



THANKSGIVING DAY

The American Calendar

Amy A. Kass | Leon R. Kass

THE MEANING OF THANKSGIVING DAY

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* Suitable for students, grades 5–8

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1



Thanksgiving:
An American Holiday

The Origins and Traditions of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a venerable and much beloved American holiday. In colonial times it was primarily a harvest holiday, in which the colonists offered thanks for a good harvest, sometimes by feasting, sometimes by fasting. A holiday was already celebrated in the Spanish colony of Florida in the sixteenth century, and in the British colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, most famously in 1621, when the Pilgrims at Plymouth, Massachusetts celebrated their first successful harvest in the company of some of the Native American tribesmen. Thanksgiving became a regularly celebrated national holiday only during the Civil War, when Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a day of national Thanksgiving in 1863. The holiday became fixed to the fourth Thursday in November by an act of the United States Congress in 1941.

The Early Colonists' Thanksgiving

In May of 1541, Spanish explorers under Francisco Vázquez de Coronado camped on the rim of Palo Duro Canyon (near modern-day Amarillo, Texas) and joined together in a celebration of thanksgiving. Nearly a quarter-century later, French Huguenot colonists at Fort Caroline, Florida set aside a day for solemn praise and thanksgiving in June 1564. In the late summer of 1607, English settlers in Maine united with Abnaki Indians for a harvest feast. Three years later, English colonists in Jamestown, Virginia held a jubilant day of thanksgiving when fresh supply ships arrived, providing the surviving colonists with much-needed food after a severe winter and disastrous drought. In 1619, pursuant to their charter, English settlers at Berkeley Hundred, Virginia decreed that the day of their arrival “shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of thanksgiving to Almighty God.”¹

Of course, the most famous early American thanksgiving celebration occurred at Plymouth Plantation in the fall of 1621, when about fifty Pilgrims joined with nearly a hundred Pokanoket Indians—including the tribe’s chief, or *Massasoit*, Ousamequin—for a three-day-long harvest festival.² Desiring to separate from the Church of England and set up their own government, the Pilgrims had left England aboard the *Mayflower* the previous August. After two months of weathering choppy seas, they reached the New World, landing at Cape Cod, Massachusetts. While still aboard ship, on November 11, the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact, in which they “Covenant[ed] and Combine[d] [them] selves together into a Civil Body Politic, for [their] better ordering and preservation.”³

¹ The Indian Massacre of 1622, however, forced the colonists to take refuge in Jamestown, and the settlement at Berkeley Hundred—along with its thanksgiving tradition—was abandoned for some time. Catherine Clinton, “A History of the Thanksgiving Holiday,” Gilder Lehrman Institute, available at www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/government-and-civics/essays/history-thanksgiving-holiday.

² As different accounts refer to the Indians either as Pokanoket or as Wampanoag, it is helpful to point out that the former were a smaller tribe within the Wampanoag Nation.

³ The Mayflower Compact, WhatSoProudlyWeHail.org, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/mayflower-compact.

On December 18, after sending out parties to explore the area, the *Mayflower* docked at Plymouth Rock on the western side of Cape Cod Bay, and the new colonists settled in for a harsh winter. They spent their first few months in the New World aboard the ship. More than half died, victims of poor nutrition, inadequate housing, and disease.

Shortly after moving to land in March 1621, the Pilgrims met an English-speaking Patuxet Indian named Tisquantum (“Squanto”) who served as a guide and translator for the Englishmen and the local Pokanoket tribe. The Native Americans helped the colonists adapt to the New World, teaching them what to farm and how to hunt local animals and providing the colonists with needed supplies when their stores were low. In the fall, to celebrate their successful harvest, the Pilgrims hosted the Native Americans for a feast of lobsters, clams, vegetables, and, famously, a “great store of wild Turkeys.”⁴ Writing in *Mourt’s Relation*, his firsthand account of the colony at Plymouth Rock, Edward Winslow describes the festivities:

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruits of our labor. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which we brought to the plantation and bestowed on our governor, and upon the captain and others. And although it be not always so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet by the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.⁵

An American Holiday

Although the colonists set aside other days for thanksgiving, these were much more somber affairs than the harvest festival we now think of as America’s “first Thanksgiving.” In November 1777, the First National Proclamation of Thanksgiving was issued by the Continental Congress following the Colonial victories over British General John Burgoyne in the Battles of Saratoga. In the Proclamation, Congress “recommended to the legislative or executive Powers of these United States to set apart Thursday, the eighteenth Day of December next, for Solemn Thanksgiving and Praise.”⁶ Near the end of the Revolutionary War—after the British House of Commons had voted to end the war in America, but before the formal signing of the Treaty of Paris—the Congress proclaimed another “day of solemn Thanksgiving to God for all his mercies.”⁷

⁴ William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, 1646, see below.

⁵ Edward Winslow, *Mourt’s Relation*, 1622, based on facsimile edition of the original 1622 edition, with updated spelling provided by Caleb Johnson and paragraphing by the 1969 Dwight Heath version, available at www.histarch.uiuc.edu/plymouth/mourt6.html.

⁶ National Historical Society, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 6, 557, available at GoogleBooks.

⁷ “Founders Give Thanks,” Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/thanksgiving/.

The first Thanksgiving Day celebrated under the new Constitution, took place on November 26, 1789, the first year of George Washington's presidency. At the encouragement of the House of Representatives, President Washington proclaimed a day to be devoted to "public thanksgiving and prayer," and sent money to supply debtors in prison with provisions, thus beginning the Thanksgiving Day tradition of charity.⁸ Washington's proclamation, however, did not result in a new holiday: John Adams, Washington's successor, recommended a "National Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer," rather than a thanksgiving day, while Thomas Jefferson opposed the proclamation of both thanksgiving and fast days as counter to the separation of church and state.⁹

Although many states, particularly in New England, continued to have annual observances of thanksgiving, there wasn't another national Thanksgiving Day until Abraham Lincoln proclaimed one in 1863 to celebrate the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg—an act we owe, in part, to the efforts of Sarah Josepha Buell Hale. The editor of the popular magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* and famous author of "Mary Had a Little Lamb," Hale had devoted an entire chapter to the importance of Thanksgiving traditions in her 1827 novel, *Northwood*. She campaigned to make the day a national holiday, year after year sending letters to governors, congressmen, senators, and to the White House, addressing notes to at least six different presidents.

By 1855, fourteen states recognized the fourth Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day, with two others celebrating the holiday on the third Thursday. Territories such as California and Oregon even proclaimed the holiday before being recognized as states. In September 1863, Hale published an editorial once again urging President Lincoln to proclaim a national Thanksgiving Day. On October 3—the same date on which Washington had offered his Thanksgiving Proclamation—Lincoln declared that Thanksgiving Day would be observed on the last Thursday in November. Writing in the midst of the Civil War, Lincoln urged Americans to remember the "gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy" and to "fervently implore the imposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it."¹⁰

After the Civil War

Following the Civil War, the once solemn day of Thanksgiving became a celebratory holiday to rival the Pilgrims' harvest festival in Plymouth. By the early twentieth century, the religious nature of the holiday had melded with the civic, and it acquired a new purpose, as an occasion to incorporate newcomers into American customs. Festivals in honor of the Pilgrims became popular, as did the ubiquitous grade-school Pilgrims-and-Indians pageants. Costumed parades were held in different cities, and in 1921 Gimbels

⁸ George Washington, Thanksgiving Proclamation, 1789, see below.

⁹ See Thanksgiving Day Proclamations, 1789–2011, WhatSoProudlyWeHail.org, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/thanksgiving-day-proclamations-1789-2011.

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln, Thanksgiving Proclamation, 1863, see below.

Department Store sponsored a Thanksgiving Day parade in Philadelphia. In 1938, Macy's did the same for New York, bringing the famous Uncle Sam balloon to the streets of Manhattan. Football soon became its own Thanksgiving Day tradition, with many college teams choosing to play their big games on the holiday.

In 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt joined the continuous line of presidents since Lincoln to offer a Thanksgiving Day Proclamation. He differed with his predecessors, however, by declaring that the holiday would be celebrated on the second-to-last Thursday of November, since that year the last Thursday was on November 30 and retailers were concerned that the late date would not leave enough time for Christmas shopping. Roosevelt's change was met with a storm of protest, and sixteen states refused to accept the president's proclamation and continued to celebrate Thanksgiving on the last Thursday of the month. To settle the matter, Congress established the Federal Thanksgiving Day holiday. On October 6, 1941, the House of Representatives passed a motion declaring "the last Thursday in November a legal holiday." The Senate then passed an amendment "making the fourth Thursday in November a legal holiday" (to avoid the trouble caused by the occasional fifth Thursday in November), and President Roosevelt signed the resolution on December 26, 1941.¹¹

Today, Thanksgiving is perhaps our most beloved national holiday, yet it is celebrated quietly, privately, with festive meals prepared at home and shared with family and friends. The busy streets of the city are quiet, the concerns with getting and spending are set aside, and the entire nation, household by household in the year's colorful autumn of the year, establishes and perpetuates its own traditions of celebrating the bounties of nature and of expressing gratitude. The remarkable Thanksgiving mood and activity are highlighted by the contrast with the day after Thanksgiving, known as "Black Friday," when the shopping season for Christmas opens with a vengeance at midnight.

There is another tradition associated with the holiday: Every year since 1863, every president since Abraham Lincoln has issued a Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, in which—in addition to officially announcing the day—he offers his own ideas about the holiday.¹² Perusing these proclamations is an interesting and illuminating way of discovering the evolving idea of the meaning of the holiday and the things for which Americans—or at least their leaders—believe we should be grateful.

¹¹ "Congress Establishes Thanksgiving," Center for Legislative Archives, National Archives, www.archives.gov/legislative/features/thanksgiving/.

¹² See Thanksgiving Day Proclamations, 1789–2011, WhatSoProudlyWeHail.org, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/thanksgiving-day-proclamations-1789-2011.

Excerpts from *Of Plymouth Plantation*

WILLIAM BRADFORD

William Bradford (1590–1657), a member of the English Puritan sect that had left England for more tolerant Holland, was one of the Pilgrims who sailed on the Mayflower to set up a colony in the New World. Bradford, who became the long-term governor of the Plymouth colony, kept a journal of the group's experiences in Holland, their transatlantic voyage, and the early years of the settlement at Plymouth, from which he eventually published Of Plymouth Plantation in 1650, having brought the account of the colony up to date through 1646. In these two excerpts Bradford tells, first, of the end of the voyage of the Mayflower and the landing of the Pilgrims on Cape Cod in the autumn of 1620, and, second, of the unexpected and marvelous first harvest the following year.

Imagine yourself aboard ship, as the days go by and the stormy sea continues to threaten. What emotions loom large? How do you react to the sight of land? Given Bradford's description of what the Puritans faced on land, how would you feel about your new "home"? Bradford suggests that they could be sustained only by "the Spirit of God and His grace." Can you appreciate why the arriving Puritans were inclined to praise God and to thank Him for His "loving kindness" to them? Would your faith and gratitude be confirmed by the surprising harvest the following summer?

*Of their Voyage, and how they Passed the Sea;
and of their Safe Arrival at Cape Cod*

September 6 [1620?]. These troubles being blown over, and now all being compact together in one ship, they put to sea again with a prosperous wind, which continued divers days together, which was some encouragement unto them; yet, according to the usual manner, many were afflicted with seasickness. . . .

After they had enjoyed fair winds and weather for a season, they were encountered many times with cross winds and met with many fierce storms with which the ship was shroudly¹ shaken, and her upper works made very leaky; and one of the main beams in the midships was bowed and cracked, which put them in some fear that the ship could not be able to perform the voyage. So some of the chief of the company, perceiving the mariners to fear the sufficiency of the ship as appeared by their mutterings, they entered into serious consultation with the master and other officers of the ship, to consider in time of the danger, and rather to return than to cast themselves into a desperate and inevitable peril. And truly there was great distraction and difference of opinion amongst the mariners themselves; fain would they do what could be done for their wages' sake (being now near half the seas over) and on the other hand they were loath to hazard their lives too desperately. But in examining of all opinions, the master and others affirmed they knew the ship to be strong and firm under water; and for the buckling of the main beam, there was a great iron screw the passengers brought out of Holland, which would raise the

¹ An old form of shrewdly in its original meaning wickedly.

beam into his place; the which being done, the carpenter and master affirmed that with a post put under it, set firm in the lower deck and otherways bound, he would make it sufficient. And as for the decks and upper works, they would caulk them as well as they could, and though with the working of the ship they would not long keep staunch, yet there would otherwise be no great danger, if they did not overpress her with sails. So they committed themselves to the will of God and resolved to proceed.

In sundry of these storms the winds were so fierce and the seas so high, as they could not bear a knot of sail, but were forced to hull² for divers days together. And in one of them, as they thus lay at hull in a mighty storm, a lusty³ young man called John Howland, coming upon some occasion above the gratings was, with a seele⁴ of the ship, thrown into sea; but it pleased God that he caught hold of the topsail halyards which hung overboard and ran out at length. Yet he held his hold (though he was sundry fathoms under water) till he was hauled up by the same rope to the brim of the water, and then with a boat hook and other means got into the ship again and his life saved. And though he was something ill with it, yet he lived many years after and became a profitable member both in church and commonwealth. In all this voyage there died but one of the passengers, which was William Batten, a youth, servant to Samuel Fuller, when they drew near the coast.

But to omit other things (that I may be brief) after long beating at sea they fell with that land which is called Cape Cod; the which being made and certainly known to be it, they were not a little joyful. After some deliberation had amongst themselves and with the master of the ship, they tacked about and resolved to stand for the southward (the wind and weather being fair) to find some place about Hudson's River for their habitation. But after they had sailed that course about half the day, they fell among dangerous shoals and roaring breakers, and they were so far entangled therewith as they conceived themselves in great danger; and the wind shrinking upon them withal, they resolved to bear up again for the Cape and thought themselves happy to get out of those dangers before night overtook them, as by God's good providence they did. And the next day they got into the Cape Harbor where they rid in safety. . . .

Being thus arrived in a good harbor, and brought safe to land, they fell upon their knees and blessed the God of Heaven who had brought them over the vast and furious ocean, and delivered them from all the perils and miseries thereof, again to set their feet on the firm and stable earth, their proper element. And no marvel if they were thus joyful, seeing wise Seneca was so affected with sailing a few miles on the coast of his own Italy, as he affirmed, that he had rather remain twenty years on his way by land than pass by sea to any place in a short time, so tedious and dreadful was the same unto him.

But here I cannot but stay and make a pause, and stand half amazed at this poor people's present condition; and so I think will the reader, too, when he well considers the same. Being thus passed the vast ocean, and a sea of troubles before in their preparation

² To heave or lay-to under very short sail and drift with the wind.

³ Lively, merry; no sexual connotation. Howland, a servant of Governor Carver, rose to be one of the leading men of the Colony.

⁴ Roll or pitch.

(as may be remembered by that which went before), they had now no friends to welcome them nor inns to entertain or refresh their weatherbeaten bodies; no houses or much less town to repair to, to seek for succour. It is recorded in Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company, that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them (as after will appear) were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise. And for the season it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent, and subject to cruel and fierce storms, dangerous to travel to known places, much more to search an unknown coast. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men—and what multitudes there might be of them they knew not. Neither could they, as it were, go up to the top of Pisgah⁵ to view from this wilderness a more goodly country to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face, and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue. If they looked behind them, there was the mighty ocean which they had passed and was now as a main bar and gulf to separate them from all the civil parts of the world. If it be said they had a ship to succour them, it is true; but what heard they daily from the master and company? But that with speed they should look out a place (with their shallop⁶) where they would be, at some near distance; for the season was such as he would not stir from thence till a safe harbor was discovered by them, where they would be, and he might go without danger; and that victuals consumed apace but he must and would keep sufficient for themselves and their return. Yea, it was muttered by some that if they got not a place in time, they would turn them and their goods ashore and leave them. Let it also be considered what weak hopes of supply and succour they left behind them, that might bear up their minds in this sad condition and trials they were under; and they could not but be very small. It is true, indeed, the affections and love of their brethren at Leyden was cordial and entire towards them, but they had little power to help them or themselves. . . .

