THE BRILLIANT FACE

"For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." - Micah 6:4

It is striking to find the name of Miriam along with those of her distinguished brothers. That was indeed a remarkable family that dwelt upon the banks of the Nile. Everyone had real ability. Everyone had a part in bringing to birth a nation that has been a spiritual teacher of the world.

I.

There are certain respects in which Miriam was a pioneer.

1. So far as the record goes, she is the first woman among her people to be a career woman. She lived in a day when a woman's sphere was exceedingly limited. During her day and for many centuries thereafter, about the only vocation open to women was that of wifehood and motherhood. What significance she had was because of her husband or because of her children. The branching out in a career of her own was practically unknown.

I hasten to say that we have come upon a better day. Of course, I am still old fashioned enough to believe that woman has her best opportunity in the home. I believe that she who deliberately turns away from this high vocation abdicates her supremest throne and stops her ears to the deepest and sweetest secret of human blessings. But having said this, I hasten to say that I rejoice in the vast number of vocations that are now open to women outside the home. Increasingly woman is entering every vocation that man is entering and doing so successfully.
As far back as 1920, of the 572 gainful occupations in America, 537 of them had already been entered by women. That left only thirty-five that was exclusively masculine. The number would be reduced still further today. Nor are we to think that this has been due to the fact that women are in rebellion. It is due rather to the fact that the jobs that were once done in the home have now been carried outside. Many women must, therefore, work outside the home or not work at all.

2. Not only is Miriam the first career woman that we meet on the pages of the Bible but she is the first spinster. I do not call her an old maid for old maids have gone out of style. Some of you have never seen one. I remember those I knew in my boyhood. They wore long dresses and high shoes. Some said they had ankles but nobody could ever speak with authority. Their chief occupation was knitting and crocheting and looking after the children of their married sisters. But now she has cast aside those queer garments. She has had her hair cut and her hands manicured and she is out in the world of affairs - bless her heart - and giving a good account of herself.

Just why Miriam did not marry we are not told. It may be that she was simply not interested. She may have been married to her career. There are few such. Not being interested in men, they were not greatly interested in her. Or if they were interested, their interest didn't awaken hers. Of course, the good women that her rejected suitors married never knew that they had proposed to that old maid first. At least, I hope she didn't.

The second handicap that Miriam had was that she was exceedingly brilliant. Sharing the high intellectual gifts of her brothers, she likely made any eligible suitor feel cheap. That, of course, was fatal. If you happen to be brilliant and really want to catch that moron that is going with you, put a sparkle in your eye, laugh at his inane jokes, send him away thinking well of himself and he will say with enthusiasm that you are the most brilliant conversationalist that he ever talked to. Not only so but
he will be back. But if you send him away feeling a bit like a wounded toad, the next night he will go to the other end of the street to find somebody beautiful but dumb. An exceedingly brilliant woman is at a decided disadvantage in the marriage market.

3. The third fact about Miriam was that she was the first woman on the pages of the Bible of whom it is said she was definitely called of God to a task. Jesus made no distinction in his teaching between men and women, but He is the only great religious leader who failed to do so. It is most remarkable, therefore, to find recorded in that distant day that a woman was as truly called of God as was Moses.

II.

Miriam played a part in that great drama of the birth of a nation. She comes upon the stage three times. The first two, she plays beautiful parts and the third and final entrance is fraught in tragedy.

1. The first glimpse we get of her is as a girl perhaps twelve to fourteen years of age. She is doing what older sisters have done countless times. She is serving as nursemaid to a younger brother. This younger brother has had a death sentence pronounced against him. He is, therefore, in hiding in a frail little vessel among the rushes of the Nile.

I can imagine that Miriam grew very tired of her monotonous task. But one day the monotony was broken. It was broken in a fashion that made Miriam's face go white of fear. She sees a group of women coming to the river Nile. Among them as leader is none other than the Princess herself. They make straight for the spot where the baby is hidden. When he is discovered Miriam gives the first demonstration of her intellect and tact.

She hurries from her hiding place. She is far too wise to tell the Princess that she is the baby's sister. She is too wise to suggest that
the baby's own mother be found. She does suggest a Hebrew woman as nurse. Her offer is accepted and thus the Moses we know is made possible. Brilliant young Miriam helped to make history on a big scale on that distant day.

