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L. W. COOK



UZZIAH'S PRIDE AND PUNISHMENT

"The Spotted King" Subject of International Sunday School Lesson

The International Sunday School Lesson For December 3 Is "Uzziah's Pride and Punishment."—II Chron. 26.

(By William T. Ellis)

As I sit at my desk to write the story of a great king, who made his mark on his world, but who is best remembered for his leprosy, there rise unbidden before my mind the figures of other men of our own day whom I know who are, like Uzziah, spotted men; so that their leprosy rises up like a hideous mantle, to blot out all remembrance of their goodness and greatness.

Most communities have these men. Often they are "leading citizens." But when the strong men of the neighborhood mention their names it is usually to speak first of their spottedness. The bad that is in them obscures the good, even as a drop of ink may pollute a glass of crystal water. A law of life which King Uzziah illustrates, is that, as Shakespeare says,

"The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones."

The one spot of leprosy, showing red on Uzziah's forehead, so fills the observer's eye that the beauty of his character are not seen, like him many a man with good deeds to his credit will be remembered, after he is gone, only for his spottedness.

There is another timely warning in this story. Uzziah sinned after he had reached middle age and had won a noble record. We commonly think that youth is the time of danger; yet our own observation shows that moral collapse often comes to men of established reputation when they have reached full maturity. Two score or more years of blameless living does not insure against disaster to character. With Uzziah's great ancestor we may well pray to be delivered "from pernicious sins." Written large over this lesson is the injunction "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall."

Some Marks of a Great Man

In boyhood, when but sixteen years old, Uzziah came to the throne of Israel. (The story in Kings gives his name as Azariah, a mistake easily made in the Hebrew.) His father had been assassinated, after turning again to heathen practices, and the young king found himself at the parting of the ways. Royal stuff was in him, however, and his course through long years may be written down as a model for every public official.

He sought godly counsel. Finding a prophet, Zechariah (not the author of the book), Uzziah had a clear vision of God. Uzziah made him a special confidant and adviser. He led the people along the old paths of righteousness. When he might have been pampering his vanity among foolish courtiers, the young king diligently sought out the highest truth. I thought of Uzziah yesterday morning when, in a famous New York church, I saw sitting at the feet of a modern interpreter of the mind of God. To go to church in sagacity; for, after all, there is no wisdom of such universal and immediate application as the will of the Lord.

No mollycoddle was Uzziah. Do not for an instant imagine that he was the sort of snivel-saint who pines to sit and sing his soul away to everlasting bliss. Not a bit of it. This ruler, who first of all sought to know the will of Jehovah, was a fearless, two-fisted fighter, as brave in battle as he was devout in meditation. He was of Richard the Lion-Hearted was a sort of going out to seek battles in the good cause. "He went forth and warred against the Philistines," and did not wait until they came to him, as God's militants was he, whose sword was to the fore in every holy war.

"Preparedness" in the Long Ago

Many a class of men and of boys will study this lesson for its light on national preparedness. Uzziah was a great general in that he created a huge volunteer army, and equipped every man. He not only prepared for all the hosts' spears and swords and bows and arrows and shields and helmets, but he also called the skillful men of Jerusalem to invent new engines for military purposes of attack and siege. Like Cromwell, he "trusted in God and kept his powder dry." He did not believe in giving the heathen and the godless a monopoly of sagacity and prudence. The sacred trust of national responsibility needed to be looked to.

On all sides, the feet of the Jews felt Uzziah's strong hand. He smote the Philistines on the west, destroying their fortresses and the walls of their great cities. He "was a king and a builder" for he erected his own strongholds in the enemy's country, to keep them in check. In the wilderness, too, and on the fertile, wind-swept uplands east of the Jordan—the words bring back to me the memory of how blithely the winds sweep across that tableland!—Uzziah erected towers of protection for his people. Score it to his credit that he was a builder and a constructor.

For five thousand years past, right down to the present day, any ruler in this part of the world who wanted trouble could he at the hands of the Arabs, those enemies of all men.

An Expansionist Patriot

Late news from the world's wars comes to mind as we read how Uzziah's victories extended down toward the Suez Canal, where the Turks and the Germans are again conducting an expedition. For his victorious sway ran "even to the entrance of Egypt." Trace on the map the expansion of Judah under Uzziah, and you will find that he occupied the spots which are to-day the scenes of romantic activity and conflict in the world's war.

