

Little Foxes!

The Little Sins That Mar the Christian Character

By [John Colwell](#)

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

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,

I. 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.

"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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