men, especially those who have not largely mixed in the common activities of life, are often credited with irritability or ill-temper, though, in reality, they do but suffer from over-sensitiveness.

Some time ago, we wandered amid the beauties of Rydal Mount, and as we gazed upon the bright waters and the grand hilltops around us, and threaded the shady paths along which Wordsworth must often have passed while he meditated his poems — we thought of him with great delight. Meeting an old woman, we eagerly asked, "Did you know Wordsworth?" "Ay, I did, and a right crusty old fellow he was, too," was the reply. What a shock! Was Wordsworth bad-tempered, then? We do not think so. But, like some others with less genius than himself, he was too sensitive. This "little fox" may be best described as a good watch-dog unduly developed, so that instead of the careful and useful animal that might guard your treasures — you have the quarrelsome brute that embroils you with itself and with your neighbors. The sensitive man has two great defects: his senses — physical, mental, spiritual — are too keen. Secondly, they are almost always mistaken.

They are too keen. He sees what he should not see, and hears what he should not hear. The gates of his spirit are not shut day or night; the avenues of his soul are ever open. A friend of the writer's once called upon an optometrist for advice. After question and examination, the optometrist said, "Your sight is too keen, too circumscribed; we must disperse it, make it more general and less minute." In other words, his sight was too sensitive. The most trifling irregularity disturbed him, an insignificant disorder worried him, he was too particular. So is the too-sensitive soul.

Addison, in one of his charming essays, tells us of a man who spent his life in the regulation of his weight. He constructed a weighing-chair, in which he ate, drank, and slept, so that for years he lived in a pair of scales. After a feast he weighed two hundred and one pounds; after a fast only one hundred and ninety-nine pounds. The great business of his life was to "trim the balance between these two volatile pounds in his constitution." Then follows an amusing account of the way in which this "trimming" was accomplished. How is it possible to avoid pitying such an individual? The empire might collapse. That meant nothing to him. He was gaining the pound he had lost. His wife might die. But what of that? He was a quarter of a pound too heavy, and he must reduce himself!

We smile at this man. We should say that death would be preferable to such a life. But does not the over-sensitive man too often imitate him? If we never rest until there is no crumb on the carpet, no crease in the window-curtain, absolutely no dust on the furniture, and no "hitch" in the vast and complicated machinery of human life — we shall never rest until the grave encloses us! The forgetfulness or neglect of this, works much evil in every department of life. As a result of excessive keenness of sight, comes mistaken sight. People who are too sensitive, not only see some things too keenly — but they often see the wrong things. Benjamin Franklin hit on a strange expedient for discovering the tendencies of his friends. He did not wish to keep company with people who were too sensitive, who were always looking out for defects and spots, which became sources of annoyance to them. He had the misfortune to have one deformed leg, while the other was normal. When any newcomer appeared, he so disposed himself as to exhibit his legs, and then judged the character of his visitors, by the leg upon which they first remarked. If they first remarked upon the deformed leg — he bade them goodbye; if upon the normal leg — he invited them to remain. Franklin closes his story by advising us to "Stop looking at the ugly leg!" But how difficult it is for the man who is, by nature or habit, unduly sensitive, to act upon that advice. Such persons remember the one wasp — while they forget the numberless butterflies; and overlook the long summer beauties, in their moanings over the one thunderstorm. By a strange perversity, they are blind and deaf to beauties and blessings, both great and small. But they are painfully alive to all that is defective or disorderly. They see the shadows with intense distinctness, while the brightness plays around them in vain. The painful nature of their disease — for so we must call it — reminds us of a lesson once read by a friend of ours to a sentimental youth. The youth was "far-sighted." He was disposed to think all evil, of the things which he knew; and all good, of those which he knew not. Other people's gardens were better than his father's, other countries better than England, other continents better than Europe. The farther a thing might be from his father's garden wall — the more he prized it.

One day our friend walked up to him with a beautiful flower. "See what a rare treasure I have found!" said he. "O, how delightful!" was the reply. "It is lovely. Where did it come from? From a long way off, I'm sure. How sweet, how rich!" "It is the flower of the *Solatium tuberosum*" replied our friend, "and is a native of South America." The youth went into still greater ecstasies. But when our friend had "fooled him to the top of his bent," he suddenly brought him down again by saying, "Yes, this beautiful flower grows upon a potato-top; I have just plucked it in your father's garden, where there are hundreds more!"