Some readers will recall that a British warship went up the Gulf of Akaba, a year ago, and blew up the town of Akaba. Perhaps it never occurred to them that this was the spot where King Solomon built his navy; and, after it had been destroyed by the Edomites, Uzziah built it again; so that his dominion extended clear to the Red Sea. On modern maps "Elloth" is Akaba, a place associated with the Children of Israel on the way to the Canaan, and with all the later history of earth's land of romance, even down to the present day.

A Farmer-King

"For he loved husbandry." That is one gem in the sacred biography of Uzziah that makes our hearts warm to this long-ago king. He not only developed his nation in military defense and prowess, but he also looked well to the cultivation of the fruits of the earth, the ultimate source of all national greatness. All of us feel kinship for this remote ruler as we read of his devotion to the good brown earth; and of his delight in the freshly-turned soil; and in the browsing cattle, and the growing grain and the budding vines. No man who loves God's out-of-doors, and the primitive simplicities of nature, can be wholly bad.

While he fills the eye as a rich and famous and successful ruler, a man

who left his country better than he found it, yet Uzziah is beloved as a farmer-king. Somehow, his husbandry and well-digging seem more real to us than his battles and the cities he built. The new movement to encourage the boys and girls in the arts of husbandry would have delighted the heart of King Uzziah.

Branded!

Surely it was not after a quiet, contemplative walk in the fields, but rather following some successful battle, when he was flushed with pride and power, that Uzziah dared to enter into the holy place, and attempt to usurp the priests' function of offering incense on the altar of Jehovah. Ah, Uzziah, you were big in your own eyes that day! Pride, that conqueror of kings, had got a death-clutch on you. When you forgot to be reverent, you forgot to be your best self, your truest self.

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While the rash king and the dauntless priests contended, leprosy broke forth on the king's forehead. He was branded. He who had built cities must now go forth into the exile of the unclean. His sin had found him out. Unto the day of his death he had to live apart from men; and through all the centuries since he has been a spotted man, his greatness obscured by his sin.

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Many a class of men and of boys will study this lesson for its light on national preparedness. Uzziah was a great general in that he created a huge volunteer army, and equipped every man. He not only prepared for all the hosts' spears and swords and bows and arrows and shields and helmets, but he also called the skillful men of Jerusalem to invent new engines for military purposes of attack and siege. Like Cromwell, he "trusted in God and kept his powder dry." He did not believe in giving the heathen and the godless a monopoly of sagacity and prudence. The sacred trust of national responsibility needed to be looked to.

On all sides, the feet of the Jews felt Uzziah's strong hand. He smote the Philistines on the west, destroying their fortresses and the walls of their great cities. He "was a king and a builder" for he erected his own strongholds in the enemy's country, to keep them in check. In the wilderness, too, and on the fertile, wind-swept uplands east of the Jordan—the words bring back to me the memory of how blithely the winds sweep across that tableland!—Uzziah erected towers of protection for his people. Score it to his credit that he was a builder and a constructor.

For five thousand years past, right down to the present day, any ruler in this part of the world who wanted trouble could he at the hands of the Arabs, those enemies of all men.

An Expansionist Patriot

Late news from the world's wars comes to mind as we read how Uzziah's victories extended down toward the Suez Canal, where the Turks and the Germans are again conducting an expedition. For his victorious sway ran "even to the entrance of Egypt." Trace on the map the expansion of Judah under Uzziah, and you will find that he occupied the spots which are to-day the scenes of romantic activity and conflict in the world's war.

Some readers will recall that a British warship went up the Gulf of Akaba, a year ago, and blew up the town of Akaba. Perhaps it never occurred to them that this was the spot where King Solomon built his navy; and, after it had been destroyed by the Edomites, Uzziah built it again; so that his dominion extended clear to the Red Sea. On modern maps "Elloth" is Akaba, a place associated with the Children of Israel on the way to the Canaan, and with all the later history of earth's land of romance, even down to the present day.

A Farmer-King

"For he loved husbandry." That is one gem in the sacred biography of Uzziah that makes our hearts warm to this long-ago king. He not only developed his nation in military defense and prowess, but he also looked well to the cultivation of the fruits of the earth, the ultimate source of all national greatness. All of us feel kinship for this remote ruler as we read of his devotion to the good