2. The next glimpse we get of Miriam is on the shores of the Red Sea. The Israelites have made their escape. The sea seems to be spitting up in disgust the dead bodies of Pharaoh's once proud army. Miriam is leading her sisters in a song of thanksgiving. It is not in praise of themselves but of their mighty God. It celebrates yesterday but it is to prepare them for tomorrow.

3. When Miriam makes her final entry, she plays the tragic and disappointing part. She seeks, with the help of Aaron, to stir up a rebellion against Moses. The pretext for this is Moses' wife. Moses had married a foreign woman. I am quite sure that Miriam did not like her. She had two reasons: First, because she was a foreigner. Second, she occupied too large a place in the life of Moses. Remember that Miriam was much older than her gifted brother. Her resentment against Moses' wife was akin to that of a mother-in-law at her worst.

But Miriam's supreme reason for staging this rebellion was her own personal ambition. She was gifted and knew it. She was the oldest of the three. She wanted to be first. The fact that she could not be first filled her with inner rage and bitterness. She became envious, even of her own brother.

Having dared to give expression to her envy in bitter words against her brother, the story said, she was smitten with leprosy. Throughout the Bible, leprosy is a symbol of sin. The inner rage of this woman wrote its name on her face. That is constantly happening. Those who have the peace of God in their hearts show some trace of it in their faces but nobody can nurse envy and rage and hate in their hearts without these writing something
of their ugliness in their face. We are glad to say that Miriam repented and was healed. But this inward ugliness was such a habit with her that it was given to her as a name and has clung to her through all the centuries.

It is rather striking that while Aaron joined his sister in speaking against Moses, he was not stricken with leprosy as she was. This was the case, I think, because Aaron really did not share her bitterness. Aaron was intellectual but he was a weakling. He was mere putty in her strong hands. The poor worm just did what he was told. This is not to excuse him altogether for weakness is close akin to wickedness. One so often leads to the other.

This gives us a glimpse of Aaron when Moses had gone into the heights and failed to come back for forty days. The people demands that Aaron make them a god to go before them. Of course, Aaron did not believe in such idolatry but he did as he was told. When at last Moses returned and called him on the carpet, instead of confessing his cowardice he tried to alibi out of it. He implies that he did not make the calf at all, it just happened so. Listen to his words: "I cast the gold into the fire and behold there came forth this calf." What an accident!

III.

The tragedy of Miriam's life was that she never learned how to take second place gracefully. The fact that she failed to learn this casts a shadow over her entire life. It will do the same for us. We ought to learn to take second place joyfully and gracefully. Sooner or later we must all play in that role. How may we learn to do so without giving away to envy and bitterness?

1. It ought to help us to remember that to play second role is perfectly natural. I used to could play tennis better than either of my
boys. I can't do so any more. The fact that I can't does not make me talk ugly about them or to them. I simply accept it as natural to my advancing years.

2. Then, as another has indicated, the fact that I am second does not necessarily mean that I am inferior to the man in first place. When Lindbergh made his flight across the ocean, he received tokens of appreciation surpassing any other man in history. Inside of thirty days, he had received 3,500,000 letters. It took ten trucks to carry his presents. When Chamberlain made a longer flight a few months later, he had to pay $124.00 to get his few medals through the custom office. The first man's great recognition does not mean that he was that much superior to the second.

Nor does second place always mean inferior usefulness. How often has the man in the second place rendered a far greater service than the man at the top. That was what Jesus meant when He said, "Many that are last shall be first."

3. It will help us to accept our place bravely and sweetly to believe that we are where we are, if we are Christians, at the call of God. To be true to your task is perfection. To do your best with your one talent is to have your Lord come to meet you one day, all enthusiasm, saying, "Well done, well done."

Miriam was greatly gifted but because she wasn't gifted above all others, she made herself miserable. Her very name signifies bitterness. We quote with approval the man who had rather be first in an Siberian village than second in Rome. But such a man is not to be congratulated. He raises hell for himself and for others. To be willing to be what God meant you to do, that is to live richly both in time and in eternity. Blessed is he who knows how to take the second place gracefully.