It was the Latin name and the pretended admiration of our friend, that threw the young gentleman into such raptures. The moral is obvious. An acquaintance of ours unfortunately suffered from an injured arm. It was not painful, but inconvenient. Its possessor was, however, of an unhappy, morbid temperament, and very soon took especial pleasure in nursing and cherishing the afflicted member.

"Did you enjoy the service?"

"Yes, but for my arm."

"It is a fine morning!"

"O, yes, the morning's fine enough, if it was not for my arm."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, but I had to mind my arm." That unhappy limb soon became the nuisance and by-word of the village!

Just so, some people take a morbid delight in their sensitiveness, and nurse and develop what they should ruthlessly destroy.

"I have just met Mr. Parson, and he never spoke to me," said Mrs. Leader to her husband. "Did you speak to him?" replied Mr. Leader. "Certainly not," was the response. "Then he is probably making the same remark about you." For sensitive people, as a class, we feel great sympathy. We would encourage them to fight manfully against their evil genius. The best weapons with which to attack it, are strong common sense and true religion. Let them also bear in mind these simple directions.

Cultivate an accurate knowledge of the disease. If a lady is aware of her deafness, she takes it into account, and does not accuse the preacher of whispering his sermons. A knowledge of our physical and spiritual conditions, will save both ourselves and others a world of trouble. If sensitive people know and remember that they are sensitive, they will be able to discount the slights and annoyances they receive — or imagine they receive; a knowledge of the evil and its causes, may enable them largely to diminish it.

Cultivate self-depreciation. What is self? After all, who am I? Only a trifling part of the great universe — a little drop in a vast, unfathomed sea. Why should I be specially considered? Among the millions that toil around me, there are many better than I, many whose claims are stronger than mine; let them be first thought of. "In honor preferring one another" says the Apostle. My Master came to destroy self. "I live, yet not I" said Paul. Self was dead. Sensitiveness is too often undue self-consciousness.

Cultivate some active work. Let both body and mind be well employed. Work clears . . .

the body of evil distempers,

the brain of evil thoughts,

the heart of evil attitudes. The worst curse may be turned to a blessing, by the worker. Work was the saving clause in Adam's doom. How could he and Eve have dwelt together in their altered state — had they been unemployed? Of the general benefits of work, however, we do not now speak; we simply point to it as a relief, if not a cure, for sensitiveness.

We have more sensitiveness in the community, than of yore; partly because our high state of civilization has increased the number of refined idlers in our midst. If such persons would return to moral and spiritual well-being, they must accept its first and last condition — WORK! "I must work" said the Great Exemplar. Trifles, irritations, small vexations, and annoying slights — disappear in the footsteps of the earnest worker.

06 - Chapter 6

CHAPTER 6. OVERDOING.

We know no better word by which to describe the little fox now sitting for his portrait, than overdoing. He does things too much. He is too important, too fussy, too eager. He never yet baked a dish without burning it, nor boiled a pudding without reducing it to pulp. He never will remember that "to overdo, is to undo." He has been, times without number, in danger of the fate of the frog who endeavored to swell himself to the size of the ox, and whose attempt had such deplorable consequences. How many vineyards this fox has marred history with, has not been able to report. But a few of his CHARACTERISTICS may be described, so that a mark may be set upon him, and that men may know him forthwith.

Overdoing manifests itself in the use of exaggerated language: In the way of BOASTING. All that this fox has to say revolves around one center, namely, SELF. The only really important part of speech in his grammar, is the first person singular. When he speaks of himself, which he too often does, it is always in such a way as to impress you with his virtues, his wisdom, or his greatness. And when he does not speak of himself, he reaches self, though it may be in a less direct manner.

What grand relatives he has! He expatiates upon them and their surroundings with garrulous verbosity, or drops sententious hints as to their high position. His family came of no common stock. If he himself is "nobody particular," you are requested to respect him on account of the glories of unnumbered connections, living and dead, which reflect upon and center in him. On the other hand, if he is rich and his relations poor, the fact that he has risen from such unlikely surroundings to so great an eminence is duly enlarged upon. Our fox is, likewise, full of little histories, in which the historian or narrator is always the chief actor. His stock phrases will be painfully familiar to us all:

"When I was in such a place."