What could now sustain them but the Spirit of God and His grace? May not and ought not the children of these fathers rightly say: “Our fathers were Englishmen which came over this great ocean, and were ready to perish in this wilderness; but they cried unto the Lord, and He heard their voice and looked on their adversity,” etc. “Let them therefore praise the Lord, because He is good: and His mercies endure forever.” “Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, shew how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out of the way, and found no city to dwell in, both hungry and thirsty, their soul was overwhelmed in them. Let them confess before the Lord His loving-kindness and His wonderful works before the sons of men.”

[*The First Thanksgiving*]⁷

⁵ A Biblical reference, a high place or ridge.

⁶ A small open boat propelled by oars or sails and used chiefly in shallow waters.

⁷ This passage records an event that took place a few weeks after those of the first passage, though the actual date of this first thanksgiving festival is nowhere related.

After this, the 18th of September they sent out their shallop to the Massachusetts, with ten men and Squanto for their guide and interpreter, to discover and view that Bay and trade with the natives. The which they performed, and found kind entertainment. The people were much afraid of the Tarentines, a people to the eastward which used to come in harvest time and take away their corn, and many times kill their persons. They returned in safety and brought home a good quantity of beaver, and made report of the place, wishing they had been there seated. But it seems the Lord, who assigns to all men the bounds of their habitations, had appointed it for another use. And thus they found the Lord to be with them in all their ways, and to bless their outgoings and incomings, for which let His holy name have the praise forever, to all posterity.

They began now to gather in the small harvest they had, and to fit up their houses and dwellings against winter, being all well recovered in health and strength and had all things in good plenty. For as some were thus employed in affairs abroad, others were exercised in fishing, about cod and bass and other fish, of which they took good store, of which every family had their portion. All the summer there was no want; and now began to come in store of fowl, as winter approached, of which this place did abound when they came first (but afterward decreased by degrees). And besides waterfowl there was great store of wild turkeys, of which they took many, besides venison, etc. Besides they had about a peck a meal a week to a person, or now since harvest, Indian corn to that proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not feigned but true reports.

[May–July 1623]⁸

I may not here omit how, notwithstanding all their great pains and industry, and the great hopes of a large crop, the Lord seemed to blast, and take away the same, and to threaten further and more sore famine unto them. By a great drought which continued from the third week in May, till about the middle of July, without any rain and with great heat for the most part, insomuch as the corn began to wither away though it was set with fish, the moisture whereof helped it much. Yet at length it began to languish sore, and some of the drier grounds were parched like withered hay, part whereof was never recovered. Upon which they set apart a solemn day of humiliation, to seek the Lord by humble and fervent prayer, in this great distress. And He was pleased to give them a gracious and speedy answer, both to their own and the Indians' admiration that lived

⁸ This last paragraph comes much later in Bradford's account. According to the Alfred A. Knopf edition, it "is written on the verso of fol. 102. It was 'overslipped in its place,' noted Bradford, who at first wrote most of it on the verso of fol. 79 as of 1622; but discovering his error before completing the passage, drew his pen across it and noted beneath: 'This is to be here rased out and is to be placed on page 103 where it is inserted.'"

The thanksgiving day to which it refers is most likely not the same one that he recounts in the previous passage. Some scholars (e.g., William DeLoss Love in *The Fast and Thanksgiving Days of New England*) argue that this thanksgiving celebration was observed on July 30, 1623. As the editors of this edition of Bradford's work note, "the Pilgrims never had a regular fall Thanksgiving Day. A law of 15 Nov. 1636 (*Plymouth Colony Records* XI 18) allows the Governor and Assistants 'to command solemn days of humiliation by fasting, etc., and also for thanksgiving as occasion shall be offered.'"

amongst them. For all the morning, and greatest part of the day, it was clear weather and very hot, and not a cloud or any sign of rain to be seen; yet toward evening it began to overcast, and shortly after to rain with such sweet and gentle showers as gave them cause of rejoicing and blessing God. It came without either wind or thunder or any violence, and by degrees in that abundance as that the earth was thoroughly wet and soaked and therewith. Which did so apparently revive and quicken the decayed corn and other fruits, as was wonderful to see, and made the Indians astonished to behold. And afterwards the Lord sent them such seasonable showers, with interchange of fair warm weather as, through His blessing, caused a fruitful and liberal harvest, to their no small comfort and rejoicing. For which mercy, in time convenient, they also set apart a day of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Proclamation

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Universally admired for his courage, integrity, and judgment, George Washington (1732–99) had great influence and power as the nation’s first president (1789–97). But ever mindful of the precedents that he would be setting for future leadership, he took pains to cultivate practices and manners that would stand the nation in good stead long after he was gone from the scene. Such considerations appear evident in his Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789, Washington’s (and the nation’s) first presidential proclamation, issued in the first year of his first term.

What reasons does Washington give for issuing this proclamation? What, according to the Proclamation, are the blessings for which the earliest citizens of the United States should have been grateful? For what things should they humbly offer God their prayers and supplications? What does Washington hope to accomplish with this Proclamation? For what things should a modern-day proclamation recommend giving thanks? Does Washington’s Proclamation violate the principle of the separation of church and state? Conversely, can the United States—or any nation—survive and flourish without a connection to something higher than itself or without acknowledging its dependence on a higher power?¹

By the President of the United States of America. A Proclamation.

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and Whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th. day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the People of this country previous to their becoming a Nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquillity, union, and plenty, which we have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of

¹ For more questions, see the Discussion Guide below. We also invite you to visit [our website](#) to view a video model conversation about this selection.

acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge and in general for all the great and various favors which he hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the People, by constantly being a government of wise, just and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed, to protect and guide all Sovereigns and Nations (especially such as have shown kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science among them and Us, and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.

Excerpt from *Northwood*

SARAH JOSEPHA BUELL HALE

This excerpt, taken from the 1852 edition of her popular 1827 novel, Northwood, is the first of three selections from the writings of Sarah Josepha Buell Hale (1788–1879), the influential American editor, author (she wrote “Mary Had a Little Lamb”), and champion of education for women. Widowed in 1822 with five children to support, Hale took up a literary career, publishing a book of poems in 1823 and assuming the editorship of Ladies’ Magazine in 1828. She would go on to edit Godey’s Lady’s Book in 1837, which would become the most widely circulated women’s magazine in the country, and would assume a leading role in the establishment of Vassar College. These selections trace the (finally successful) campaign that Hale waged over many years to establish Thanksgiving as a national American holiday.

In this literary selection, a New Hampshire farmer, Squire Romilly, explains to a skeptical Englishman, Mr. Frankford, the meaning of the New England Thanksgiving holiday. Describe the scene and mood in the house. What does it indicate about the special place of Thanksgiving in this home? What, according to the Squire, is the reason for a day of public Thanksgiving in New England? Why does he believe that it should be celebrated nationally, like the Fourth of July, and observed by all of the people? Is Thanksgiving, according to Squire Romilly, a religious, moral, or political holiday? How might a national celebration of Thanksgiving “be a grand spectacle of moral power and human happiness, such as the world has never yet witnessed”?

The supper was now in active preparation. The large table was set forth, and covered with a cloth as white as snow. Lucy placed all in order, while Sophia assisted her mother to bring in the various dishes. No domestics appeared, and none seemed necessary. Love, warm hearted love, supplied the place of cold duty; and the labor of preparing the entertainment was, to Mrs. Romilly, a pleasure which she would not have relinquished to have been made an empress, so proud was she to show Sidney [*her son, returned home after a long absence*] her cookery; and she tried to recollect the savory dishes he used to like, and had prepared them now in the same manner. At length all was pronounced ready, and after Squire Romilly had fervently besought a blessing, they took their seats.

The supper consisted of every luxury the season afforded. First came fried chicken floating in gravy; then broiled ham, wheat bread, as white as snow, and butter so yellow and sweet, that it drew encomiums from the Englishman, till Mrs. Romilly colored with pleasure while she told him she made it herself. Two or three kinds of pies, all excellent, as many kinds of cake, with pickles and preserves, and cranberry sauce—the last particularly for Sidney—furnished forth the feast. The best of young hyson,¹ with cream and loaf sugar, was dispensed around by the fair hand of Sophia, who presided the department of the tea pot; her mother being fully employed in helping her guests to the viands, and urging them to eat and make out a supper, if they could.

¹ A Chinese tea. Young hyson is considered high quality.

Sidney's feelings were too much occupied to allow any great appetite for mere corporeal food. He wanted every moment to gaze on the loved faces smiling around him, or listen to voices whose soft tones, when calling him *son* or *brother* made every fibre of his heart thrill with rapture.

But Frankford was as hungry as fasting and fever could make him. He was just in that stage of convalescence when the appetite demands its arrearages with such imperious calls, that the whole mind is absorbed in the desire of satisfying its cravings. He did honor to every dish on the table; till Sidney, fearing he would injure himself by eating to excess, was obliged to beg he would defer finishing his meal till the next morning; "for you know, Mr. Frankford," added he, laughing, "the physician forbade your making a full meal till you could walk a mile before taking it."

"If that be the case," said Squire Romilly, "I hope you will exert yourself to-morrow. It is our Thanksgiving, and I should be loath to have the dinner of any one at my table abridged. It will, indeed, be a day of joy to us, and Sidney could not have come home at a more welcome season."

While he spoke, he directed a glance towards Silas, whose cheeks, fresh as they were, showed a heightened color, and his black eyes were involuntarily cast down. Sidney observed it, and asked his father if there was to be any peculiarity in the approaching festival.

"Do you," said he, "still have your plum pudding and pumpkin pies as in former times?"

"O yes," replied his father, "our dinner will be the same; but our evening's entertainment will be different."

A wink from Mrs. Romilly, who evidently pitied the embarrassment of Silas, prevented further inquiries or explanations, and they soon obeyed her example of rising from the table.

Mr. Frankford, who they feared would exert himself too much, was now installed on the wide sofa, (or *settle*) drawn up to the fire, and all the pillows to be found in the house as bethought were gathered for him to nestle in. When he was fairly arranged like a Turk on his divan, half sitting, half reclining, he addressed Squire Romilly, and inquired the cause of the Thanksgiving he had heard mentioned.

"Is it a festival of your church?" said he.

"No; it is a festival of the people, and appointed by the Governor of the State."

"But there is some reason for the custom—is there not?" inquired the Englishman.

“Certainly; our Yankees seldom do what they cannot justify by reasons of some sort,” replied the Squire. “This custom of a public Thanksgiving is, however, said to have originated in a providential manner.”

Mr. Frankford smiled rather incredulously.

The Squire saw the smile, but took no heed, while he went on.

“Soon after the settlement of Boston, the colony was reduced to a state of destitution, and nearly without food. In this strait the pious leaders of the pilgrim band appointed a solemn and general fast.”

“If they had no food they must have fasted without that formality,” said Frankford.

“True; but to convert the necessity into a voluntary and religious act of homage to the Supreme Ruler they worshiped and trusted, shows their sagacity as well as piety. The faith that could thus turn to God in the extremity of physical want, must have been of the most glowing kind, and such enthusiasm actually sustains nature. It is the hidden manna.”

“I hope it strengthened them: pray, how long did the fast continue?”

“It never began.”

“Indeed! Why not?”

“On the very morning of the appointed day, a vessel from London arrived laden with provisions, and so the fast was changed into a Thanksgiving.”

“Well, that was wise; and so the festival has been continued to the present day?”

“Not with any purpose of celebrating that event,” replied the Squire. “It is considered as an appropriate tribute of gratitude to God to set apart one day of Thanksgiving in each year; and autumn is the time when the overflowing garners of America call for this expression of joyful gratitude.”

“Is Thanksgiving Day universally observed in America?” inquired Mr. Frankford.

“Not yet; but I trust it will become so. We have too few holidays. Thanksgiving, like the Fourth of July, should be considered a national festival, and observed by all our people.”

“I see no particular reason for such an observance,” remarked Frankford.

“I do,” returned the Squire. “We want it as the exponent of our Republican institutions, which are based on the acknowledgment that God is our Lord, and that, as a

nation, we derive our privileges and blessings from Him. You will hear this doctrine set forth in the sermon to-morrow.”

“I thought you had no national religion.”

“No established religion you mean. Our people do not need compulsion to support the gospel. But to return to our Thanksgiving festival. When it shall be observed, on the same day, throughout all the states and territories, it will be a grand spectacle of moral power and human happiness, such as the world has never yet witnessed.”

Our National Thanksgiving

SARAH JOSEPHA BUELL HALE

In this 1858 editorial from Godey's Lady's Book, its editor Sarah Josepha Buell Hale appeals directly, this time in her own name, for a national day of Thanksgiving. After opening with two stanzas of the Protestant hymn "Praise to God, Immortal Praise," which indicates the things for which we should offer "grateful vows and solemn praise," Hale offers the reasons for and benefits of having a national day of thanksgiving. What are those reasons and benefits? Why does she say that Thanksgiving Day would be (is) a "truly American Festival," or that the last Thursday in November "will become a day of AMERICAN THANKSGIVING throughout the world"? What is the connection between giving thanks and acts of charity? Between both and national unity and harmony? What is the relation between the hymn and Hale's argument for nationalizing the holiday? Is Thanksgiving Day a religious or political holiday?

"All the blessings of the fields,
All the stores the garden yields,
All the plenty summer pours,
Autumn's rich, o'erflowing stores,
Peace, prosperity, and health,
Private bliss and public wealth,
Knowledge with its gladdening streams,
Pure religion's holier beams—
Lord, for these our souls shall raise
Grateful vows and solemn praise."

We are most happy to agree with the large majority of the governors of the different States—as shown in their unanimity of action for several past years, and which, we hope, will this year be adopted by all—that THE LAST THURSDAY IN NOVEMBER shall be the DAY OF NATIONAL THANKSGIVING for the American people. Let this day, from this time forth, as long as our Banner of Stars floats on the breeze, be the grand THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY of our nation, when the noise and tumult of worldiness may be exchanged for the laugh of happy children, the glad greetings of family reunion, and the humble gratitude of the Christian heart. This truly American Festival falls, this year on the *twenty-fifth day of this month*.

Let us consecrate the day to benevolence of action, by sending good gifts to the poor, and doing those deeds of charity that will, for one day, make every American home the place of plenty and of rejoicing. These seasons of refreshing are of inestimable advantage to the popular heart; and if rightly managed, will greatly aid and strengthen public harmony of feeling. Let the people of all the States and Territories sit down together to the "feast of fat things," and drink, in the sweet draught of joy and gratitude to the Divine giver of all our blessings, the pledge of renewed love to the Union, and to each other; and of peace and good-will to all men. *Then the last Thursday in November will soon become the day of AMERICAN THANKSGIVING throughout the world.*

Letter to President Abraham Lincoln

SARAH JOSEPHA BUELL HALE

In this letter, written on September 28, 1863, Sarah Josepha Buell Hale takes her campaign on behalf of a national Thanksgiving holiday directly to the President of the United States. Five days later, Abraham Lincoln responded by issuing the presidential proclamation (see next selection) for the first of what has become 150 years of unbroken celebrations of Thanksgiving as an official national American holiday. Hale had been campaigning for this holiday for many years, and, as her letter indicates, she had by the end lined up powerful support for the cause. What does it say about the United States that a private citizen or journalist, dedicated to some worthy cause, can have such influence and prevail in the end? Readers will note that the letter was written at the height of the Civil War, and that several times Hale refers to the proposed holiday as a "Union Festival" or a "Union Thanksgiving." Why might she be making this presidential appeal in the midst of the Civil War? Why might she hope that her appeal could now be successful? What might a day of national and Union thanksgiving do for the nation, both during and after the conflict? In what mood, and for what blessings, could one give thanks to God during that horrendous war?

