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"THE LITTLE FOXES"

"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines, for our vines have tender grapes." – Canticles 2:15.

IN THE above text the word "take" is used in the sense of catch – help us to catch the foxes, especially the little foxes. The fox is known as a very cunning, but docile little animal, not capable of ferocity and viciousness, but nevertheless the cause of much harm. Its very appearance of harmlessness makes it the more dangerous. The young fox, like all the young of the dog family, is very destructive in its character; and the fox is particularly cunning and crafty when bent on mischief, hence less likely to arouse suspicion of its evil intentions. It has a peculiar simplicity of manner; it attracts by its apparent innocence, and is all the more apt to deceive.

In our text King Solomon seems to be picturing the depravities of our fallen nature which are not so extreme, not so gross, as some, but which are none the less very harmful; indeed they are especially deceitful and likely to elude our attention, and for this reason need more careful and constant watching. The words seem to be the language of the Bridegroom to His espoused. He emphasizes the expression, "the little foxes," and intimates that they would be very destructive.

If we apply the term to sins, we find that there are little sins which are really more dangerous than grosser sins, because we are less likely to be on our guard against these than against the greater sins. Every one would be instinctively on guard against lions, bears, serpents, etc.; but little foxes are so attractive-looking and seem so artless in disposition that unless one has had bitter experience with them he would have little or no fear. But these little animals are much given to scratching and generally destroying everything with which they come in contact. [R5886 : page 119]

GUARD CAREFULLY THE "TENDER GRAPES"

In this illustration of the wise man the grape-vine is spoken of, as though these foxes have a special predilection for grapes – the grapes representing the fruits of the Holy Spirit. As these little foxes delight to tear the vine with their sharp claws and to gnaw the roots with their teeth, so small sins tear the branches and gnaw at the roots of the spiritual vine, thus endangering its very life. They destroy or devour the precious grapes, which are very tender. Grapes during the formative period and while very small are exceedingly tender and the stems very brittle and easily snapped off the vine and destroyed. So the Spirit's fruitage in the hearts and lives of immature Christians may be easily ruined, either by their own lack of care and watchfulness or by the example of the brethren. How careful should those be who have been longer in the Heavenly way to guard their words and conduct in the presence of the younger, less mature ones, the lambs of the flock! Unloving criticism of the brethren before beginners, or others, may do untold harm and is a manifestation of a lack of love and Christian maturity.

Every child of God should be especially on guard against the little things – the things that seem like jokes, which sometimes do more harm in the Church than things which appear great; the little insinuations, that often leave a sting; the jesting about sacred matters, turning Scriptural passages into jests; the little acts of selfishness, etc. These things and many others which by careful thought each one may note really do much damage, injuring the branches and destroying the precious fruits of the Lord's Vine. Then let us, dear brethren, strive to be more and more watchful to catch these "little foxes." Let us each, individually, watch and pray that we do not by thought or word or act of ours hinder or lessen our own fruit-bearing or that of another.

It is difficult for us to realize how potent is our influence for either good or evil in matters which, unless carefully scrutinized,

seem trifling. Ah, these little foxes! Careless words, spoken with scarcely a thought or in a moment of impatience, little grumblings, a sarcastic word or laugh or look or shrug – oh, how these things count in our daily lives either for or against our own spiritual development, and often the development of others! How earnestly we should each seek to upbuild our own character and the characters of the brethren! Our Lord is marking all these things. Remember, "He that is faithful in that which is least, will be faithful also in much."