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"He hath shewed me, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Micah 6:8

This is the last Sunday of the old year. Soon we are to venture upon what we call, with daring hopefulness, a New Year. Of course, the coming year will not be new to all of us. To some it will just be another year, with its same old fears and failures, its same prejudices and hates, its same disappointments and heartaches. But to others it will be perfectly new. Day by day we shall be thanking God for those mercies that are really new each morning. Day by day we shall be shouting with Paul, "Old things are passed away, Behold, they are become new."

The method by which we may obtain this high goal did not originate with me. It came from the lips of a man of the name of Micah, who was a prophet in a little country at the back side of the world, more than twenty-six centuries ago. Micah was a farmer. He lived close to nature. He lived closer still to nature's God. Living thus in the Divine Fellowship, he was able to define for us what religion is at its best. In fact, no other man in the Old Testament equaled him at telling in simple language what the will of God is for the world and for each individual in the world. Nobody in the New Testament has run past him in this respect.

If, then, you and I are going to find the coming year really new, we need to sit at the feet of this Prophet. If there is to be any abiding newness, we must find it within the will of God. What, then, is the will of God for your life and mine? In answering this question Micah pushed aside all ritual, all offering of sacrifices. Man has never found God through mere ritual. Nothing is more true than this.
if religion loses its inwardness, we seek to make up for that loss by outward display. What, then, is fundamental? Here is the answer. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to be just and kind?" and then walk in humble fellowship with God. That is simple enough for a little child; it is profound enough for the greatest genius. Let us look at these great longings and hopes of God in detail.

I

It is the will of God that we should be just.

1. What is justice? Justice is fair-mindedness in action. It is to play the game according to the rules. It is to give every man his due. "For the just, every place a palace and all seasons summer." 2. Where is it to be found?

First, we are to be just in our international relationships. National morality is a recent discovery. It is only in recent years that we have come to the realization that we cannot do as a nation what is wrong for us as individuals. There was a time when everybody seemed to think any nation had a right to steal and plunder and be unjust just as it suited its own national program. We still make it our first business to look out for Number 1, but at least we are developing some national conscience.

Second, we are to be just in dealing with our own nation. In the language of Jesus, we are to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." In a recent election in Germany, about eighty to ninety percent of the people voted. In our recent election about fifty percent of the people voted. If eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, one-half of the American people are not paying that price. We can lose our
liberty and kill our democracy by merely doing nothing.

Third, we are to be fair in our business relationships. The employer is to pay an adequate wage; the employee is to do a full days work. There is to be fair play between buyer and seller. In other words, we are to handle the tools of our daily trade as religiously as we handle the communion cup on Sunday morning.

Fourth, we are to be just in our dealings with the minority group that are among us. We are to take special pains to be just to those whom we have at a disadvantage. A man told me some time ago, with a swagger, how he bought a very fine gun from a negro woman who had lost her husband. The gun was worth perhaps $200 but he got it for a petty sum because the woman did not know its value. We know his purchase was just a legal way of stealing.

Fifth, we are to be just in our relations to our church. If we render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, certainly we ought to render to God the things that are God's. Why should a man be in earnest about his club, his fraternity, and his business, and lukewarm about his church? No man ought to allow anything to keep him away from God's house on Sunday that would not keep him from his business on Monday.

Sixth, we are to be just in our dealings one with another. When Jesus, "judge not", he did not mean to forbid our reaching a conclusion as to the worth or worthlessness of our fellows. He was forbidding us to look for the worst instead of the best. He was forbidding that damning habit of fault finding. If we look for the best in our fellows, we are sure to find it. If we look for the worst, we are equally sure to find that. Those who sought for something to criticize in Jesus did not seek in vain. By now we learned that
This certainty that Jesus was God come in the flesh—Immanuel—God with us—did not weaken with the passing of the Master but grew vastly stronger. Having witnessed the resurrection and experienced Pentecost, these men became absolutely certain that the same Jesus with whom they had walked the pathway of Galilee, was alive and forevermore. They became absolutely certain that he was both with and within them as a living presence. Not only so, but they became the kind of men and did the kind of deeds that we would expect God's chosen men to become and to accomplish.