Philadelphia, Sept. 28th 1863.

Sir.—

Permit me, as Editress of the "Lady's Book," to request a few minutes of your precious time, while laying before you a subject of deep interest to myself and—as I trust—even to the President of our Republic, of some importance. This subject is to have the day of our annual Thanksgiving made a National and fixed Union Festival.

You may have observed that, for some years past, there has been an increasing interest felt in our land to have the Thanksgiving held on the same day, in all the States; it now needs National recognition and authoritative [*sic*] fixation, only, to become permanently, an American custom and institution.

Enclosed are three papers (being printed these are easily read) which will make the idea and its progress clear and show also the popularity of the plan.

For the last fifteen years I have set forth this idea in the "Lady's Book," and placed the papers before the Governors of all the States and Territories—also I have sent these to our Ministers abroad, and our Missionaries to the heathen—and commanders in the Navy. From the recipients I have received, uniformly the most kind approval. Two of these letters, one from Governor (now General) Banks and one from Governor Morgan are enclosed; both gentlemen as you will see, have nobly aided to bring about the desired Thanksgiving Union.

But I find there are obstacles not possible to be overcome without legislative aid—that each State should, by statute, make it obligatory on the Governor to appoint the last Thursday of November, annually, as Thanksgiving Day;—or, as this way would require years to be realized, it has occurred [*sic*] to me that a proclamation from the President of the United States would be the best, surest and most fitting method of National appointment.

I have written to my friend, Hon. Wm. H. Seward, and requested him to confer with President Lincoln on this subject[.] As the President of the United States has the power of appointments for the District of Columbia and the Territories; also for the Army and Navy and all American citizens abroad who claim protection from the U. S. Flag—could he not, with right as well as duty, issue his proclamation for a Day of National Thanksgiving for all the above classes of persons? And would it not be fitting and patriotic for him to appeal to the Governors of all the States, inviting and commending these to unite in issuing proclamations for the last Thursday in November as the Day of Thanksgiving for the people of each State? Thus the great Union Festival of America would be established.

Now the purpose of this letter is to entreat President Lincoln to put forth his Proclamation, appointing the last Thursday in November (which falls this year on the 26th) as the National Thanksgiving for all those classes of people who are under the National Government particularly, and commending this Union Thanksgiving to each State Executive: thus, by the noble example and action of the President of the United States, the permanency and unity of our Great American Festival of Thanksgiving would be forever secured.

An immediate proclamation would be necessary, so as to reach all the States in season for State appointments, also to anticipate the early appointments by Governors.

Excuse the liberty I have taken

With profound respect

Yrs truly

Sarah Josepha Hale,
Editress of the “Ladys Book”

Thanksgiving Proclamation

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

As noted above, Abraham Lincoln (1809–65) issued this proclamation for a day of national thanksgiving in 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, not long after the battle of Gettysburg and several other Union successes seemed to have turned the tide toward a Union victory. Like so many of his famous speeches, this modest presidential proclamation displays the extraordinary understanding, statesmanship, and generosity of soul that distinguished the sixteenth President of the United States.

Read the proclamation slowly, paragraph by paragraph and line by line, in order to discern what Lincoln is hoping to teach the nation. How does his beginning capture the audience's sympathy? What, exactly, are the blessings for which he believes that thanksgiving is in order, even "in the midst of a civil war of unequaled magnitude and severity"? Why does he believe that, despite the human "waste" of the war, the country may be permitted to "expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom"? What is his understanding of "the Most High God," His relation to the United States, and "our sins"? Imagining yourself a Confederate auditor of this proclamation; would you be inclined to accept the invitation and recommendation Lincoln offers in the long fifth paragraph to "my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States"? Is Lincoln's case for "a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father" still persuasive today?

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they can not fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequaled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict, while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity, and union.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this 3d day of October, A. D. 1863, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Modern Thanksgiving Proclamations

RONALD REAGAN AND BARACK OBAMA

A president's speech or declaration reflects and reveals the mind and heart of the president who makes it. It also tells us something about the spirit of the times and the beliefs of the nation to which it is addressed. In fact, one could learn a lot about the changing opinions and sentiments of our nation by reading, in order, all the presidential Thanksgiving proclamations from Washington (and especially Lincoln) to the present day. To enable readers to experience some of these changes, we present here two recent proclamations, one from 1988 by President Ronald Reagan (1911–2004) and one from 2011 by President Barack Obama (b. 1961). Compare these two proclamations, both with each other and with those of Presidents Washington and Lincoln, above. What is the tone, mood, and spirit of each proclamation? To whom, and for what, is thanksgiving being recommended? Which one comes closer to your own understanding of the meaning of the National Day of Thanksgiving?

I.

The celebration of Thanksgiving Day is one of our Nation's most venerable and cherished traditions. Almost 200 years ago, the first President of these United States, George Washington, issued the first national Thanksgiving Day Proclamation under the Constitution and recommended to the American people that they "be devoted to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be." He called upon them to raise "prayers and supplications to the Great Lord and Ruler of Nations," not merely for continued blessings on our own land but on all rulers and nations that they might know "good government, peace, and concord."

A century ago, President Grover Cleveland called for "prayers and song of praise" that would render to God the appreciation of the American people for His mercy and for the abundant harvests and rich rewards He had bestowed upon our Nation through the labor of its farmers, shopkeepers, and tradesmen. Both of these Proclamations included something else as well: a recognition of our shortcomings and transgressions and our dependence, in total and in every particular, on the forgiveness and forbearance of the Almighty.

Today, cognizant of our American heritage of freedom and opportunity, we are again called to gratitude, thanksgiving, and contrition. Thanksgiving Day summons every American to pause in the midst of activity, however necessary and valuable, to give simple and humble thanks to God. This gracious gratitude is the service of which Washington spoke. It is a service that opens our hearts to one another as members of a single family gathered around the bounteous table of God's Creation. The images of the Thanksgiving celebrations at America's earliest settlement—of Pilgrim and Iroquois Confederacy assembled in festive friendship—resonate with even greater power in our

own day. People from every race, culture, and creed on the face of the Earth now inhabit this land. Their presence illuminates the basic yearning for freedom, peace, and prosperity that has always been the spirit of the New World.

In this year when we as a people enjoy the fruits of economic growth and international cooperation, let us take time both to remember the sacrifices that have made this harvest possible and the needs of those who do not fully partake of its benefits. The wonder of our agricultural abundance must be recalled as the work of farmers who, under the best and worst of conditions, give their all to raise food upon the land. The gratitude that fills our being must be tempered with compassion for the needy. The blessings that are ours must be understood as the gift of a loving God Whose greatest gift is healing. Let us join then, with the psalmist of old:

O give thanks to the Lord, call on His name, Make known His deeds among the peoples!

Sing to Him, sing praises to Him, Tell of all His wonderful works!

Glory in His holy name; Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!

Now, Therefore, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 24, 1988, as a National Day of thanksgiving, and I call upon the citizens of this great Nation to gather together in homes and places of worship on that day of thanks to affirm by their prayers and their gratitude the many blessings God has bestowed upon us.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of August, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirteenth.

RONALD REAGAN

II.

One of our Nation's oldest and most cherished traditions, Thanksgiving Day brings us closer to our loved ones and invites us to reflect on the blessings that enrich our lives. The observance recalls the celebration of an autumn harvest centuries ago, when the Wampanoag tribe joined the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony to share in the fruits of a bountiful season. The feast honored the Wampanoag for generously extending their knowledge of local game and agriculture to the Pilgrims, and today we renew our gratitude to all American Indians and Alaska Natives. We take this time to remember the ways that the First Americans have enriched our Nation's heritage, from their generosity centuries ago to the everyday contributions they make to all facets of American life. As we come together with friends, family, and neighbors to celebrate, let us set aside our daily concerns and give thanks for the providence bestowed upon us.

Though our traditions have evolved, the spirit of grace and humility at the heart of Thanksgiving has persisted through every chapter of our story. When President George

Washington proclaimed our country's first Thanksgiving, he praised a generous and knowing God for shepherding our young Republic through its uncertain beginnings. Decades later, President Abraham Lincoln looked to the divine to protect those who had known the worst of civil war, and to restore the Nation "to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union."

In times of adversity and times of plenty, we have lifted our hearts by giving humble thanks for the blessings we have received and for those who bring meaning to our lives. Today, let us offer gratitude to our men and women in uniform for their many sacrifices, and keep in our thoughts the families who save an empty seat at the table for a loved one stationed in harm's way. And as members of our American family make do with less, let us rededicate ourselves to our friends and fellow citizens in need of a helping hand.

As we gather in our communities and in our homes, around the table or near the hearth, we give thanks to each other and to God for the many kindnesses and comforts that grace our lives. Let us pause to recount the simple gifts that sustain us, and resolve to pay them forward in the year to come.

Now, Therefore, I, Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 24, 2011, as a National Day of Thanksgiving. I encourage the people of the United States to come together—whether in our homes, places of worship, community centers, or any place of fellowship for friends and neighbors—to give thanks for all we have received in the past year, to express appreciation to those whose lives enrich our own, and to share our bounty with others.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand eleven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-sixth.

BARACK OBAMA

Excerpt from “No Thanks to Gratitude”

JAMES W. CEASER

James W. Ceaser is the Harry F. Byrd Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia, where he has taught since 1976. He has written widely on American political thought, political institutions, and campaigns. In this excerpt from an essay on the importance of gratitude for civic memory and national attachment (2011), Ceaser examines the relationship among politics, religion, and Thanksgiving Day, raising questions as to the true nature of the day and where it fits in our constitutional republic.

What is gratitude? How might it be important for American citizenship and American public life? Can gratitude—which is, however defined, a free expression of the heart—be commanded or made into an obligation? To whom, and for what, is America’s civic expression of gratitude appropriate today? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the opposing positions mentioned in the last paragraph in this selection?

The virtue of gratitude enjoys a special status in American public life. The obligation to display gratitude is recognized by a statute, enacted in 1941, that establishes an official national holiday of Thanksgiving. The statute codified a long practice, unbroken from Abraham Lincoln’s proclamation in 1863, of a presidential declaration fixing each year a day of thanksgiving. Before Lincoln, Presidents Washington, Adams, and Madison proclaimed thanksgiving days, in some instances at the urging of Congress, but the practice ended with Madison.

Under the terms of the statute, the holiday has no direct religious connection. History makes clear, however, that the expression of gratitude to God for our national blessings was originally at the core of the whole exercise. The opening phrase of Washington’s first proclamation in 1789 reads: “Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor. . . .”

A sense of the religious character of these proclamations can be gleaned from a passage, not at all untypical, from John Kennedy’s declaration in 1963:

Let us therefore proclaim our gratitude to Providence for manifold blessings—let us be humbly thankful for inherited ideals—and let us resolve to share those blessings and those ideals with our fellow human beings throughout the world . . . On that day let us gather in sanctuaries dedicated to worship and in homes blessed by family affection to express our gratitude for the glorious gifts of God; and let us earnestly and humbly pray that He will continue to guide and sustain us in the great unfinished tasks of achieving peace, justice, and understanding among all men and nations and of ending misery and suffering wherever they exist.

The religious dimension of this day of gratitude has for quite some time now been supplemented (or tamed) by tying the holiday into a day of memory of the Pilgrims and their encounter with the Indians. In this vein, it is more often celebrated as “Thanksgiving Day” than, in JFK’s words, “a day of national thanksgiving.” Indeed, the earliest holidays proclaimed by Washington, Adams, and Madison made no mention of the Pilgrims, and the dates they selected bore no special connection to the harvest (some were in the winter and the spring). . . .

Still, the tradition continues, and the connection of Thanksgiving to public expressions of gratitude to God requires us to ask in what measure government has an interest in cultivating the religious aspect of gratitude, and in what measure a religious people, through their public officials, may give thanks to God. Different answers have been given to these questions. George Washington believed that governmental encouragement of religion, where there was no violation of constitutional principle, was both permissible and, in light of the public benefits of religion, good policy. Many have taken the opposite view, some out of animosity for religion, others from an understanding of what they think the Constitution, or a liberal political system, allows. James Madison, who twice agreed to declare a day of thanksgiving, evidently had doubts about his action and probably let the practice lapse because of them. In a later reflection he commented: “Altho’ recommendations only, they [official expressions of religious gratitude] imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers.”

The legal standing of the holiday of Thanksgiving (and for that matter Christmas) is not an issue today, as neither holiday is officially designated as religious. (It is another matter for the National Day of Prayer, established by statute in 1952, where the religious aspect is integral to the statute.) Still, some dispute about Thanksgiving continues, for it is clear that custom connects it to religion. For most people of faith, this practice is generally seen as a natural and fitting expression of the spirit of the people. For those who are unfriendly to religion, however, any mention of religious gratitude under the cover of public authority should be discouraged or banned. The wall of separation of religion and politics can never be high enough.

2



Public and Private Blessings:
The Things for Which
We Should Be Grateful



Harvest



For an Autumn Festival

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Thanksgiving was, to begin with, a festival of the harvest, with gratitude expressed for the bounty of nature. This harvest hymn was written in 1859 by Massachusetts Quaker poet and ardent abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–92) for exercises at the Congregational Church as part of the annual fair of the Amesbury and Salisbury Agricultural and Horticultural Society. Whittier, who grew up on a New England farm and had little formal education, was heavily influenced by his pious upbringing, earning him the moniker “America’s finest religious poet.”

Here, he begins by pointing out that, although the pagan earth-worshipping festivals of Persia and Greece have long since disappeared, beauty, nature, woman’s grace and household skill, and manhood’s toil are still honored among us, as we are summoned to acknowledge the blessings born of earth, sun, and rain. What is “Nature’s bloodless triumph”? Who is “our common mother,” and what is her relation to “our Father’s hand”? Why does the poet say that “the bounty overruns our due,” and what should be our response to this unmerited plenty? The poet credits sunshine and rain, but he also credits our God-given power to transform the rugged soil, “Freedom’s arm” that “can change a rocky soil to gold,” and our “brave and generous lives” that warm the cold and inhospitable world around us. Is this a song of praise to nature (earth, sky, sun, or rain), to God, or to the power of human beings? For what, finally, and to whom, does he seek to awaken our thanksgivings? How does this gratitude differ from the pagan worship of the earth goddess and sky god?

The Persian’s flowery gifts, the shrine
Of fruitful Ceres, charm no more;
The woven wreaths of oak and pine
Are dust along the Isthmian shore.

But beauty hath its homage still,
And nature holds us still in debt;
And woman’s grace and household skill,
And manhood’s toil, are honored yet.

And we, to-day, amidst our flowers
And fruits, have come to own again
The blessings of the summer hours,
The early and the latter rain;

To see our Father’s hand once more
Reverse for us the plenteous horn
Of autumn, filled and running o’er
With fruit, and flower, and golden corn!

Once more the liberal year laughs out
O'er richer stores than gems or gold;
Once more with harvest-song and shout
Is Nature's bloodless triumph told.

