

## Little Foxes!

### The Little Sins That Mar the Christian Character

By John Colwell

1882

*"Catch the foxes — the little foxes that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes!"*  
Song of Songs 2:15

#### 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 consoled 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.

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