III

But the answer of these friends of Jesus of the long ago is not enough for you and me. We must find the answer to this question for ourselves. "Who do you say that I am?" That question is intensely personal.

Some time ago a brilliant friend of mine sent a manuscript of books to his publisher for publication. It so happened that this friend is a great

"a book he said there"
"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?" — Micah 6:8

(A New Year's Sermon)

My text is taken from the prophet Micah. We know very little about this prophet except what he tells us in his brief book. We do know that he was a member of a quartet of prophets who were contemporaries. These four men, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah probably exerted a greater influence upon religious thinking than any other four of the Old Testament. Micah, as Amos, lived in the country but he was not a shepherd. He was a farmer. Living in the country he was naturally a bit suspicious of the city. This suspicion soon changed into hot indignation. There was a reason for this. It was men from the city who were pillaging and plundering the small farmers whom Micah knew personally. Hence this prophet came to look upon the cities of Jerusalem and Samaria as veritable cesspools of iniquity and injustice.

As his fellow prophets, Micah was undergirded by a deep sense of mission. He felt himself called of God to denounce the evils that were blighting his people. "I am full of power by the spirit of the Lord — — — to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." But his ministry was far more than a ministry of denunciation. His message was also constructive. In fact, this man was inspired to define for us the will of God, both for the individual and for the world with a beautiful simplicity surpassing that of any other prophet of the Old Testament. In truth, it is doubtful if any man in all the centuries
that have past since that far off day has improved on Micah's definition of real religion.

"What doth the Lord require of thee," he asks. In other words, what is necessary to please God? In answer he passes by ritual, he passes by sacrifice which was a fundamental part of the worship of that day, to give this simple and profound answer. "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." How beautifully simple! A child can understand it. How vastly profound! The wisest of men cannot run past it. Here is a word for every man in every age. Often religion seems a vague and unreal something. But not so is the religion of this prophet. Here is a religion that fits into life as we know it and live it.

This is the last Sunday of the old year. Soon we are going to venture into the new. Personally, I still believe in New Year. It is a time for heart searching in the presence of God. It is a time when thoughtfully we should seek equipment for the trying days ahead. Just as Christian was lead into the armory chamber of the Palace Beautiful that he might equip himself for his adventure, so we ought to seek to equip ourselves. What better resolution could we make as we face the new year than this? "This year I am resolved by the help of God to be just and kind, and to live in humble fellowship with my Lord." Let us look at these in their order.

I.

This year my purpose by God's grace is to do justly.

What is it to do justly? Justice is fair-mindedness in action. Just conduct is the outward expression of inward honesty and sincerity. Such conduct is admired by every unwarped mind. "For justice every place a palace and all seasons summer."
This doing justly, playing the game fairly, is to cover the whole circumference of life. It is to govern our play. When you boys and girls play games you are to play fairly. Any one who cheats in a game is likely to cheat in matters of greater importance. The same is true of an adult. A certain humorous writer declares with more truth than humor, that there are few sharper tests than that which comes to a golfer when his ball is in the rough and nobody is looking on but God. Years ago I watched a hard fought tennis match. There was a questionable decision that went in favor of the server. At once the server drove both balls into the net and the crowd applauded. They were convinced that he was too good a sportsman to desire a point that he had not justly won.

Justice also has to do with all our business relationships. It was a lack of justice between man and man that filled Moshe with such hot indignation. As he looked about him he saw "priests pattering oracles for pay." He beheld so-called prophets who would pronounce a blessing if they were paid, but would curse if they were not. He saw judges accepting bribes. He saw the powerful rich taking such advantage of the poor peasants that he accused them of stripping the hide off their flesh. That conception has come down to us. Today we speak of getting skinned in a trade. These plunderers were going even further. They were practicing cannibalism. This they were doing not by actually eating the flesh of their victims, but by cheating them of the goods upon which life depended.