Our common mother rests and sings,
Like Ruth, among her garnered sheaves;
Her lap is full of goodly things,
Her brow is bright with autumn leaves.

Oh, favors every year made new!
Oh, gifts with rain and sunshine sent
The bounty overruns our due,
The fullness shames our discontent.

We shut our eyes, the flowers bloom on;
We murmur, but the corn-ears fill,
We choose the shadow, but the sun
That casts it shines behind us still.

God gives us with our rugged soil
The power to make it Eden-fair,
And richer fruits to crown our toil
Than summer-wedded islands bear.

Who murmurs at his lot to-day?
Who scorns his native fruit and bloom?
Or sighs for dainties far away,
Beside the bounteous board of home?

Thank Heaven, instead, that Freedom's arm
Can change a rocky soil to gold,—
That brave and generous lives can warm
A clime with northern ices cold.

And let these altars, wreathed with flowers
And piled with fruits, awake again
Thanksgivings for the golden hours,
The early and the latter rain!

The Corn Song

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

In this poem from 1850, John Greenleaf Whittier pays special homage to corn, the Native American crop. Have you every stopped to think about the glory that is corn? Why is it singled out for special praise? How does it differ from the apple, the orange, and the grape of the vine? To whom is thanks due for corn: Those who plowed the earth and chased away the robber crows? "The kindly earth"? "Our farmer girls"? Or God? Why might the blessing of corn have been the most fundamental reason for Thanksgiving? Might it still be so today, whether we know it or not? If not, what are you first thankful for instead?

Heap high the farmer's wintry hoard!
Heap high the golden corn!
No richer gift has Autumn poured
From out her lavish horn!

Let other lands, exulting, glean
The apple from the pine,
The orange from its glossy green,
The cluster from the vine;

We better love the hardy gift
Our rugged vales bestow,
To cheer us when the storm shall drift
Our harvest-fields with snow.

Through vales of grass and meads of
flowers
Our ploughs their furrows made,
While on the hills the sun and showers
Of changeful April played.

We dropped the seed o'er hill and plain,
Beneath the sun of May,
And frightened from our sprouting grain
The robber crows away.

All through the long, bright days of June
Its leaves grew green and fair,
And waved in hot midsummer's noon
Its soft and yellow hair.

And now, with autumn's moonlit eves,
Its harvest-time has come,

We pluck away the frosted leaves,
And bear the treasure home.

There, richer than the fabled gift
Apollo showered of old,
Fair hands the broken grain shall sift,
And knead its meal of gold.

Let vapid idlers loll in silk
Around their costly board;
Give us the bowl of samp and milk,
By homespun beauty poured!

Where'er the wide old kitchen hearth
Sends up its smoky curls,
Who will not thank the kindly earth,
And bless our farmer girls?

Then shame on all the proud and vain,
Whose folly laughs to scorn
The blessing of our hardy grain,
Our wealth of golden corn!

Let earth withhold her goodly root,
Let mildew blight the rye,
Give to the worm the orchard's fruit,
The wheat-field to the fly:

But let the good old crop adorn
The hills our fathers trod;
Still let us, for his golden corn,
Send up our thanks to God!



Hearth and Home



An Old-Fashioned Thanksgiving

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

This story from 1881 by the beloved New England author of Little Women, Louisa May Alcott (1832–88) presents a picture of a nineteenth-century Thanksgiving in a farming family in New Hampshire before there were stoves and supermarkets, when all food was raised in the fields around the house and cooked in the hearth that kept the house warm. The daughter of Boston transcendentalist Bronson Alcott—whose social circle included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Nathaniel Hawthorne—Alcott turned to the practical aspects of life and living after a utopian commune her father founded collapsed. She often focuses on themes of domestic living and family life, based on remembrances of her own childhood.

How do you account for the “mutual patience, affection, and courage [that] made the old farm-house a very happy home”? What, exactly, is it that makes a house a home? Why are the children so eager to prepare the Thanksgiving dinner? How well did they do? For what is this family grateful? What do you think of the way they express their gratitude?

Sixty years ago, up among the New Hampshire hills, lived Farmer Bassett, with a houseful of sturdy sons and daughters growing up about him. They were poor in money, but rich in land and love, for the wide acres of wood, corn, and pasture land fed, warmed, and clothed the flock, while mutual patience, affection, and courage made the old farm-house a very happy home.

November had come; the crops were in, and barn, buttery, and bin were overflowing with the harvest that rewarded the summer’s hard work. The big kitchen was a jolly place just now, for in the great fireplace roared a cheerful fire; on the walls hung garlands of dried apples, onions, and corn; up aloft from the beams shone crook-necked squashes, juicy hams, and dried venison—for in those days deer still haunted the deep forests, and hunters flourished. Savory smells were in the air; on the crane hung steaming kettles, and down among the red embers copper saucepans simmered, all suggestive of some approaching feast.

A white-headed baby lay in the old blue cradle that had rocked six other babies, now and then lifting his head to look out, like a round, full moon, then subsided to kick and crow contentedly, and suck the rosy apple he had no teeth to bite. Two small boys sat on the wooden settle shelling corn for popping, and picking out the biggest nuts from the goodly store their own hands had gathered in October. Four young girls stood at the long dresser, busily chopping meat, pounding spice, and slicing apples; and the tongues of Tilly, Prue, Roxy, and Rhody went as fast as their hands. Farmer Bassett, and Eph, the oldest boy, were “chorin’ ’round” outside, for Thanksgiving was at hand, and all must be in order for that time-honored day.

To and fro, from table to hearth, bustled buxom Mrs. Bassett, flushed and floury, but busy and blithe as the queen bee of this busy little hive should be.

"I do like to begin seasonable and have things to my mind. Thanksgivin' dinners can't be drove, and it does take a sight of victuals to fill all these hungry stomicks," said the good woman, as she gave a vigorous stir to the great kettle of cider apple-sauce, and cast a glance of housewifely pride at the fine array of pies set forth on the buttery shelves.

"Only one more day and then it will be the time to eat. I didn't take but one bowl of hasty pudding this morning, so I shall have plenty of room when the nice things come," confided Seth to Sol, as he cracked a large hazel-nut as easily as a squirrel.

"No need of my starvin' beforehand. *I always* have room enough, and I'd like to have Thanksgiving every day," answered Solomon, gloating like a young ogre over the little pig that lay near by, ready for roasting.

"Sakes alive, I don't, boys! It's a marcy it don't come but once a year. I should be worn to a thread-paper with all this extra work atop of my winter weavin' and spinnin'," laughed their mother, as she plunged her plump arms into the long bread trough and began to knead the dough as if a famine were at hand.

Tilly, the oldest girl, a red-cheeked, black-eyed lass of fourteen, was grinding briskly at the mortar, for spices were costly, and not a grain must be wasted. Prue kept time with the chopper, and the twins sliced away at the apples till their little brown arms ached, for all knew how to work, and did so now with a will.

"I think it's real fun to have Thanksgiving at home. I'm sorry Gran'ma is sick, so we can't go there as usual, but I like to mess 'round here, don't you, girls?" asked Tilly, pausing to take a sniff at the spicy pestle.

"It will be kind of lonesome with only our own folks." "I like to see all the cousins and aunts, and have games, and sing," cried the twins, who were regular little romps, and could run, swim, coast, and shout as well as their brothers.

"I don't care a mite for all that. It will be so nice to eat dinner together, warm and comfortable at home," said quiet Prue, who loved her own cozy nooks like a cat.

"Come, girls, fly 'round and get your chores done, so we can clear away for dinner jest as soon as I clap my bread into the oven," called Mrs. Bassett presently, as she rounded off the last loaf of brown bread which was to feed the hungry mouths that seldom tasted any other.

"Here's a man comin' up the hill lively!" "Guess it's Gad Hopkins. Pa told him to bring a dezzen oranges, if they warn't too high!" shouted Sol and Seth, running to the door, while the girls smacked their lips at the thought of this rare treat, and Baby threw his apple overboard, as if getting ready for a new cargo.

But all were doomed to disappointment, for it was not Gad, with the much-desired fruit. It was a stranger, who threw himself off his horse and hurried up to Mr. Bassett in the yard, with some brief message that made the farmer drop his ax and look so sober that his wife guessed at once some bad news had come; and crying, "Mother's wuss! I know she is!" out ran the good woman, forgetful of the flour on her arms and the oven waiting for its most important batch.

The man said old Mr. Chadwick, down to Keene, stopped him as he passed, and told him to tell Mrs. Bassett her mother was failin' fast, and she'd better come today. He knew no more, and having delivered his errand he rode away, saying it looked like snow and he must be jogging, or he wouldn't get home till night.

"We must go right off, Eldad. Hitch up, and I'll be ready in less'n no time," said Mrs. Bassett, wasting not a minute in tears and lamentations, but pulling off her apron as she went in, with her head in a sad jumble of bread, anxiety, turkey, sorrow, haste, and cider apple-sauce.

A few words told the story, and the children left their work to help her get ready, mingling their grief for "Gran'ma" with regrets for the lost dinner.

"I'm dreadful sorry, dears, but it can't be helped. I couldn't cook nor eat no way now, and if that blessed woman gets better sudden, as she has before, we'll have cause for thanksgivin', and I'll give you a dinner you won't forget in a hurry," said Mrs. Bassett, as she tied on her brown silk pumpkin-hood, with a sob for the good old mother who had made it for her.

Not a child complained after that, but ran about helpfully, bringing moccasins, heating the footstone, and getting ready for a long drive, because Gran'ma lived twenty miles away, and there were no railroads in those parts to whisk people to and fro like magic. By the time the old yellow sleigh was at the door, the bread was in the oven, and Mrs. Bassett was waiting, with her camlet cloak on, and the baby done up like a small bale of blankets.

"Now, Eph, you must look after the cattle like a man and keep up the fires, for there's a storm brewin', and neither the children nor dumb critters must suffer," said Mr. Bassett, as he turned up the collar of his rough coat and put on his blue mittens, while the old mare shook her bells as if she preferred a trip to Keene to hauling wood all day.

"Tilly, put extry comfortables on the beds to-night, the wind is so searchin' up chamber. Have the baked beans and Injun-puddin' for dinner, and whatever you do, don't let the boys get at the mince-pies, or you'll have them down sick. I shall come back the minute I can leave Mother. Pa will come to-morrer anyway, so keep snug and be good. I depend on you, my darter; use your jedgment, and don't let nothin' happen while Mother's away."

“Yes’m, yes’m—good-bye, good-bye!” called the children, as Mrs. Bassett was packed into the sleigh and driven away, leaving a stream of directions behind her.

Eph, the sixteen-year-old boy, immediately put on his biggest boots, assumed a sober, responsible manner and surveyed his little responsibilities with a paternal air, drolly like his father’s. Tilly tied on her mother’s bunch of keys, rolled up the sleeves of her homespun gown, and began to order about the younger girls. They soon forgot poor Granny, and found it great fun to keep house all alone, for Mother seldom left home, but ruled her family in the good old-fashioned way. There were no servants, for the little daughters were Mrs. Bassett’s only maids, and the stout boys helped their father, all working happily together with no wages but love; learning in the best manner the use of the heads and hands with which they were to make their own way in the world.

The few flakes that caused the farmer to predict bad weather soon increased to a regular snowstorm, with gusts of wind, for up among the hills winter came early and lingered long. But the children were busy, gay, and warm in-doors, and never minded the rising gale nor the whirling white storm outside.

Tilly got them a good dinner, and when it was over the two elder girls went to their spinning, for in the kitchen stood the big and little wheels, and baskets of wool rolls ready to be twisted into yarn for the winter’s knitting, and each day brought its stint of work to the daughters, who hoped to be as thrifty as their mother.

Eph kept up a glorious fire, and superintended the small boys, who popped corn and whittled boats on the hearth; while Roxy and Rhody dressed corn-cob dolls in the settle corner, and Bose, the brindled mastiff, lay on the braided mat, luxuriously warming his old legs. Thus employed, they made a pretty picture, these rosy boys and girls, in their homespun suits, with the rustic toys or tasks which most children nowadays would find very poor or tiresome.

Tilly and Prue sang, as they stepped to and fro, drawing out the smoothly twisted threads to the musical hum of the great spinning wheels. The little girls chattered like magpies over their dolls and the new bed-spread they were planning to make, all white dimity stars on a blue calico ground, as a Christmas present to Ma. The boys roared at Eph’s jokes, and had rough and tumble games over Bose, who didn’t mind them in the least; and so the afternoon wore pleasantly away.

At sunset the boys went out to feed the cattle, bring in heaps of wood, and lock up for the night, as the lonely farm-house seldom had visitors after dark. The girls got the simple supper of brown bread and milk, baked apples, and a doughnut all ’round as a treat. Then they sat before the fire, the sisters knitting, the brothers with books or games, for Eph loved reading, and Sol and Seth never failed to play a few games of Morris with barley corns, on the little board they had themselves at one corner of the dresser.

“Read out a piece,” said Tilly from Mother’s chair, where she sat in state, finishing off the sixth woolen sock she had knit that month.

"It's the old history book, but here's a bit you may like, since it's about our folks," answered Eph, turning the yellow page to look at a picture of two quaintly dressed children in some ancient castle.

"Yes, read that. I always like to hear about the Lady Matildy I was named for, and Lord Bassett, Pa's great-great-grandpa. He's only a farmer now, but it's nice to know we were somebody two or three hundred years ago," said Tilly, bristling and tossing her curly head as she fancied the Lady Matilda might have done.

"Don't read the queer words, 'cause we don't understand 'em. Tell it," commanded Roxy, from the cradle, where she was drowsily cuddled with Rhody.

"Well, a long time ago, when Charles the First was in prison, Lord Bassett was a true friend to him," began Eph, plunging into his story without delay. "The lord had some papers that would have hung a lot of people if the king's enemies got hold of 'em, so when he heard one day, all of a sudden, that soldiers were at the castle gate to carry him off, he had just time to call his girl to him and say: 'I may be going to my death, but I won't betray my master. There is no time to burn the papers, and I can not take them with me; they are hidden in the old leathern chair where I sit. No one knows this but you, and you must guard them till I come or send you a safe messenger to take them away. Promise me to be brave and silent, and I can go without fear.' You see, he wasn't afraid to die, but he *was* to seem a traitor. Lady Matildy promised solemnly, and the words were hardly out of her mouth when the men came in, and her father was carried away a prisoner and sent off to the Tower."

"But she didn't cry; she just called her brother, and sat down in that chair, with her head leaning back on those papers, like a queen, and waited while the soldiers hunted the house over for 'em: wasn't that a smart girl?" cried Tilly, beaming with pride, for she was named for this ancestress, and knew the story by heart.

"I reckon she was scared, though, when the men came swearin' in and asked her if she knew anything about it. The boy did his part then, for *he* didn't know, and fired up and stood before his sister; and he says, says he, as bold as a lion: 'If my lord had told us where the papers be, we would die before we would betray him. But we are children and know nothing, and it is cowardly of you to try to fight us with oaths and drawn swords!'"

As Eph quoted from the book, Seth planted himself before Tilly, with the long poker in his hand, saying, as he flourished it valiantly:

"Why didn't the boy take his father's sword and lay about him? I would, if any one was ha'sh to Tilly."

"You bantam! He was only a bit of a boy, and couldn't do anything. Sit down and hear the rest of it," commanded Tilly, with a pat on the yellow head, and a private resolve that Seth should have the largest piece of pie at dinner next day, as reward for his chivalry.

