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A MAN TOO BIG FOR GOD

The International Sunday School Lesson for April 23rd is: "Uzziah's Pride and Punishment."—II. Chronicles 26:1-27.

By William T. Ellis.

Since the new director general of the motion picture industry in America, Mr. Will Hays, is a Sunday School man, and knows his Bible, it is to be hoped that he will turn to the dramatic events in Old Testament history for better material than is commonly put on the screen. The story of King Uzziah was one such drama; that of his grandson, King Uziah, was another, even more human and general in its appeal. By means of the story of Uziah there may be depicted the career of the modern America self-made man, who rises from strength to might, and then, at his height, falls into folly.

A page from real life is this story, to be duplicated in almost every city of our time. It starts out with the record of a devout youth of noble impulses and religious loyalty, eager to do the right. There was no sign of the terrible end of Uziah in the earlier career of the boy-king of Judah, who came to the throne when but sixteen years old. He was ambitious only to serve his country and God. So fine was his earlier record that he ranks among the most constructive of his nation's history.

A Farmer-Strategist King. "He loved husbandry," is one characterization of this king, as we read of his plantings and his enlargings. He was a builder of cities, and a restorer of waste and captured places. As a soldier, he equipped his forces well, and took advantage of the latest inventions, in order to fortify Jerusalem anew. "He made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skillful men, to be upon the towers and upon the battlements, wherewith to shoot arrows and great stones."

These giant catapults link Uziah with our own world war less than one other phrase in the Lesson which is likely to be overlooked—"He built Elath, and restored it to Judah."

Now Elath was the scene of some of the most romantic and least known episodes of the war in the East. The town, now a poor Arab village, lies at the head of the Gulf of Akaba, which is the principal arm of the Red Sea, forming the Sinai Peninsula. So wonderful is the harbor, as King Solomon well knew, that great ships may anchor close to shore. There the British warships gathered secretly, and landed arms and supplies and gold and men, for the romantic campaign of the Bedouin against the Turks and the Germans. The whole region is one of mystery and elusive charm; it was better known to Moses than to the British war office. Directly up from it lies the wonderful rock city of Petra, lost to human knowledge for a thousand years. Some day students of the Bible may travel freely in this region: I escaped a massacre by only one day when I went there. Old Petra knew Uziah's name better than the modern world knows Petra's name. His fame ran from the Euphrates to the

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Nile, as a fighter, a builder, a great and constructive statesman.

A "Biggoty" Big Man.

Southern colored folk have a descriptive word of their own coloring—"biggoty." That describes the type of person who, whether big or not, feels and acts "biggoty," or self-important. The self-made man is prone to become "biggoty," or, as another homely designation has it, "too big for his boots." The type is common; often satirized as a "self-made man proud of the job." How often are sterling qualities obscured by this spirit of vanity and boastfulness.

Because men have risen above their former circumstances, or above their surroundings, they sometimes feel themselves to be above the common obligations and mores of life. It has come to be almost an accepted condition that the big business and public men, and writers and others in the people's eye, shall not feel themselves bound by the conventional code of conduct. It is almost expected that they shall regard themselves as "above the law." Even the Church sometimes winks at moral and ethical laxity in big men—which is a horrible sin on the part of the church.

Now this seems to have been the state into which King Uziah had grown. After half a century of noble reign, he fell a prey to sinful pride. His vanity destroyed in a day the good name of fifty years. Recollection brings to mind more than one figure of our own time, once held in honor, who now walk apart from their fellows, "unwept, unhonored and unsung," because they thought themselves able to flout the laws of God and man. They cast off the marriage ties, they abandoned the ideals of their youth, they profaned the sanctities, only to learn at the end that no man is great enough to take liberties with the eternal integrities. "There is a way that seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

A Common Insult To God. Perhaps the commonest heresy of our American church life is the notion, not often stated in explicit terms, that God is especially pleased to have the approval of rich or eminent persons. When the minister speaks of "our best people" he too often means only the richest people. So far as I have been able to observe, in a rather wide experience, the term "leading laymen" means wealthy laymen. It connotes nothing of real leadership or piety or religious zeal. Who has not heard the politician or other public men quoted flatteringly because he has spoken favorably and patronizingly of religion?