His is a word that is needed in every age. There is a pressing need for justice between capital and labor. We are concerned that the employer pay a just wage. We are also concerned, if we are just, that the employee do a just day's work. We need fairness between buyer and seller - fairness on both sides of the counter. In fact, we are to handle the tools of our trade day by day as honestly and religiously as we handle the communion cup on Sunday morning.
Then we are to be just in our judgments one of another. "Judge not," said Jesus, "that you be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." What does Jesus mean by this warning? I do not take it that he is forbidding our reaching a conclusion as to the degree of worth or of worthlessness of the men and women with whom we have to do. Such conclusions are made necessary by our Lord's next command: "Cast not your pearls before swine, neither give that which is holy unto the dogs." We can follow out this command only reaching some conclusion as to who is swinish and who is not.

What then is Jesus forbidding? He is forbidding judgments that are harsh and unfair. He is forbidding us to play the role of faultfinder. He is forbidding us to reach conclusions that have no foundation in fact. In short, he is forbidding those hasty criticisms born of ignorance or prejudice. "Judge righteous judgment," he urges. Therefore, since we are so little able to know both the deeds and motives of others, we ought to be slow to pass sentence. This is a word for the pulpit quite as much as for the pew.

There is another field for the exercise of justice that comes close to all of us. We have a race problem that has been considerably aggravated in recent years. We are, naturally, resentful of that type of outside interference that seeks to erase by a wave of the hand difficulties that are the growth of centuries. But we must allow no kind of resentment to make us unfair. Justice is always needful, but it is never more needful and never quite so beautiful as when we are dealing with those whom we have at a disadvantage.

We ought to be just to the membership of the organizations of which we are a part. One organization of supreme importance to which we belong is the home. Now I know a home needs more than justice, but it certainly cannot get along with less. How many husbands and wives separate because one or both of
them refuse to play fairly with the other. Some will not play fairly financially. Sometimes they refuse to play fairly in matters more intimate and personal. The husband who takes privileges that he would not allow his wife to take, is a cheat. He cheats not only his wife, but he cheats himself, his children and society.

Parents owe it to God and man to play fairly with their children. Every child has a right to be well born. Every child has a right not only to a mother but to a father. All parents owe their children the right sort of training. Psychologists tell us that children who go to Sunday School have a higher personality rating than those who do not. They tell us that children whose parents attend church have a higher personality rating than the children of parents who do not. If we play fairly with our children then they are likely to play fairly with us.

We ought to be fair in the home.

Most of us belong to the church. I like that word belong. It means that the church has a claim on us. It has a claim because of our own voluntary choice. We stood at these altars and took upon ourselves the solemn vows of the church. Therefore we ought fairly to discharge these vows. We have no right to take a course that if others should take it would weaken, if not wreck, our church.

Finally, we are to be just in our community relationships. To have a good community we must have good homes, good churches, good schools, clean places of amusement. We ought to contribute to all that helps to build a good community. As we owe a debt to a community so we owe to the nation and the world. We are asking some millions of our choice young men and women to venture their all during these bloody days. We ought to deal fairly with them in doing our best to see that they have the best possible home—coming when the war is over.
Why is it the will of God that we should be just? He is asking justice at our hands because justice is a badge of character. He is eager that we be just because He wants us to be like Himself. Ours is a just God. He is no respecter of persons. He always gives every man a square deal. He yearns that we be like Himself.

Then He is eager for us to be just because He is more than a judge. He is a Father. Being a Father, He is eager that His children be just to their brothers. If one of my boys were to do the other an injustice, with which one would I side? I would side with both. I would be sorry for the one who suffered the injustice. I would be more sorry still, and more indignant, against the one who inflicted that injustice. No good father can fail to grieve when one child takes an unfair advantage of the other.

Finally, God is eager for us to be just because He knows that there is no building permanent society without it. To build on injustice is like building on a time bomb. Sooner or later that bomb will explode and blow the superstructure into bits, regardless of the skill, care and expense with which we have built it. It remains forever true that nothing is finally settled until it is rightly settled. No wonder therefore our Lord is asking that we be just one toward another.

II.

Not only does God ask that we be just, but also that we be kind. If justice is fair-mindedness in action, kindness is something better still. It is love in action. Kindness is a child of love. "Love suffereth long in its kind." Merely to be kind does not sound so very heroic, yet nothing would do more to sweeten life and to change human desert into garden than plain every day kindness.