“Well, the men went off after turning the castle out of window, but they said they should come again; so faithful Matildy was full of trouble, and hardly dared to leave the room where the chair stood. All day she sat there, and at night her sleep was so full of fear about it, that she often got up and went to see that all was safe. The servants thought the fright had hurt her wits, and let her be, but Rupert, the boy, stood by her and never was afraid of her queer ways. She was ‘a pious maid,’ the book says, and often spent the long evenings reading the Bible, with her brother by her, all alone in the great room, with no one to help her bear her secret, and no good news of her father. At last, word came that the king was dead and his friends banished out of England. Then the poor children were in a sad plight, for they had no mother, and the servants all ran away, leaving only one faithful old man to help them.”

“But the father did come?” cried Roxy, eagerly.

“You’ll see,” continued Eph, half telling, half reading.

“Matilda was sure he would, so she sat on in the big chair, guarding the papers, and no one could get her away, till one day a man came with her father’s ring and told her to give up the secret. She knew the ring, but would not tell until she had asked many questions, so as to be very sure, and while the man answered all about her father and the king, she looked at him sharply. Then she stood up and said, in a tremble, for there was something strange about the man: ‘Sir, I doubt you in spite of the ring, and I will not answer till you pull off the false beard you wear, that I may see your face and know if you are my father’s friend or foe.’ Off came the disguise, and Matilda found it was my lord himself, come to take them with him out of England. He was very proud of that faithful girl, I guess, for the old chair still stands in the castle, and the name keeps in the family, Pa says, even over here, where some of the Bassetts came along with the Pilgrims.”

“Our Tilly would have been as brave, I know, and she looks like the old picter down to Gran’mā’s, don’t she, Eph?” cried Prue, who admired her bold, bright sister very much.

“Well, I think you’d do the settin’ part best, Prue, you are so patient. Till would fight like a wild cat, but she can’t hold her tongue worth a cent,” answered Eph; whereat Tilly pulled his hair, and the story ended with a general frolic.

When the moon-faced clock behind the door struck nine, Tilly tucked up the children under the “extry comfortables,” and having kissed them all around, as Mother did, crept into her own nest, never minding the little drifts of snow that sifted in upon her coverlet between the shingles of the roof, nor the storm that raged without.

As if he felt the need of unusual vigilance, old Bose lay down on the mat before the door, and pussy had the warm hearth all to herself. If any late wanderer had looked in at midnight, he would have seen the fire blazing up again, and in the cheerful glow the old

cat blinking her yellow eyes, as she sat bolt upright beside the spinning wheel, like some sort of household goblin, guarding the children while they slept.

When they woke, like early birds, it still snowed, but up the little Bassetts jumped, broke the ice in their jugs, and went down with cheeks glowing like winter apples, after a brisk scrub and scramble into their clothes. Eph was off to the barn, and Tilly soon had a great kettle of mush ready, which, with milk warm from the cows made a wholesome breakfast for the seven hearty children.

"Now about dinner," said the young housekeeper, as the pewter spoons stopped clattering, and the earthen bowls stood empty.

"Ma said, have what we liked, but she didn't expect us to have a real Thanksgiving dinner, because she won't be here to cook it, and we don't know how," began Prue, doubtfully.

"I can roast a turkey and make a pudding as well as anybody, I guess. The pies are all ready, and if we can't boil vegetables and so on, we don't deserve any dinner," cried Tilly, burning to distinguish herself, and bound to enjoy to the utmost her brief authority.

"Yes, yes!" cried all the boys, "let's have a dinner anyway; Ma won't care, and the good victuals will spoil if they ain't eaten right up."

"Pa is coming to-night, so we won't have dinner till late; that will be real genteel and give us plenty of time," added Tilly, suddenly realizing the novelty of the task she had undertaken.

"Did you ever roast a turkey?" asked Roxy, with an air of deep interest.

"Should you darst to try?" said Rhody, in an awe-stricken tone.

"You will see what I can do. Ma said I was to use my judgment about things, and I'm going to. All you children have got to do is to keep out of the way, and let Prue and me work. Eph, I wish you'd put a fire in the best room, so the little ones can play in there. We shall want the settin'-room for the table, and I won't have them pickin' 'round when we get things fixed," commanded Tilly, bound to make her short reign a brilliant one.

"I don't know about that. Ma didn't tell us to," began cautious Eph who felt that this invasion of the sacred best parlor was a daring step.

"Don't we always do it Sundays and Thanksgivings? Wouldn't Ma wish the children kept safe and warm anyhow? Can I get up a nice dinner with four rascals under my feet all the time? Come, now, if you want roast turkey and onions, plum-puddin' and mince-pie, you'll have to do as I tell you, and be lively about it."

Tilly spoke with such spirit, and her suggestion was so irresistible, that Eph gave in, and, laughing good-naturedly, tramped away to heat up the best room, devoutly hoping that nothing serious would happen to punish such audacity.

The young folks delightedly trooped away to destroy the order of that prim apartment with housekeeping under the black horse-hair sofa, "horseback-riders" on the arms of the best rocking chair, and an Indian war-dance all over the well-waxed furniture. Eph, finding the society of peaceful sheep and cows more to his mind than that of two excited sisters, lingered over his chores in the barn as long as possible, and left the girls in peace.

Now Tilly and Prue were in their glory, and as soon as the breakfast-things were out of the way, they prepared for a grand cooking time. They were handy girls, though they had never heard of a cooking school, never touched a piano, and knew nothing of embroidery beyond the samplers which hung framed in the parlor; one ornamented with a pink mourner under a blue weeping-willow, the other with this pleasing verse, each word being done in a different color, which gave the effect of a distracted rainbow:

This sampler neat was worked by me,
In my twelfth year, Prudence B.

Both rolled up their sleeves, put on their largest aprons, and got out all the spoons, dishes, pots, and pans they could find, "so as to have everything handy," Prue said.

"Now, sister, we'll have dinner at five; Pa will be here by that time, if he is coming to-night, and be so surprised to find us all ready, for he won't have had any very nice victuals if Gran'ma is so sick," said Tilly, importantly. "I shall give the children a piece at noon" (Tilly meant luncheon); "doughnuts and cheese, with apple-pie and cider, will please 'em. There's beans for Eph; he likes cold pork, so we won't stop to warm it up, for there's lots to do, and I don't mind saying to you I'm dreadful dubersome about the turkey."

"It's all ready but the stuffing, and roasting is as easy as can be. I can baste first-rate. Ma always likes to have me, I'm so patient and stiddy, she says," answered Prue, for the responsibility of this great undertaking did not rest upon her, so she took a cheerful view of things.

"I know, but it's the stuffin' that troubles me," said Tilly, rubbing her round elbows as she eyed the immense fowl laid out on a platter before her. "I don't know how much I want, nor what sort of yarbs to put in, and he's so awful big, I'm kind of afraid of him."

"I ain't! I fed him all summer, and he never gobbled at *me*. I feel real mean to be thinking of gobbling him, poor old chap," laughed Prue, patting her departed pet with an air of mingled affection and appetite.

"Well, I'll get the puddin' off my mind fust, for it ought to bile all day. Put the big kettle on, and see that the spit is clean, while I get ready."

Prue obediently tugged away at the crane, with its black hooks, from which hung the iron tea-kettle and three-legged pot; then she settled the long spit in the grooves made for it in the tall andirons, and put the dripping-pan underneath, for in those days meat was roasted as it should be, not baked in ovens.

Meantime Tilly attacked the plum-pudding. She felt pretty sure of coming out right, here, for she had seen her mother do it so many times, it looked very easy. So in went suet and fruit; all sorts of spice, to be sure she got the right ones, and brandy instead of wine. But she forgot both sugar and salt, and tied it in the cloth so tightly that it had no room to swell, so it would come out as heavy as lead and as hard as a cannon-ball, if the bag did not burst and spoil it all. Happily unconscious of these mistakes, Tilly popped it into the pot, and proudly watched it bobbing about before she put the cover on and left it to its fate.

"I can't remember what flavorin' Ma puts in," she said, when she had got her bread well soaked for stuffing. "Sage and onions and apple-sauce go with goose, but I can't feel sure of anything but pepper and salt for a turkey."

"Ma puts in some kind of mint, I know, but I forget whether it is spearmint, peppermint, or pennyroyal," answered Prue, in a tone of doubt, but trying to show her knowledge of "yarbs," or, at least, of their names.

"Seems to me it's sweet majoram or summer savory. I guess we'll put both in, and then we are sure to be right. The best is up garret; you run and get some, while I mash the bread," commanded Tilly, diving into the mess.

Away trotted Prue, but in her haste she got catnip and wormwood, for the garret was darkish, and Prue's little nose was so full of the smell of the onions she had been peeling, that everything smelt of them. Eager to be of use, she pounded up the herbs and scattered the mixture with a liberal hand into the bowl.

"It doesn't smell just right, but I suppose it will when it is cooked," said Tilly, as she filled the empty stomach, that seemed aching for food, and sewed it up with the blue yarn, which happened to be handy. She forgot to tie down his legs and wings, but she set him by till his hour came, well satisfied with her work.

"Shall we roast the little pig, too? I think he'd look nice with a necklace of sausages, as Ma fixed him at Christmas," asked Prue, elated with their success.

"I couldn't do it. I loved that little pig, and cried when he was killed. I should feel as if I was roasting the baby," answered Tilly, glancing toward the buttery where piggy hung, looking so pink and pretty it certainly did seem cruel to eat him.

It took a long time to get all the vegetables ready, for, as the cellar was full, the girls thought they would have every sort. Eph helped, and by noon all was ready for cooking, and the cranberry-sauce, a good deal scorched, was cooking in the lean-to.

Luncheon was a lively meal, and doughnuts and cheese vanished in such quantities that Tilly feared no one would have an appetite for her sumptuous dinner. The boys assured her they would be starving by five o'clock, and Sol mourned bitterly over the little pig that was not to be served up.

"Now you all go and coast, while Prue and I set the table and get out the best chiny," said Tilly, bent on having her dinner look well, no matter what its other failings might be.

Out came the rough sleds, on went the round hoods, old hats, red cloaks, and moccasins, and away trudged the four younger Bassetts, to disport themselves in the snow, and try the ice down by the old mill, where the great wheel turned and splashed so merrily in the summer-time.

Eph took his fiddle and scraped away to his heart's content in the parlor, while the girls, after a short rest, set the table and made all ready to dish up the dinner when that exciting moment came. It was not at all the sort of table we see now, but would look very plain and countrified to us, with its green-handled knives, and two-pronged steel forks, its red-and-white china, and pewter platters, scoured till they shone, with mugs and spoons to match, and a brown jug for the cider. The cloth was coarse, but white as snow, and the little maids had seen the blue-eyed flax grow, out of which their mother wove the linen; they had watched and watched while it bleached in the green meadow. They had no napkins and little silver; but the best tankard and Ma's few wedding-spoons were set forth in state. Nuts and apples at the corners gave an air, and the place of honor was left in the middle for the oranges yet to come.

"Don't it look beautiful?" said Prue, when they paused to admire the general effect.

"Pretty nice, I think. I wish Ma could see how well we can do it," began Tilly, when a loud howling startled both girls, and sent them flying to the window. The short afternoon had passed so quickly that twilight had come before they knew it, and now, as they looked out through the gathering dusk, they saw four small black figures tearing up the road, to come bursting in, all screaming at once: "The bear, the bear! Eph, get the gun! He's coming, he's coming!"

Eph had dropped his fiddle, and got down his gun before the girls could calm the children enough to tell their story, which they did in a somewhat incoherent manner. "Down in the holler, coastin', we heard a growl," began Sol, with his eyes as big as saucers. "I see him fust lookin' over the wall," roared Seth, eager to get his share of honor.

"Awful big and shaggy," quavered Roxy, clinging to Tilly, while Rhody hid in Prue's skirts, and piped out: "His great paws kept clawing at us, and I was so scared my legs would hardly go."

"We ran away as fast as we could go, and he came growlin' after us. He's awful hungry, and he'll eat every one of us if he gets in," continued Sol, looking about him for a safe retreat.

"Oh, Eph, don't let him eat us," cried both little girls, flying upstairs to hide under their mother's bed, as their surest shelter.

"No danger of that, you little geese. I'll shoot him as soon as he comes. Get out of the way, boys," and Eph raised the window to get good aim.

"There he is! Fire away, and don't miss!" cried Seth, hastily following Sol, who had climbed to the top of the dresser as a good perch from which to view the approaching fray.

Prue retired to the hearth as if bent on dying at her post rather than desert the turkey, now "browning beautiful," as she expressed it. But Tilly boldly stood at the open window, ready to lend a hand if the enemy proved too much for Eph.

All had seen bears, but none had ever come so near before, and even brave Eph felt that the big brown beast slowly trotting up the dooryard was an unusually formidable specimen. He was growling horribly, and stopped now and then as if to rest and shake himself.

"Get the ax, Tilly, and if I should miss, stand ready to keep him off while I load again," said Eph, anxious to kill his first bear in style and alone; a girl's help didn't count.

Tilly flew for the ax, and was at her brother's side by the time the bear was near enough to be dangerous. He stood on his hind legs, and seemed to sniff with relish the savory odors that poured out of the window.

"Fire, Eph!" cried Tilly, firmly.

"Wait till he rears again. I'll get a better shot then" answered the boy, while Prue covered her ears to shut out the bang, and the small boys cheered from their dusty refuge among the pumpkins.

But a very singular thing happened next, and all who saw it stood amazed, for suddenly Tilly threw down the ax, flung open the door, and ran straight into the arms of the bear, who stood erect to receive her, while his growlings changed to a loud "Haw, haw!" that startled the children more than the report of a gun.

"It's Gad Hopkins, tryin' to fool us!" cried Eph, much disgusted at the loss of his prey, for these hardy boys loved to hunt and prided themselves on the number of wild animals and birds they could shoot in a year.

“Oh, Gad, how could you scare us so?” laughed Tilly, still held fast in one shaggy arm of the bear, while the other drew a dozen oranges from some deep pocket in the buffalo-skin coat, and fired them into the kitchen with such good aim that Eph ducked, Prue screamed, and Sol and Seth came down much quicker than they went up.

“Wal, you see I got upsot over yonder, and the old horse went home while I was floundering in a drift, so I tied on the buffalors to tote ’em easy, and come along till I see the children playin’ in the holler. I jest meant to give ’em a little scare, but they run like partridges, and I kep’ up the joke to see how Eph would like this sort of company,” and Gad haw-hawed again.

“You’d have had a warm welcome if we hadn’t found you out. I’d have put a bullet through you in a jiffy, old chap,” said Eph, coming out to shake hands with the young giant, who was only a year or two older than himself.

“Come in and set up to dinner with us. Prue and I have done it all ourselves, and Pa will be along soon, I reckon,” cried Tilly, trying to escape.

“Couldn’t, no ways. My folks will think I’m dead ef I don’t get along home, sence the horse and sleigh have gone ahead empty I’ve done my arrant and had my joke; now I want my pay, Tilly,” and Gad took a hearty kiss from the rosy cheeks of his “little sweetheart,” as he called her. His own cheeks tingled with the smart slap she gave him as she ran away, calling out that she hated bears and would bring her ax next time.

“I ain’t afeared—your sharp eyes found me out: and ef you run into a bear’s arms you must expect a hug,” answered Gad, as he pushed back the robe and settled his fur cap more becomingly.

“I should have known you in a minute if I hadn’t been asleep when the girls squalled. You did it well, though, and I advise you not to try it again in a hurry, or you’ll get shot,” said Eph, as they parted, he rather crestfallen and Gad in high glee.

“My sakes alive—the turkey is all burnt one side, and the kettles have biled over so the pies I put to warm are all ashes!” scolded Tilly, as the flurry subsided and she remembered her dinner.