"When I was a young man."

"I will tell you what I once did."

Every one of these expressions is the introduction to a long glorification of self. Sometimes even a physical or mental weakness is expatiated upon, but still with the inevitable consequence of self-exaltation.

Unhappily for his own reputation, the boaster sometimes prophesies what he will do, or brags what he would have done, under certain circumstances. We may praise ourselves by retelling of past events without receiving any condemnation except that of egotism, for nobody can contradict facts. But when we boast as to what we will do, our words may be remembered against us, and at some future day be contrasted with our meager performances. But to say what we would have done had we been so-and-so, implies censure upon so-and-so, and should be far from a generous heart. Not that we would advise our readers to discriminate in their boasting; we prefer advising

them to turn the hurtful little fox out of their vineyards altogether!

Why should we employ ourselves in self-praise? "For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" 1 Corinthians 4:7

It is a hard and delicate subject for a man to speak of himself. Therefore, let him who aspires after wisdom take the advice of Scripture, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips!" Proverbs 27:2

Why should we boast of the future — or exalt ourselves at the expense of other people's failures? Admitting that we have done well in the past, the very next storm that blows may prove too strong for us. And are we quite sure we should have done better than our neighbors or forefathers, had we been in their stead? So thought the brook in the Russian fable. The river overflowed its banks, and carried away one of the shepherd's lambs. Whereupon the brook condoled with him, saying, "Ah, I would not serve you thus. Were I the river, I would kiss the flowers as I passed along, and gently bathe the feet of the animals that came to drink my waters, and all men should dwell safely by me." But what happened? The storm-cloud embraced the mountain in which the brook took its rise, and the brook became a foaming torrent. In its mad holiday it carried away the sheepcote and all the sheep, it threw down the shepherd's home and overwhelmed his family, and the shepherd himself stood upon its banks and cursed it in his despair.

"Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." But EXAGGERATION is often used without boasting, or without any intention to be boastful. It is in such cases simply language overdone. To some persons such methods of speech are natural, to others they come by slowly-formed habits — but in all who indulge in them, they grow. But that does not excuse it, certainly does not lessen its evils.

We cannot be too hard upon this fox when we find him busy about our tender vines — he will do us much evil. The use of exaggeration breaks down the habit of truth-speaking.

"Mother, there are a hundred cats in our garden!"

"No, my boy."

"Then there are fifty."

"No, my boy."

"Then there is our cat and one more."

"Yes, my boy." This well-worn story would not appear here, did it not point our moral. If this boy could multiply two cats into one hundred — then into how many would he multiply them by the time he became a man? Some men cannot tell the truth. Exaggeration, in other words, unintentional lying, has become their native tongue. The use of exaggeration weakens our testimony. "Some people's ducks are all swans." But their swans are of less value in the market, than other people's ducks. If men make it needful that their statements should be discounted — then the discount will not fail to be exacted. A countryman we once knew, told wonderful tales about the people of the village. His wife related them over the washing-tub, but never omitted the remark at the close,

"Mind, it's Charles' tale." Can a man sink lower than to become the "Charles" of the society in which he moves? But there are many other forms of exaggerated language than those which have been referred to. Language is overdone in many ways today. This is a crying evil of our time. But we must trust the intelligence and honesty of our readers to discover this fox, if he is in their vineyards in any guise, and to their courage and determination to turn him adrift! If he abides in the vineyard, he will work it ill.

Words are all-important; Christ is God's WORD. Therefore, "Let your "Yes," be "Yes;" and your "No," "No;" lest you fall into judgment." By our words, we shall be either justified or condemned.

Overdoing manifests itself in business and domestic life. How many business men work harder than necessity demands; how many mothers are over-particular? When we have satisfied the just demands of honesty and prudence, or labored to the full extent of our strength and capacity — why attempt more? True, there are many whose lot in life is so hard that the utmost self-abnegation is needed, and even then, cruel fate still cries for more. But, on the other hand, there are many who fret and fume beyond all need, and who overdo every department of their life.