Kindness also is God-like. Our God is infinitely kind. This the Bible tells us again and again. But we receive our greatest assurance of God's kindness
in that He is like Jesus. And how kind was our Lord! When Luke sums up His life in a single beautiful sentence, he tells us that He went about doing good. That is just another way of saying that He went about being kind. But the fact that kindness is always good does not mean that it is goody-good.

One day Jesus told the story of a man whom the whole world has agreed to call good. Why have all men in every age reached the same decision with regard to this Samaritan? We only have one view of his face, one single snapshot. But this shows him in what we regard as a typical pose. In this one picture he is doing an act of kindness. Kindness sometimes has to wound. When a surgeon is called to see a patient with an acute attack of appendicitis, the easiest way out might be repeated shots of morphine. But out of real kindness he resorts to the knife. Kindness whether its face seems harsh or gentle is always love in action.

The field for the exercise of kindness is everywhere. There is seldom a day so uneventful that we do not have an opportunity to employ it. Kindness also is needed everywhere. But the closer our relationships to each other the more it is needed. We come closer together in the home than anywhere else, therefore, there is no better place for the practicing of kindness than among the commonplace folks with whom we have to live day by day. Yet, I have known a few people who were more kindly and gracious everywhere else than in their own homes. Kindness enriches both the giver and the receiver. It makes living together easier. It saves from what is often the sharpest pang of separation when the one we love reaches the end of the journey. It was my painful duty to conduct a funeral some time ago where the grief of the bereaved was unusually bitter. I knew the situation well enough to be confident that the sharpest pain of that grief grew out of the memory of unkindness.

Kindness therefore is a great luxury. But it is far more than a luxury, it is a necessity. Jesus told the story of a certain rich man who lifted up his
eyes in hades. This was the case not because he had committed a crime. It was the case because he had not had enough kindness to make him willing to help a beggar who lay at his very gate. In the picture that Jesus gives of the final judgment, there were some who received no welcome, but were turned away. Why? They were so devoid of kindness that their presence would have changed any kind of heaven into a hell. No place can be heavenly where hearts are unkind. But there were others who were made welcome. This was the case because they were so full of "the milk of human kindness" that had they been sent into hell, they would have changed it into heaven. Kindness is a necessity.

III.

"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God."

It is this walking with God that to some will seem unnecessary and unreal. To be just and kind, is not that enough? That is a religion that the man of the street feels he can get his teeth into. But walking with God. Why is that necessary? Why does God will that for us?

1. God yearns for us to walk with Him because we are the children of His love. Therefore, he is so eager for our fellowship that no gift we can possibly make Him can be a substitute for the gift of ourselves. God so longs for our companionship that He is willing to bear any cross in order to win it. The shepherd who found that one sheep was missing could not be satisfied. He braved dangers of the wilds in order to find it. God is like that. He seeks not ours but us.

2. Not only does God long for our fellowship because He cannot be satisfied without us, but because He knows that we can never be satisfied without Him. Every man is possessed of a hunger for God, that nothing else can satisfy. It is true that we often do not know what it is for which we are hungering and thirsting.
Yet this remains, that there is no true satisfaction for any human soul except in the fellowship of God.

Finally, God longs for our fellowship because He knows that it is only as we walk with Him that we shall be really just and kind. Here is a lovely little brook. It is singing its way to the sea. "There is something worth while," I say as I look at it. "It is a poem of usefulness and beauty, but the spring far up yonder among the rugged hills, I care nothing about that at all." But unless we have the spring we cannot have the lovely stream that flows from it. Justice and kindness at their best flow out of this lovely spring of fellowship of God. When the fellowship is broken the stream is likely to dry up.

What then ought to be my resolution for the new year? I ought to resolve to be just and kind and to live in fellowship with God. I can do nothing less than this and be a real Christian. I can do nothing bigger than this, however, great my gifts. I can begin in the here and now by an inward dedication to my Lord. I can go out to be just and kind today. I ought to do this in the realization that the closer I get to God, the more just and kind I shall become. The more just and kind I become, the closer will be my fellowship with God. I can make no higher resolution than this.