This fashion of patting the Lord Almighty on the head is enough to bring swift punishment for sacrilege, even as it did in the case of Uziah. God asks allegiance from high as well as from low; the practice of some churches of making office-holders out of "influential" men who have not confessed Christ and are not members of the church is wrong, root and branch. When a conquered general approached Napoleon and offered his hand, the emperor replied, according to the story, "Your sword first!" We cannot be on terms of friendship with God until we are first on terms of submission to him. Even the millionaire is not exempted from this law. Yet there are congregations where non-Christian office-holders see no incongruity in laying down a course of conduct for the church members!

Ministers Who Had Backbone. So distorted were Uziah's ideas, in his vanity, which is commonly a mild form of insanity, that he even presumed to enter the holy place of the temple, to usurp the sacred office of the priests, and offer incense upon the altar of incense. In short, he really thought himself great enough to revise the laws of God; he deemed Uziah so big that he was not bound by the prescriptions of Jehovah. The delusions of abnormal egotism often take this impious form, Uziah profaning the temple of the Lord is a terrible figure, but nevertheless a type.

While we contemplate this splendid king gone wrong, and ruining a great career, let us turn aside to a noble spectacle, the conduct of the priests of the temple. Led by Azariah, eighty priests rushed after the mad and sacrilegious king, and forbade and withstood him. He was king, but they were anointed ministers of the Most High, subject to no man in matters spiritual. With fine courage and fidelity they rebuked the king in bold words, and ordered him out of the sanctuary. He might raise an army and a nation, but his authority ceased at the doors of the house of God.

We think of John Knox and Queen Mary as we read this thrilling story of the brave priests who would not tolerate the intrusion of the power of the state into the sanctities of religion. In the house of God the greatest king is on a par with the humblest worshipper. With the Lord there is no distinction of persons.

As for the mad king, his punishment was swift and ghastly, for on the spot, and before the indignant

and horrified eyes of the priests, the deadly sign of leprosy broke out on the forehead of Uziah. He was a doomed man, an outcast henceforth until death. In pride he had vaulted high, offending the honor of the King of kings; but he had been brought low. Would that his tragic fate might be a warning to all who fall in reverence to the living God. (Copyright, 1922, by The Ellis Service).

BRIEFS FROM WILTON

Tower on Methodist Church Will Undergo Repairs.

Wilton, April 19.—The public school closed for the Easter holidays. Miss Darling has returned to her home in Moscow. Mr. and Mrs. N. A. Asselstine are spending the holidays with their son, Oliver Asselstine, of Chatham, Ont. Visitors: Miss Gladys Costley, Campbellford, with her sister, Mrs. Bernard Davy; Mrs. Saunders, Peterborough, with her daughter, Mrs. H. J. Latimer, at the parsonage; Mr. Shibley and Miss Dorothy Neilson, Kingston, at the home of their parents, Mr. and Mrs. K. N. Storms; Mrs. B. B. Shibley, Kingston, with her daughter, Mrs. K. N. Storms. Mr. and Mrs. John Henderson and son, Bill, Millhaven, at the home of James Davy. Edward Parrott spent a few days at the home of Kensal Priest, Bath. The christening of John Bernard, infant son of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Davy, took

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place after the Easter morning service at the Methodist church. The tower of the Methodist church has so long been the dwelling of the little sparrows that it has become necessary to repair their home. The Pepper Bros., Napanee, have the contract for rebuilding the same.

Columbia Records advertisement featuring a woman holding a record and listing various music titles and prices.

Table listing Columbia Records titles and prices, including categories like Dance Records, Song Hits, and Opera and Concert.

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