Why are you so eager, so very particular? What real good comes of it? Absolute perfection cannot be attained in this world, and when things have been fairly done, either by ourselves or others — let them be. But some of us never know when to be done; life is nothing to us, if it be not one constant scene of labor, intensity, and worry. We forget that it is well to "make haste slowly," and that he who starts first, sometimes stops soonest. It is not always the man who makes the greatest fuss, who does the most work.

Well might the Great Teacher caution us against the hurry and care of life.

We have witnessed many painful illustrations of this. One at this moment occurs to us. In a midland town lived a tradesman and his wife. They had a prosperous business and no family to provide for. They were both consistent members of a Christian Church. But their toil and care knew no bounds. The husband worked in his garden at five o'clock in the morning to save the expense of a gardener, then labored behind his counter all day to save the expense of an assistant. The wife toiled hard to save the expense of a servant, and did her own washing to save the expense of a washerwoman. Toiling, saving, and pinching was the order both day and night. And then the end came. Both husband and wife died — worn out — in the very prime of their days, and left many thousand dollars to relations who did not need it. In other words, they overdid their life, until there was nothing left to do at; the candle was consumed over a worthless game!

Business, likewise, is overdone in speculation, in advertising, in competition, and in many other ways.

Illustrations of our principle, traces of our little fox, may be found in all the departments of life, the religious not less than others. But we forbear. "Study to be quiet," says the Voice of Inspiration. Happy he who preserves the golden mean.

07 - Chapter 7

CHAPTER 7. DON'T-CARE. Our last fox was called "Over-doing." We might have called this one "Under-doing," though the name most exactly descriptive of his character, would be "Sluggard," by which name he should have been made known to men, had we not felt an uneasy suspicion that that word was only to be found in the slang dictionary. But perhaps it is as well, for other reasons, that we have given him the name that stands at the head of this chapter, for if people cared, there would be no underdoing, no slovenliness, no half-finished tasks, no slip-shod work. After all, "don't-care" lies at the root of many of our misfortunes. The "don't-care" fox may be easily described. Let us set a mark upon him by detailing some of his features,

1. Don't-care is a SLOVENLY fox. None of his brethren are particularly good-looking, but many of them do make the best of a bad bargain. They avoid the mire as far as they can; they keep their faces clean, and carry their bushy tails with some little pride. But this fox makes no effort to amend his natural disadvantages. His gait is more than careless, his general appearance condemns him, and as he slinks ungracefully around the vineyard; he is a warning to all mortals against the vice of slovenliness.

1. Don't-care warns us against slovenly DRESS.

Rich clothing badly put on, does not array its possessor half so well, as poor clothing neatly worn. Butterflies are more beautiful than grasshoppers, and humming-birds more attractive than robins; but is that a reason why the grasshopper should not make the best of its sober garments, and the robin display its red breast to the best advantage? Indeed, neither beauty nor deformity should dress carelessly. Neatness would set off beauty, and rob deformity of half its ugliness.

Beauty cannot afford to dispense with grace. A beautiful human being slovenly dressed, is a painful sight; for instead of the beauty destroying the slovenliness — the slovenliness is all the more conspicuous because of the beauty; just as ill words always come most ill from sweet lips. Beautiful fruit looks best when it nestles amid beautiful foliage. But if beauty should be neat — then plainness should certainly not be slovenly.

Oliver Cromwell could not relieve himself of the wart that disfigured his face — but he needed not to have worn dirty shirts.

Ugliness, or plainness, should dress itself with greatest care.

2. Don't-care warns us against slovenly HABITS.

"Aim at virtue, nobleness, strength," says the strong man. Certainly, but

clothe the virtues with the graces;

crown nobility with order; and

let strength repose in the arms of loveliness.

"Manners are the shadows of the virtues," says Sydney Smith. "Manners are the finest of the fine arts," says Emerson. Tennyson asserts that "manners are not idle, but the fruit of a noble mind." The child that has been taught cleanliness, order, neatness, courtesy — will not have the vineyard of his after-life wasted by the little fox of slovenliness!