“Well, I can’t help it. I couldn’t think of victuals when I expected to be eaten alive myself, could I?” pleaded poor Prue, who had tumbled into the cradle when the rain of oranges began.

Tilly laughed, and all the rest joined in, so good-humor was restored, and the spirits of the younger ones were revived by sucks from the one orange which passed from hand to hand with great rapidity while the older girls dished up the dinner. They were just struggling to get the pudding out of the cloth when Roxy called out: “Here’s Pa!”

“There’s folks with him,” added Rhody.

"Lots of 'em! I see two big sleighs chock full," shouted Seth, peering through the dusk.

"It looks like a seminary. Guess Gran'ma's dead and come up to be buried here," said Sol, in a solemn tone. This startling suggestion made Tilly, Prue, and Eph hasten to look out, full of dismay at such an ending of their festival.

"If that is a funeral, the mourners are uncommonly jolly," said Eph, dryly, as merry voices and loud laughter broke the white silence without.

"I see Aunt Cinthy, and Cousin Hetty—and there's Mose and Amos. I do declare, Pa's bringin' 'em all home to have some fun here," cried Prue, as she recognized one familiar face after another.

"Oh, my patience! Ain't I glad I got dinner, and don't I hope it will turn out good!" exclaimed Tilly, while the twins pranced with delight, and the small boys roared:

"Hooray for Pa! Hooray for Thanksgivin'!"

The cheer was answered heartily, and in came Father, Mother, Baby, aunts, and cousins, all in great spirits; and all much surprised to find such a festive welcome awaiting them.

"Ain't Gran'ma dead at all?" asked Sol, in the midst of the kissing and hand-shaking.

"Bless your heart, no! It was all a mistake of old Mr. Chadwick's. He's as deaf as an adder, and when Mrs. Brooks told him Mother was mendin' fast, and she wanted me to come down to-day, certain sure, he got the message all wrong, and give it to the fust person passin' in such a way as to scare me 'most to death, and send us down in a hurry. Mother was sittin' up as chirk as you please, and dreadful sorry you didn't all come."

"So, to keep the house quiet for her, and give you a taste of the fun, your Pa fetched us all up to spend the evenin', and we are goin' to have a jolly time on't, to judge by the looks of things," said Aunt Cinthy, briskly finishing the tale when Mrs. Bassett paused for want of breath.

"What in the world put it into your head we was comin', and set you to gittin' up such a supper?" asked Mr. Bassett, looking about him, well pleased and much surprised at the plentiful table.

Tilly modestly began to tell, but the others broke in and sang her praises in a sort of chorus, in which bears, pigs, pies, and oranges were oddly mixed. Great satisfaction was expressed by all, and Tilly and Prue were so elated by the commendation of Ma and the aunts, that they set forth their dinner, sure everything was perfect.

But when the eating began, which it did the moment wraps were off; then their pride got a fall; for the first person who tasted the stuffing (it was big Cousin Mose, and that made it harder to bear) nearly choked over the bitter morsel.

“Tilly Bassett, whatever made you put wormwood and catnip in your stuffin’?” demanded Ma, trying not to be severe, for all the rest were laughing, and Tilly looked ready to cry.

“I did it,” said Prue, nobly taking all the blame, which caused Pa to kiss her on the spot, and declare that it didn’t do a mite of harm, for the turkey was all right.

“I never see onions cooked better. All the vegetables is well done, and the dinner a credit to you, my dears,” declared Aunt Cinthy, with her mouth full of the fragrant vegetable she praised.

The pudding was an utter failure in spite of the blazing brandy in which it lay—as hard and heavy as one of the stone balls on Squire Dunkin’s great gate. It was speedily whisked out of sight, and all fell upon the pies, which were perfect. But Tilly and Prue were much depressed, and didn’t recover their spirits till dinner was over and the evening fun well under way.

“Blind-man’s bluff,” “Hunt the slipper,” “Come, Philander,” and other lively games soon set everyone bubbling over with jollity, and when Eph struck up “Money Musk” on his fiddle, old and young fell into their places for a dance. All down the long kitchen they stood, Mr. and Mrs. Bassett at the top, the twins at the bottom, and then away they went, heeling and toeing, cutting pigeon-wings, and taking their steps in a way that would convulse modern children with their new-fangled romps called dancing. Mose and Tilly covered themselves with glory by the vigor with which they kept it up, till fat Aunt Cinthy fell into a chair, breathlessly declaring that a very little of such exercise was enough for a woman of her “heft.”

Apples and cider, chat and singing, finished the evening, and after a grand kissing all round, the guests drove away in the clear moonlight which came out to cheer their long drive.

When the jingle of the last bell had died away, Mr. Bassett said soberly, as they stood together on the hearth: “Children, we have special cause to be thankful that the sorrow we expected was changed into joy, so we’ll read a chapter ’fore we go to bed, and give thanks where thanks is due.”

Then Tilly set out the light-stand with the big Bible on it, and a candle on each side, and all sat quietly in the fire-light, smiling as they listened with happy hearts to the sweet old words that fit all times and seasons so beautifully.

When the good-nights were over, and the children in bed, Prue put her arm round Tilly and whispered tenderly, for she felt her shake, and was sure she was crying:

"Don't mind about the old stuffin' and puddin', deary—nobody cared, and Ma said we really did do surprisin' well for such young girls."

The laughter Tilly was trying to smother broke out then, and was so infectious, Prue could not help joining her, even before she knew the cause of the merriment.

"I was mad about the mistakes, but don't care enough to cry. I'm laughing to think how Gad fooled Eph and I found him out. I thought Mose and Amos would have died over it, when I told them, it was so funny," explained Tilly, when she got her breath.

"I was so scared that when the first orange hit me, I thought it was a bullet, and scrabbled into the cradle as fast as I could. It was real mean to frighten the little ones so," laughed Prue, as Tilly gave a growl.

Here a smart rap on the wall of the next room caused a sudden lull in the fun, and Mrs. Bassett's voice was heard, saying warningly, "Girls, go to sleep immediate, or you'll wake the baby."

"Yes'm," answered two meek voices, and after a few irrepressible giggles, silence reigned, broken only by an occasional snore from the boys, or the soft scurry of mice in the buttery, taking their part in this old-fashioned Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Day

LYDIA MARIA CHILD

Lydia Maria Child (1802–80) was an American novelist, journalist, scholar, and activist. Born to an abolitionist family, she was influenced by the anti-slavery beliefs of her brother, a Harvard Divinity School professor and Unitarian minister, and the prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, and would advocate all her life for the abolition of slavery. In 1826, she founded a children's periodical, Juvenile Miscellany.

This famous poem, written in 1844, describes, in stages, the journey and eager anticipation of children traveling once again, over the river and through the wood, to the traditional Thanksgiving dinner at their grandparents' home. Imagining yourself in their place, what do you think makes the journey and the day so special? For what things do the children sing "hurrah," and how are they related? What role do memory and the repetitions of tradition play in the delights of this holiday? How does the structure of the poem convey those delights?

Over the river and through the wood,
To Grandfather's house we go;
The horse knows the way
to carry the sleigh
through the white and drifted snow.

Over the river and through the wood—
Oh, how the wind does blow!
It stings the toes
And bites the nose,
As over the ground we go.

Over the river and through the wood,
To have a first-rate play—
Hear the bells ring
"Ting-a-ling-ding!"
Hurrah for Thanksgiving Day!

Over the river and through the wood
Trot fast, my dapple-gray!
Spring over the ground,
Like a hunting hound!
For this is Thanksgiving Day.

Over the river and through the wood,
And straight through the barn-yard gate!
We seem to go
Extremely slow—
It is so hard to wait!

Over the river and through the wood—
Now Grandmother's cap I spy!
Hurrah for the fun!
Is the pudding done?
Hurrah for the pumpkin pie!

John Inglefield's Thanksgiving

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64) remains one of our most profound students of the American soul—in all its mystery and complexity. Never one to cover up the faces of evil and darkness, Hawthorne provides us with opportunities to see most deeply into the highs and lows of the human condition, especially as it is influenced by the tensions between freedom and piety, as both wrestle with the penchant for wickedness. This disturbing story, published in 1852 under a pseudonym (“Rev. A. A. Royce”), is no exception. The gathering and mood of John Inglefield’s Thanksgiving are, at first glance, a far cry from those most of us associate with this holiday—although, truth to tell, people in troubled families often experience this holiday with added tension and mixed emotions. So too do the events of the evening reflect this, as Inglefield’s wayward daughter Prudence comes to join the hearth she had not long ago abandoned.

Why does she return, and on Thanksgiving Day? Why does she leave so abruptly, and in the manner she does? Given the fact and the way that Prudence leaves, would it have been better had she not come at all? What does Hawthorne mean when he says her presence produced “one of those intervals when sorrow vanishes in its own depth of shadow, and joy starts forth in transitory brightness”? Is this “transitory joy” at hearth and home what this holiday is really all about? Is thanksgiving truer and deeper when we recognize that the blessings of hearth and home are in fact impermanent, and that our abundance and our family ties cannot be taken for granted? Or is Hawthorne (or perhaps only Rev. Royce) suggesting that, in a world of sin and separation, there is finally not much to be thankful about?

On the evening of Thanksgiving day, John Inglefield, the blacksmith, sat in his elbow-chair, among those who had been keeping festival at his board. Being the central figure of the domestic circle, the fire threw its strongest light on his massive and sturdy frame, reddening his rough visage, so that it looked like the head of an iron statue, all aglow, from his own forge, and with its features rudely fashioned on his own anvil. At John Inglefield’s right hand was an empty chair. The other places round the hearth were filled by the members of the family, who all sat quietly, while, with a semblance of fantastic merriment, their shadows danced on the wall behind them. One of the group was John Inglefield’s son, who had been bred at college, and was now a student of theology at Andover. There was also a daughter of sixteen, whom nobody could look at without thinking of a rose-bud almost blossomed. The only other person at the fireside was Robert Moore, formerly an apprentice of the blacksmith, but now his journeyman, and who seemed more like an own son of John Inglefield than did the pale and slender student.

Only these four had kept New England’s festival beneath that roof. The vacant chair at John Inglefield’s right hand was in memory of his wife, whom death had snatched from him since the previous Thanksgiving. With a feeling that few would have looked for in his rough nature, the bereaved husband had himself set the chair in its place next his

own; and often did his eye glance thitherward, as if he deemed it possible that the cold grave might send back its tenant to the cheerful fireside, at least for that one evening. Thus did he cherish the grief that was dear to him. But there was another grief which he would fain have torn from his heart; or, since that could never be, have buried it too deep for others to behold, or for his own remembrance. Within the past year another member of his household had gone from him, but not to the grave. Yet they kept no vacant chair for her.

While John Inglefield and his family were sitting round the hearth with the shadows dancing behind them on the wall, the outer door was opened, and a light footstep came along the passage. The latch of the inner door was lifted by some familiar hand, and a young girl came in, wearing a cloak and hood, which she took off, and laid on the table beneath the looking-glass. Then, after gazing a moment at the fireside circle, she approached, and took the seat at John Inglefield's right hand, as if it had been reserved on purpose for her.

"Here I am, at last, father," said she. "You ate your Thanksgiving dinner without me, but I have come back to spend the evening with you."

Yes, it was Prudence Inglefield. She wore the same neat and maidenly attire which she had been accustomed to put on when the household work was over for the day, and her hair was parted from her brow, in the simple and modest fashion that became her best of all. If her cheek might otherwise have been pale, yet the glow of the fire suffused it with a healthful bloom. If she had spent the many months of her absence in guilt and infamy, yet they seemed to have left no traces on her gentle aspect. She could not have looked less altered, had she merely stepped away from her father's fireside for half an hour, and returned while the blaze was quivering upwards from the same brands that were burning at her departure. And to John Inglefield she was the very image of his buried wife, such as he remembered her on the first Thanksgiving which they had passed under their own roof. Therefore, though naturally a stern and rugged man, he could not speak unkindly to his sinful child, nor yet could he take her to his bosom.

"You are welcome home, Prudence," said he, glancing sideways at her, and his voice faltered. "Your mother would have rejoiced to see you, but she has been gone from us these four months."

"I know it, father, I know it," replied Prudence, quickly. "And yet, when I first came in, my eyes were so dazzled by the fire-light, that she seemed to be sitting in this very chair!"

By this time the other members of the family had begun to recover from their surprise, and became sensible that it was no ghost from the grave, nor vision of their vivid recollections, but Prudence, her own self. Her brother was the next that greeted her. He advanced and held out his hand affectionately, as a brother should; yet not entirely like a brother, for, with all his kindness, he was still a clergyman, and speaking to a child of sin.

"Sister Prudence," said he, earnestly, "I rejoice that a merciful Providence hath turned your steps homeward, in time for me to bid you a last farewell. In a few weeks, sister, I am to sail as a missionary to the far islands of the Pacific. There is not one of these beloved faces that I shall ever hope to behold again on this earth. O, may I see all of them—yours and all—beyond the grave!"

A shadow flitted across the girl's countenance.

"The grave is very dark, brother," answered she, withdrawing her hand somewhat hastily from his grasp. "You must look your last at me by the light of this fire."

While this was passing, the twin-girl—the rosebud that had grown on the same stem with the castaway—stood gazing at her sister, longing to fling herself upon her bosom, so that the tendrils of their hearts might intertwine again. At first she was restrained by mingled grief and shame, and by a dread that Prudence was too much changed to respond to her affection, or that her own purity would be felt as a reproach by the lost one. But, as she listened to the familiar voice, while the face grew more and more familiar, she forgot everything save that Prudence had come back. Springing forward, she would have clasped her in a close embrace. At that very instant, however, Prudence started from her chair, and held out both her hands, with a warning gesture.

"No, Mary,—no, my sister," cried she, "do not you touch me. Your bosom must not be pressed to mine!"

Mary shuddered and stood still, for she felt that something darker than the grave was between Prudence and herself, though they seemed so near each other in the light of their father's hearth, where they had grown up together. Meanwhile Prudence threw her eyes around the room, in search of one who had not yet bidden her welcome. He had withdrawn from his seat by the fireside, and was standing near the door, with his face averted, so that his features could be discerned only by the flickering shadow of the profile upon the wall. But Prudence called to him, in a cheerful and kindly tone:

"Come, Robert," said she, "won't you shake hands with your old friend?"

Robert Moore held back for a moment, but affection struggled powerfully, and overcame his pride and resentment; he rushed towards Prudence, seized her hand, and pressed it to his bosom.

"There, there, Robert!" said she, smiling sadly, as she withdrew her hand, "you must not give me too warm a welcome."

And now, having exchanged greetings with each member of the family, Prudence again seated herself in the chair at John Inglefield's right hand. She was naturally a girl of quick and tender sensibilities, gladsome in her general mood, but with a bewitching pathos interfused among her merriest words and deeds. It was remarked of her, too, that she had a faculty, even from childhood, of throwing her own feelings, like a spell, over

her companions. Such as she had been in her days of innocence, so did she appear this evening. Her friends, in the surprise and bewilderment of her return, almost forgot that she had ever left them, or that she had forfeited any of her claims to their affection. In the morning, perhaps, they might have looked at her with altered eyes, but by the Thanksgiving fireside they felt only that their own Prudence had come back to them, and were thankful. John Inglefield's rough visage brightened with the glow of his heart, as it grew warm and merry within him; once or twice, even, he laughed till the room rang again, yet seemed startled by the echo of his own mirth. The grave young minister became as frolicsome as a school-boy. Mary, too, the rosebud, forgot that her twin-blossom had ever been torn from the stem, and trampled in the dust. And as for Robert Moore, he gazed at Prudence with the bashful earnestness of love new-born, while she, with sweet maiden coquetry, half smiled upon and half discouraged him.

