Neither tears nor wit can cancel out a line of it!

"A Book of verses underneath the Bough, A jug of wine, a loaf of Bread an Thou!" The saddest people in the world," wrote Winchell, "are those sitting in joints making believe they are having a good time " This Broadway street [of fools?] B. The second illusion was the feeling on the part of the prodigal that he was independent, that he could live life happily outside his fathers house and his fathers will C. He was a victim of the illusion that freedom is licence

6 King quotes from Khayyám's Rubáiyát 71 and 12 (pp. 50 and 31) Hamilton also cited these two verses to exemplify "the philosophy of the prodigal" (Horns and Halos in Human Nature, p. 29)

7 King probably refers to journalist Walter Winchell, whose syndicated gossip column "On Broadway" ran in newspapers from 1924 until 1963

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“The Fellow Who Stayed at Home”

[October 1956]

[Montgomery, Ala. ?]

King bases the following handwritten outline on J. Wallace Hamilton’s sermon “That Fellow Who Stayed at Home,” which deals with the prodigal son’s elder brother. King removed this chapter from his annotated copy of Hamilton’s book, Horns and Halos in Human Nature, and kept the torn pages in the same file folder as this sermon. In the outline below, King observes that the elder brother “failed to realize that he was [committing] sins as damaging to the soul as the coarser sins of the younger brother.”

They began to be merry—that is a fitting climax. The elder brother is a sudden discord, but without him the story would have been untrue to life. The year has its winter storms, the glow of day is followed by the gloom of night.

1 He possessed a sort of unattractive goodness that was deeply repulsive. True he stayed at home, did the chores, kept the rules. He wasted no money nor scarred his soul with dissipation—But he was undesirable nevertheless. He did the right things but in the wrong spirit.

1 Hamilton, Horns and Halos in Human Nature, pp. 163–173. The 17 October 1956 Dexter Echo noted that King was scheduled to preach a sermon series on the prodigal son. This sermon may represent King’s second sermon in that series.

2 Cf Luke 15:24

3 Hamilton, Horns and Halos in Human Nature, p. 166. “Let us begin with the most obvious fact about him—that, for all his respectability, he illustrates a kind of ungracious, unattractive goodness that is much too common. True, he stayed at home, did the chores, kept the rules, performed his duty. He sowed no wild
That Fellow Who Stayed at Home

The minister had called for those who felt the need of prayer to linger after the service at the altar of the church. In the quiet, came a number, among them two men from opposite sides of the church. Without notice of each other, they knelt at the altar to pray. When, after a few moments, they arose, they looked at each other in startled recognition. When before they had faced each other one was a judge pronouncing sentence, the other a man who, in the frailties of his flesh, had run afoul of the law. Here, however, at the altar of the church, before the higher tribunal of Christ's spirit, they both stood in common need. And in the bountiful mercy of God they clasped hands in the common fraternity of the forgiven.

So we leave the great parable with the definite feeling that our Lord was talking about us. If He missed us in the first part He reached us in the second; and over it all is still the boundless love of the Father within whose house our restless souls find their true home.

- The tragedy of the elder brother was that he was contaminated with the sin of pride of egotism. He did good deeds, but from bad motives. He did the right thing, but with the wrong spirit. He would have given to the Christ appeals, but His germ of at this point would have been weak to feel his pride.

- His spiritual pride had drained from him the capacity to love. He could not call his brother brother.

In the margin of James Wallace Hamilton's sermon "That Fellow Who Stayed at Home," from his 1954 book Horns and Halos in Human Nature, King writes, "The tragedy of the elder brother was that he was contaminated with the sin of pride of egotism. . . . His spiritual pride had drained from him the capacity to love. He could not call his brother brother" (p. 173).
Oct 1956

a. The little girl’s prayer—Lord, Make all good people nice.
b. The solo spoiled by the accompaniment.
c. My former church member.
d. Homes are often broken by that “Incompatibility” is the lawyer’s word for the offensive nagging of people who are smugly moral and piously unbending. God save us from a stuffed-shirt morality! It is not enough to be good, to be Christian we must be good in a nice way.

II. He failed to realize that he was committing sins as damaging to the soul as the coarser sins of the younger brother.

There are two types of sins: sins of passions and sins of disposition or sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. Sins of the flesh would include such things as drunkenness, adultery, stealing, gambling, profanity. Sins of spirit include sins of envy, jealousy, bad temper, self-centeredness and social callousness. “The publicans and the harlots go into heaven before you.”

The Church has been harder on profanity than on prejudice. It has denounced drunkenness more than stinginess. It was un-Christian to gamble, but not to [own?] slaves.

III. His spiritual pride drained from him the capacity to love. He could not call his [brother brother].

So often people will do a good thing, and then spoil it by some ugly twist of the spirit. We often see this in the Church. Some people will faithfully perform some...
fine service in the Church but grumble so much about it, seek their own interest in it, or want so much public recognition for it that they destroy a beautiful act with the wrong spirit, And you have the feeling they are not doing it for the sake of Christ but for their own

AD  CSKC Sermon file, folder 60, “The Fellow Who Stayed at Home ”

Garden of Gethsemane, Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[14 April 1957]
Montgomery, Ala

In this Palm Sunday sermon, King declares, “You can stand up amid despair You can stand up amid persecution You can stand up amid disappointment You can stand up even amid death. But you don’t worry because you know God is with you. You have made the transition You have faced life’s central test”¹ Vowing to replicate Jesus’ obedience to God’s will, King cries, “Wherever He leads me, I will follow I will follow Him to the garden I will follow Him to the cross if He wants me to go there.”

The following text is taken from an audio recording of the service

[Choir singing]

There is hardly anyone here this morning who has not at some time been pushed to the rugged edges of life. There have been times that all of us felt that a cloud of despair had come to blot out the joyous glitter of a distant star of hope. So often we have been left standing amid the surging murmur of life’s restless sea. We have been frustrated and disillusioned, bewildered and on the brink of despair ²

There have been times that we felt like giving up. We felt that we couldn’t make it any longer. This has been an experience characterizing the lives of men and women in all generations—religious men, unbelieving men. For instance, we turn back to the pages of the Old Testament and we hear an earnest believer like Isaiah in the midst of the Babylonian exile crying, “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel.”³

We can run the long gamut of biography and come up to modern life. And we can hear an earnest believer like Carlyle saying, “It seems that God sits in his heaven and does nothing.”⁴ We can turn to a noble writer and literary genius like

1 The following Sunday, King commented that he had preached a sermon on Jesus’ experience in the garden of Gethsemane “just last week,” indicating that he delivered this homily on 14 April 1957 (King, Questions That Easter Answers, 21 April 1957, p 288 in this volume)
2 In early 1957 supporters of segregation bombed four African American churches as well as the parsonages of MIA vice president Ralph Abernathy and white minister Robert Graetz. In March 1957 the MIA put out a leaflet titled “Segregation Hasn’t Been Licked” that depicted the damage (in Papers 44)
3 Cf Isaiah 45 15
4 King paraphrases Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, p 163