3. Don't-care warns us against slovenly WORK. One of the most imperative needs of the present day, is the cultivation of conscience in the discharge of duty. Competition produces cheapness, and cheapness too often produces flimsiness. We are so much in haste, that we have no time to be thorough.

What time our ancestors took to execute a molding, to carve a stone, to build a castle, or a cathedral! But what works are we building for posterity? Alas! there is too much "jimmie-work" about us — from the preacher downwards! We are too intent to work slovenly, especially those parts that are minute, or out of sight.

Too often we hear the phrase, "That will do!"

"That will do!" says the bricklayer with his untempered mortar, his half-baked bricks, and his slovenly work — and the houses he builds become nurseries of cold, rheumatism, and premature death.

"That will do!" says the bridge-builder, as he puts in his cracked girders and deficient bolts — and in the midnight storm the train goes down with its living freight.

"That will do!" says the Christian worker, as he offers his Master shining brass for beaten gold, and the "work" suffers, and souls are forever undone.

But, will it do? No, indeed! The little fox "don't-care," will ruin any vineyard. Those tender vines of truth and honesty, upon which the luscious grapes of national integrity and uprightness grow — will be destroyed by him, and what shall we do in the end?

II. Don't-care is a SELFISH fox. The selfishness of idleness clings to him. He will not take the trouble to exert himself; he does not do better, because he will not try; he does so much evil, because he will not exert himself to avoid doing it. He sees the misery that follows him, but he does not care — that explains both his not-doing and his ill-doing. He has no active vices — he hates nobody, he loves nobody — he simply doesn't care.

Ask him to help you with a missionary subscription, he doesn't care for missions; ask him to support a worker among the poor, he doesn't care for the poor; ask him to vote for the parliamentary candidate you favor, he doesn't care for politics — and so on through the whole round of existence. There is not a positive element in his character, it is of a neutral tint. If he does harm, it is not because he means it, but because he doesn't care.

He is the kind of man of whom Sydney Smith said, "that if you bored holes in him — nothing but sawdust would come out of him." Examine all the evils that come to us from "don't-care," and they will be found to spring from indolent selfishness. This "little fox" is most injurious, most unlovely, most unnecessary, most undesirable. He is to be hated, despised, hunted, slain! Did our limits permit, we might dwell at length upon his shortcomings, but we must content ourselves by saying that he is III. An UNWISE fox. Unwise in regard of his own interest, we mean. His mischiefs come

back to him.

Even ill-birds come home to roost. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself."

Morton, Regent of Scotland, invented a dreadful guillotine, called the Maiden — and the first head that was struck off by it was the head of Morton himself. So it must be with 'don't care' — in robbing other people's vineyards, he will lose his own tail or perhaps his life! Don't-care leaves the gate open, and the dogs follow and bite his own legs. Don't-care neglects the poor, and has to pay a large poor-rate. He eschews politics, and pays a heavy income-tax. He neglects the heathen — and supports ruinous wars to keep them under control. A careless fellow was one day walking by the side of a hedge, when an overhanging brier caught him in the face and scratched out an eye. His first impulse was to cut it down, lest it should work the same evil upon some other passenger. "But no," he said, "why should I take so much trouble? The next passenger is nothing to me; I don't care if it does the same to him." Thus he passed on. But when he came back a few days afterwards, all too forgetful of the dangerous spot, the same brier caught him on the other side of his face, and struck out the remaining eye.

HOW shall we expel this "little fox" from our vineyards? By always doing our best. Dare we offer either God or man less than that? By being thorough. The old builders were; let us imitate them. By strict conscientiousness. Our Task-master is the Lord, and He is ever at the door; let us do our work to Him.

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"Little Foxes" must now disappear. We have only shown our readers a few samples of the innumerable herds that infest the vineyards of the saints, and do their utmost to spoil the grapes which the Great Vine-dresser so well loves. Sometimes "little foxes" are little infirmities, and sometimes they are little sins; but, in any case, they deserve expulsion from our soul-gardens. If but one little fox is permitted to lodge in the vineyard, others will soon follow him. They troop after each other as do the vultures! Where one weed grows, there will soon be another. One fox allowed in our soul-garden, will bring many more. Therefore guard the fences well. We hear a plaintive voice cry, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And we hear an answer from Heaven, "My grace is sufficient for you!"

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