In short, it was one of those intervals when sorrow vanishes in its own depth of shadow, and joy starts forth in transitory brightness. When the clock struck eight, Prudence poured out her father's customary draught of herb tea, which had been steeping by the fireside ever since twilight.

"God bless you, child!" said John Inglefield, as he took the cup from her hand; "you have made your old father happy again. But we miss your mother sadly, Prudence, sadly. It seems as if she ought to be here now."

"Now, father, or never," replied Prudence.

It was now the hour for domestic worship. But while the family were making preparations for this duty, they suddenly perceived that Prudence had put on her cloak and hood, and was lifting the latch of the door.

"Prudence, Prudence! where are you going?" cried they all, with one voice.

As Prudence passed out of the door, she turned towards them, and flung back her hand with a gesture of farewell. But her face was so changed that they hardly recognized it. Sin and evil passions glowed through its comeliness, and wrought a horrible deformity; a smile gleamed in her eyes, as of triumphant mockery, at their surprise and grief.

"Daughter," cried John Inglefield, between wrath and sorrow, "stay and be your father's blessing, or take his curse with you!"

For an instant Prudence lingered and looked back into the fire-lighted room, while her countenance wore almost the expression as if she were struggling with a fiend, who had power to seize his victim even within the hallowed precincts of her father's hearth. The fiend prevailed; and Prudence vanished into the outer darkness. When the family rushed to the door, they could see nothing, but heard the sound of wheels rattling over the frozen ground.

That same night, among the painted beauties at the theatre of a neighboring city, there was one whose dissolute mirth seemed inconsistent with any sympathy for pure affections, and for the joys and griefs which are hallowed by them. Yet this was Prudence Inglefield. Her visit to the Thanksgiving fireside was the realization of one of those waking dreams in which the guilty soul will sometimes stray back to its innocence. But Sin, alas! is careful of her bond-slaves; they hear her voice, perhaps, at the holiest moment, and are constrained to go whither she summons them. The same dark power that drew Prudence Inglefield from her father's hearth—the same in its nature, though heightened then to a dread necessity—would snatch a guilty soul from the gate of heaven, and make its sin and its punishment alike eternal.

Thanksgiving

EDGAR ALBERT GUEST

Edgar Guest (1881–1959), today little known or read, was a prolific, British-born, and popular American poet in the first half of the twentieth century, much beloved by American readers (and known as “the People’s Poet”) for his optimistic and sentimental verse. An immigrant to the United States when he was ten, Guest started writing at age fourteen for the Detroit Free Press as a police reporter and then composer of daily rhymes, which eventually became so popular that they were nationally syndicated.

Like Hawthorne’s story but with a completely different flavor, this poem (1917) speaks about Thanksgiving as a singular day of homecoming. It also speaks poignantly about home as a place that appears to remain the same despite the passage of time. How old is the speaker in the poem? Why does he comment so often about what is “old”? Gathering evidence from each stanza, can you say what he most likes about Thanksgiving? What does he mean by saying, “We’ve come for a time to be just what we are”? What will enable him to “put soul in my Thanksgivin’ prayers”?

Gettin’ together to smile an’ rejoice,
An’ eatin’ an’ laughin’ with folks of your choice;
An’ kissin’ the girls an’ declarin’ that they
Are growin’ more beautiful day after day;
Chattin’ an’ braggin’ a bit with the men,
Buildin’ the old family circle again;
Livin’ the wholesome an’ old-fashioned cheer,
Just for awhile at the end of the year.

Greetings fly fast as we crowd through the door
And under the old roof we gather once more
Just as we did when the youngsters were small;
Mother’s a little bit grayer, that’s all.
Father’s a little bit older, but still
Ready to romp an’ to laugh with a will.
Here we are back at the table again
Tellin’ our stories as women an’ men.

Bowed are our heads for a moment in prayer;
Oh, but we’re grateful an’ glad to be there.
Home from the east land an’ home from the west,
Home with the folks that are dearest an’ best.
Out of the sham of the cities afar
We’ve come for a time to be just what we are.
Here we can talk of ourselves an’ be frank,
Forgettin’ position an’ station an’ rank.

Give me the end of the year an' its fun
When most of the plannin' an' toilin' is done;
Bring all the wanderers home to the nest,
Let me sit down with the ones I love best,
Hear the old voices still ringin' with song,
See the old faces unblemished by wrong,
See the old table with all of its chairs
An' I'll put soul in my Thanksgivin' prayers.

Thanksgiving Day

SUSAN MINOT

Not all homecomings for Thanksgiving are as cheerful as the one envisioned in the previous poem by Edgar Guest. This story from 1984 is the work of Susan Minot (b. 1956), who started her literary career writing short stories in the New Yorker and Grand Street magazine. A recipient of the O. Henry Prize for short fiction, she has also published four novels. In this story, she raises questions about how to celebrate the holiday when your parents or grandparents who have traditionally hosted Thanksgiving are no longer able to do so. What is the mood in the old Vincent home? Is this a close family? Compare and contrast the words and deeds of the adults and the children. Is the Thanksgiving spirit alive here? Why or why not? In many families, Thanksgiving is a matter of tradition: should the Vincent family tradition continue?

Gus and Rosie Vincent waited for their six children to crawl out of the station wagon and then slammed the doors. The Vincents were always the first to arrive.

They would pull up to the house in Motley, Massachusetts, where their father grew up, and crunch across the gravel, and in the doorway was Ma with her dark blue dress pleated from collar to waist and they would give her kisses, then file in to dump their coats in the coatroom and right away the first thing would be the smell of Pa's cigar. He waited in the other room. Every Thanksgiving they descended upon him and every year it was the same.

The three girls wore matching plaid skirts with plaid suspender straps. Caitlin and Sophie, who looked alike, had on hair bands of the same material. Delilah, the youngest daughter, was darker, with a short pixie. She said it wasn't fair she didn't have long hair too. The three boys came after, Gus and Sherman, and Chickie, in grey flannels. Chickie's were shorts, since he was the baby.

For Sophie, the best thing was getting to see the cousins, especially the other Vincents. Bit, the only girl cousin, was Sophie's age, ten. And Churly was the oldest of everybody; he was fourteen. Churly and Bit arrived with Uncle Charles and Aunt Ginny. Sophie hesitated because sometimes you didn't give them a kiss. On Aunt Ginny's cardigan was the turkey pin she wore every year. The other cousins were the Smalls. Aunt Fran used to be a Vincent before she married Uncle Thomas. They had three boys. The oldest was Teever Small, who drooled.

Once everyone was there, the children had to put their coats on for the annual picture. Bit had a white rabbit muff that Teever Small grabbed at, trying to flirt. "That's enough of that," said his father, but Bit had already snatched it back. Sophie felt how soft the fur was, thinking about the dead rabbit; the muff was in the shape of a rabbit too. The grown-ups shuffled everybody around, then stood beside Sophie's father, who had the camera.

They crossed their arms against the cold, talking to one another and watching to make sure the kids didn't move.

"I'll be doggone," said Uncle Thomas. Sophie stared at his bow tie. "Will you look at that."

"A bunch of young ladies and young gentlemen," said Aunt Fran, smacking her orange lips. She had white hair like Ma's, except hers was short.

"Knock it off, Churly," Uncle Charles said.

Sophie turned around. Churly was smirking. He had a head shaped like a wooden golf club, with his long neck, and a crew cut like the other boys. Sophie looked back at the house and saw Ma inside, watching through the French doors.

After the picture was taken, Rosie Vincent told her children to say hello to Livia, and the cousins tagged along. The hall to the kitchen was dark, the floor with a sheen from the glow at the end. The kitchen was pale grey, with no lights on, and a white enamel table in the middle. Livia gave them pinched kisses, her eyes darting around the room, checking on food, on the children. She was huge and huffing in her white uniform. The kitchen smelled of Worcestershire sauce and turkey. "Are you behaving yourselves now?" She held up a shiny wooden spoon. When she was cooking, everything on Livia sweated, the steam rising behind her from the pots on the stove.

"Not me," Churly said. "I always try to be as naughty as possible."

Caitlin laughed while Sophie looked at Livia's face, which meant business. Livia sat down, "Now what are the seven blessed sacraments?" she asked, addressing Gus and Rosie's children—Catholic, thanks to their mother. Livia tipped one ear forward the way Sophie had seen the priest do in confession. Sophie fingered a tin Jell-O mold shaped like a fish, and Caitlin busied herself by tucking in Sherman's shirttails. No one answered. Livia rattled them off herself, slicing apples so the blade came right to her thumb without even looking. The cousins drifted off into the pantry as Livia thought up new questions—all having to do with catechism.

The dining-room table has already been set. The cranberry sauce had a spoon sticking out. Bit stole some mint wafers, reaching past the blue water goblets into the middle of the table, and gave one to Sophie. "It's okay," said Bit, noticing Sophie's expression.

"I saw that," Churly said from the doorway. Sophie blushed. He came in and whispered, "All right, you guys . . ." and she saw how his eyes were like those light-blue paperweights that had white lines of glass streaked from the middle. He leaned past them and plucked a candy of the cut-glass boat. "Delish," he said. "Don't mind if I do."

In the living room, the grown-ups stood stirring drinks at the red-leather bar stand; then they sat down. Sophie's mother was the only one without a Scotch or a Dubonnet.

There was nothing to do while the grown-ups talked except to look around at each tiny thing. Three walls were covered with books, and over the mantelpiece was a portrait of Dr. Vincent, so dark and shiny that the lights reflected off it. One side of the room was all French windows, with dead vines at the edges. The windows overlooked the lawn. Beside the fireplace was a child's rocking chair with a red back, an antique. Gus had gotten to it first and was sitting there, holding onto his ankles, next to Ma's place on the sofa. They had the hard kind of sofas with wooden arms and wood in a curve along the back. You could tell it was Ma's place because of the brown smudge on the ceiling from her cigarette smoke.

The girls examined their grandmother. Her shoes, the pair her granddaughters liked the best, were pale lavender with pink trim and flat bows, her fancy shoes.

"Gussie," said Aunt Fran, the one person in the world who called Sophie's father that. She said it as if it tasted bad. "How'd you like the game?" The last time they had seen each other was at the Harvard halftime in October when they were stretching their legs under the bleachers. Gus, with his children, said, "Good day to you," as if he saw his sister every day, which he didn't, each walking in the opposite direction.

The grown-ups talked about the sports the boys were playing.

"Churly's on the debating team," said Uncle Charles. He was the oldest Vincent son.

"I certainly am," said Churly, the only one of the children taking up a seat. "Anyone want to argue?"

Under a lamp was a picture of Ma before she married. She was holding a plume of roses at her waist; her chin to the side, her dark eyes and dark hair swept up.

The grown-ups were talking about the woman next door who died after she cut her finger on a splinter from a Christmas-tree ornament. Ma said how appropriate it was that a pheasant appeared out of the woods at Mr. Granger's funeral.

"But *she* was the one who loved to shoot," said Aunt Fran with her Adam's apple thrust out.

"Terrible story about their son," said Sophie's mother. Her thumb rubbed her knuckle while the conversation continued.

They talked without looking at each other, their chairs all facing in. Aunt Fran addressed her remarks to the one spot in the room where no one sat or stood. She and Uncle Thomas were having a pond dug in the back of their house and by mistake the workers had struck a pipe. Aunt Fran and Uncle Thomas told the story at the same time, interrupting each other.

Uncle Charles said, "It's like a zoo at my house." When he made jokes, he barely cracked a smile. Bit was lucky, she got to have a pony and three dogs and sheep. "Our sheep just stand there in the rain," said Churly.

Uncle Charles said the chickens hated him. And now they had a turtle, with a chain attached to the loop on its shell so it wouldn't run away. It chooses to sleep where I'm accustomed to park my car," he said.

"A what?" said Pa, angry at having to strain.

"Turtle," yelled Uncle Charles.

"Where's our turtle soup then?" said Pa and some of the family chuckled. Sophie didn't think he was kidding. He sat there still as a statue, his hands gripping the mahogany claws of his chair.

Caitlin was up at the bar with Churly, pouring a ginger ale. Sophie got Bit and Delilah to go to the owl room, and the boys followed. There were glass owls and a hollow brass owl with a hinge so its head lifted off, two china owls with flowers, owl engravings, and a needlepoint of an owl that Caitlin had done from a kit. They had a game they played by closing their eyes and then going to nose to nose with someone and saying, "One, two, three, Owl-lee, Owl-lee," and opening their eye, imitating an owl. Delilah and Sherman were playing it.

Stretching down the corridor were group silhouettes of Vincent ancestors, black cutouts of children with ringlets, holding hoops, or men with bearded profiles. There were Pa's team pictures from Noble & Greenough and his class pictures from Harvard. All the faces in the photographs had straight noses and white eyeballs and hide-grey complexions. In one, Pa lay on his side, lengthwise, in front of everyone else. Sophie tried to match him with the Pa back in the living room. You never saw Pa smile, that was common knowledge, except in one picture that Vincents had at home, of Pa with the Senator. His job had been to write speeches, and according to Sophie's mother, he got a dollar a year to do it. In the picture, his grin is closed, like a clown's. There was Pa in an army uniform—but Sophie knew that story of that. Pa missed the war, sailing to France on the exact day Armistice was declared. At the end of the hall, Sophie came to the picture of Pa's brother, the famous doctor who discovered the cure for a disease whose name she could never remember. He had died a long time ago.

When they drifted back into the living room, Uncle Charles was recalling when the lawn froze and they could skate over the sunken garden.

"Not true," said Pa, gurgling. "My lawn was never an ice rink."

"Sure," said Sophie's father. "Everything was frozen solid."

Pa said, "Never happened in my lifetime."

Uncle Charles clamped on his pipe with his back teeth. "Oh yes it did, Pa. You must be losing your memory." His voice was squeaky.

"Ma," demanded Pa.

With her perfectly calm face, ma said, "I do remember it, yes." She looked at Pa and said gently, "It was when you were away."

"Nonsense," he said. "I never went anywhere."

The children's table was wobbly. This year Sophie got to sit at the big table, and Caitlin and Churly, too. Bit said she was glad to stay at the children's table where she wouldn't have to use good manners.

When the plates came, they had everything on them already, even creamed onions, whether you liked them or not. Pa looked down at the food in front of him.

"Gravy, Granpa?" shouted Aunt Fran. Half-frowning, he regarded her. She swung a silver ladle over his turkey, bringing it up with a flourish. "Yummy," she said in a booming voice.

Everyone at the table used loud voices—family behavior. When Sophie went out to go to the bathroom, she stood for a moment in the hall between the Chinese portraits and listened to the clatter behind her, the hollow echo from the high ceilings, Aunt Fran's hooting, the knives clinking on the china, her mother's voice saying something quietly to the little table. Sophie could tell Uncle Charles from his whine, and her grandmother was the slow voice enunciating each word the way old people do because they're tired of talking. Sophie went up close to study one Indian picture—you could see the tongue of the snake and the man's pink fingernails and even the horse's white eyelashes. Ma said they used one cat hair at a time to paint it. In the bathroom was the same brown soap shaped like an owl. The towels she used were so stiff it was like drying your hands with paper.

Sophie came back as Aunt Fran was saying, "He's a crook."

"Now stop that," said Ma, lifting her chin.

"Who is?" asked Churly, brightening.

"Never mind," said Ma to her knife and fork.

So Churly asked, "What'd he steal?"

Ma said, "They've started reshingling the house in North Eden." The Vincents went to Maine every summer. A drawer in one of the side tables was always kept pulled out—a red velvet slab with rows of arrowheads, ones that Pa had found on Boxed Island in

Maine. You played Kick-the-Can on the sloping lawn after supper. When Churly was it, Sophie would let herself get caught. One time, playing spy, they saw Ma on her balcony with her hair all down, falling down her arms like a white shawl. Sometimes Ma and Pa were like ghosts. You'd see them pass behind a window in their house, or snapping out a light and vanishing. In the daytime, Ma's hair would be twisted into a knot at the back.

Aunt Fran was wondering wehtehr there didn't used to be a porch around the house at Cassett Harbor, the old house. Uncle Thomas shouted, "That's right. Mrs. Lothrop said they'd have the Herreshoff teas on that porch."

"The correct term," said Ma, "is piazza."

"It must have been quite a view," said Sophie's mother.

"It's where you'd sit with your beaux," said Ma.

"We tore down the piazza," said Pa. Sophie was surprised he was listening.

Aunt Fran said, "I thought it burned down."

"Yes." Ma's nod was meant to end the discussion.

"How'd it burn down?" Churly asked. His long neck went up and his ears stuck out. Sophie felt herself flushing.

Pa said, "It—was—torn—down." His shoulders were round and low and his chin hovered inches above his plate.

Down at her end, Ma said, "The remainder was torn down, yes." Pa glared at her. His bottom lip drooped, as white as the rest of his face.

"How'd it burn down?" Churly asked eagerly.

Ma pulled some empty dishes over the tablecloth toward her. "You finish," she said. She stood up and carried some things to the sideboard, then glanced over at the table to see what else to take. She piled small dishes on the turkey platter in front of Pa and went to lift it.

"Don't touch that," he said. He didn't look at her, or at the platter, but stared at the middle of the table.

"I think you're done," said his wife.

Sophie's mother pushed her chair back. "Let me . . ." Her napkin bloomed like a white flower when she let go of it on the table.

"I'm not through," said Pa. "I want to pick." He didn't move.

"Now, Pa," said Aunt Fran. "We've got Livia's pies coming."

"Damn Livia's pies," he said. "Only occasionally you will disguise a voyage and cancel all that crap."

The little table fell quiet.

"I'm all ready for dessert." Uncle Thomas looked perky. "You ready for dessert there, Churly?"

Churly nodded, then looked to see what Pa would do next.

Caitlin and Sophie started to take their plates, but their mother gave them a stay-put look and made several quick trips through the swinging door.

Pa growled, "I've been eating goddamned custard all Monday."

Aunt Ginny asked, "What kind of pies do we have?" Each year they had the same: apple, mince and pumpkin. Everyone began saying which kind they wanted. Ma sat back down.

As they ate their pie and ice cream, Pa kept mumbling. "Bunch of idiots. . . . Going to knock it off like a bullhorn. . . . Newspaper, *then* cigar. . . ."

"No dessert for you, Pa?" Uncle Charles asked.

"I wouldn't set foot in there to piss," said Pa Vincent.

Ma went down and whispered into Pa's ear. No one could hear what she said, but Pa answered in a loud, slow voice, "Why won't you go shoot yourself?"

In the kitchen, Sophie and Caitlin watched Churly tell Livia. She fidgeted with pans and finally set them in the sink. "Your grandfather just needs his nap," said Livia. She studied the children's faces to see if they understood this. She was frowning. Her gaze drifted off and she turned her mammoth back to them, kept on sudsing things in the sink. He'll be wanting his . . ." but they couldn't hear what.

In the living room, the grown-ups were serving coffee. On the tray were miniature blue enamel cups, a silver bowl holding light-brown-sugar rocks, and chocolate mints in tissue paper envelopes.

Ma and Aunt Fran came down from upstairs where they had taken Pa.

"Everything all right?" bellowed Uncle Thomas. His wife scowled at him.

Ma took her place on the sofa. "Fine," she said. "Fine."

Rosie handed her a cup with a tiny gold spoon placed on the saucer. Delilah, her arm draped across her mother's knee, felt brave. "Was Pa mad at us?" she asked. Caitlin glared at her.

"Hah," shouted Uncle Charles, half-laughing, "he wasn't mad at me."

Sophie's father said, "He didn't know what he was saying, Delou." He was over by the window.

Ma sipped at the rim of her cup. Gus Vincent touched the curtain with one finger and gazed out. Rosie busily poured more coffee.

Looking at Delilah, Ma said, "He was not mad at you, dear."

Aunt Ginny looked up, surprised. "The turkey was delicious," she said.

"Oh shut up, Virginia," said Uncle Charles.

Sophie looked up at Churly and noticed his ear sticking out and all his features flattened out, stiff, into a mask.

Uncle Thomas said, "Super meal, super." He jiggled the change in his pocket, waiting for something to happen.

"You can thank Livia for that." Ma set down her saucer. Sherman was in the rocking chair at her feet, lurching to and fro.

"Yes," said Rosie Vincent, "but you arranged it so beautifully."

Ma folded her hands. Her expression was matter-of-fact. "Actually, I don't think I've ever arranged anything beautifully in my whole life."

The grown-ups exchanged looks and for a moment there was no sound except for Sherman creaking in the rocking chair at Ma's feet. He got up, all at once aware of himself, and scurried himself to his mother. The chair went on rocking. Ma stared at it. Rocking empty, it meant something to her.

So she reached out one lavender shoe to still it, and did just that.

Celebrations of Thanksgiving: Cuban Seasonings

ANA MENÉNDEZ

Many Americans today, no less than in times past, are immigrants—or children of immigrants—who live between the culture of their homeland and the culture of their new home to which they are, sooner or later, assimilated. This story, written in 2004 by Los Angeles-born Cuban American novelist and journalist Ana Menéndez (b. 1970) shows the way a Cuban immigrant family dealt with this cultural “doubleness” around the peculiarly American holiday of Thanksgiving. The daughter of Cuban exiles, Menéndez has written four books of fiction, earning a Pushcart Prize, and has worked as a columnist for the Miami Herald.

What was the original attitude of the Menéndez family toward Thanksgiving? Why did they strive to transform the holiday and give it a Cuban flavor? How successful was this effort at transformation? What happened over the years to this family and its Thanksgiving traditions—and was it inevitable? What do you make of the author’s prayer at the last Thanksgiving she recounts? Has the holiday served to make these immigrants more American? More grateful?

We called it “Tansgibin” and to celebrate, we filled our plates with food that was strenuously—almost comically—Cuban: black beans and rice, fried plantains, yucca. Back then we didn’t know enough to know we were being ethnic, much less trendy. This was simply the kind of food we ate, secure in our culinary superiority, and heirs to a long kitchen tradition that expressed everything from annoyance (“You’re making my life a yogurt”) to ubiquity (“Like parsley, he’s in all the sauces”) in terms of food. Thanksgiving, in our own small context, seemed the perfect holiday. And if we were a bit embarrassed at not having invented it ourselves, we went about transforming it with the religious zeal of people finding themselves suddenly, woefully, far from home.

At the center of the party was, of course, the pig. In the early years, when my parents still dreamt of returning to their island, Tansgibin was celebrated, as were all major holidays in Cuba, with roasted pork. This was a time when the family was closest and largest, still bound by common memories and hopes, and a 50-pound pig roasting in the backyard seemed perfectly natural.

The day before, the men would drive out to Homestead to pick out a live pig for slaughter. The pig was then cleaned, split down its rib cage (a process I never witnessed), and laid out over newspapers and a large tray in the kitchen to marinate. The marinade, the *mojo*, was the most important part of the equation and families lived and died by their *mojo* recipes. Today you can buy a strange chemical syrup in bottles labeled “*mojo*”—of which the best one can say about it is that it’s another sad example of the banality of exile.

Mojo is not complicated to make, at any rate. And it makes up in exuberance for whatever it lacks in subtlety. First, several heads of garlic are peeled and then mashed with a little salt (to keep them from jumping) in a large mortar. If one is marinating pork, and therefore large quantities are called for, the garlic goes into a blender along with fresh sour orange juice. Cumin might be added, perhaps dried oregano. This is blended well and the whole thing poured over the pig. In the years before concern over food poisoning, the pig was covered and left on the table all night. As a girl, I was so addicted to the salty *mojo* that I often would sneak down to the kitchen and scoop up dripping fingerfuls of the stuff from the wells of the pig’s open ribs.

The following day, the men would dig a hole in the backyard, light a fire, and set the pig to roasting over a grill, covered with banana leaves, and later foil. It had every aspect of ritual, as well as dress rehearsal—for come Christmas Eve the whole thing would be repeated with far more ceremony and purpose. These were long, warm days in Miami. The men—shirtless and drinking beer as they told jokes and reminisced—tended to the roasting from morning until evening. The rest of the meal was up to the women and the day was a whirlwind of pots and rice makers and sizzling *sazón* (seasonings) and smells and the “hish hish” of the pressure cooker hurrying along its charge of black beans, and then of yucca. It was a happy, bantering gathering, as I remember all women’s efforts in the kitchen; and perhaps I’m one of the few women of my generation who does not consider the kitchen a chore or an affront to my independence, but rather a place of warmth and sustenance.

Those were happy days, colored as they were by the brief honeyed hour of childhood, and when I look back on them now I have a strange sense of them having taken place not in America, but in the Cuba of my parents’ memories. But change, always inevitable and irrevocable, came gradually. As usual, it was prefigured by food. One year someone brought a pumpkin pie from Publix. It was pronounced inedible. But a wall had been breached. Cranberry sauce followed. I myself introduced a stuffing recipe (albeit composed of figs and prosciutto) that to my current dismay became a classic. Soon began the rumblings about pork being unhealthy. And besides, the family was shrinking: first through sicknesses and then death, and finally through misunderstandings and the pressures of a life that became more hurried and graceless by the day. A whole pig seemed suddenly an embarrassing extravagance, a desperate and futile grasping after the old days.

And so came the turkey. I don’t remember when exactly. I do recall that at the time, I had been mildly relieved. I had already begun to develop an annoyance with my family’s narrow culinary tastes—which to me signaled a more generalized lack of curiosity about the wider world. I had not yet discovered M.F.K. Fisher,²³ and at any rate, I wasn’t old enough to understand that a hungry man has no reason to play games with his palate. I remember that soon after that first turkey appeared, there was much confusion over how to cook this new beast. The problem was eventually resolved by treating the bird exactly as if it were a pig. In went the garlic and the sour orange, the night-long *mojo* bath. When this didn’t seem quite enough to rid the poor turkey of its inherent blandness, someone

²³ Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher (1908–92), an American food writer.

came up with the idea of poking small incisions right into the meat and stuffing them with slivered garlic. Disaster, in this way, was mostly averted. And to compliment the cook one said, "This tastes just like roast pork."

I moved away from Miami almost 10 years ago. I've only been back for one or two Christmas Eve celebrations. But somehow I've always found myself in the city on Thanksgiving. My sister still claims it as her favorite holiday, even if the past few years she's used the occasion to leave town. The celebrations wax and wane. Occasionally we can still muster large crowds, though we haven't had pork for years now. Sometimes it is another occasion to see the larger family, and also to witness the ravages. It was on one such Thanksgiving that I overheard my father's mother ask him, "Tell me, have we been in this country a long time?" I was in the library of my parents' home, writing what would become my first book, and I immediately put the line into a story. None of us knew it then, but she had already begun the long decline into the forgetting illness that would eventually finish tearing apart the family as she babbled quietly in a corner, "Is this Tia Cuca's house? I have to return home, my mother is expecting me in Cárdenas . . ."

This last Thanksgiving was the smallest on record. We gathered, for the first time in memory, not at a massive folding table in the porch, but around the regular dining room table at my parent's home. It was just me, my parents, my mother's mother, and her sister. My husband was in Iraq, covering the war. My sister was in Aruba with her boyfriend. My grandmother's husband was dead, as was her sister's. And my other grandmother had been temporarily shut in a nursing home, a final act of forgetting which my father could not stomach on Tansgibin.

When it came time to say grace, my father refused. "You have nothing to be thankful for?" my mother asked, angrily. "Plenty," my father said through clenched teeth. The old women eyed each other nervously. In the silence, the one agnostic among us began to pray. Probably I expressed an ironic thanks for family and asked that there be peace in the world. I've forgotten the smirking details. I do remember that the rest of the meal passed in awkward silence. There was war within and war without and there is a lot about that Thanksgiving that I wish could have been different. But the turkey was delicious. I realized, with a pang of nostalgia that surprises me still, that it tasted just like roast pork.



Prosperity



How We Kept Thanksgiving at Oldtown

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

In this selection from her partially autobiographical and partially fictional account of "New England in its seed-bed," before the hot suns of modern progress had developed its sprouting germs" (published in 1869), Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–96), author of Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), remembers, perhaps with some embellishment, what Thanksgiving was like in her childhood, when the family gathered in the home of her grandmother for "the king and high priest of all festivals." The general scene—like Stowe's account itself—is filled with energy, exuberance, merriment, joy, and good will, as the family's prosperity and abundance of food and good cheer are shared with all around.

Collecting concrete examples from the story, can you say what kind of prosperity is to be found at Oldtown? Is Thanksgiving in Oldtown a departure from, or a fulfillment of, the religious teachings and political aspirations of their Puritan ancestors: "to form a state of society of such equality of conditions, and to make the means of securing the goods of life so free to all, that everybody should find abundant employment for his faculties in a prosperous seeking of his fortunes"? How does the combination of abundance of food, charitable concern for the needy, and lively music and dancing contribute to the creation of community? Is there anything spiritual or religious in the Oldtown Thanksgiving?

On the whole, about this time in our life we were a reasonably happy set of children. The Thanksgiving festival of that year is particularly impressed on my mind as a white day.

Are there any of my readers who do not know what Thanksgiving day is to a child? Then let them go back with me, and recall the image of it as we kept it in Oldtown.

People have often supposed, because the Puritans founded a society where there were no professed public amusements, that therefore there was no fun going on in the ancient land of Israel, and that there were no cakes and ale, because they were virtuous. They were never more mistaken in their lives. There was an abundance of sober, well-considered merriment; and the hinges of life were well oiled with that sort of secret humor which to this day gives the raciness to real Yankee wit. Besides this, we must remember that life itself is the greatest possible amusement to people who really believe they can do much with it,—who have that intense sense of what can be brought to pass by human effort, that was characteristic of the New England colonies. To such it is not exactly proper to say that life is an amusement, but it certainly is an engrossing interest that takes the place of all amusements. . . .

Our good Puritan fathers intended to form a state of society of such equality of conditions, and to make the means of securing the goods of life so free to all, that everybody should find abundant employment for his faculties in a prosperous seeking of

his fortunes. Hence, while they forbade theatres, operas, and dances, they made a state of unparalleled peace and prosperity, where one could go to sleep at all hours of day or night with the house door wide open, without bolt or bar, yet without apprehension of any to molest or make afraid.

There were, however, some few national fêtes:—Election day, when the Governor took his seat with pomp and rejoicing, and all the housewives outdid themselves in election cake, and one or two training days, when all the children were refreshed, and our military ardor quickened, by the roll of drums, and the flash of steel bayonets, and marchings and evolutions,—sometimes ending in that sublimest of military operations, a sham fight, in which nobody was killed. The Fourth of July took high rank, after the Declaration of Independence; but the king and high priest of all festivals was the autumn Thanksgiving.

When the apples were all gathered and the cider was all made, and the yellow pumpkins were rolled in from many a hill in billows of gold, and the corn was husked, and the labors of the season were done, and the warm, late days of Indian Summer came in, dreamy and calm and still, with just frost enough to crisp the ground of a morning, but with warm trances of benignant, sunny hours at noon, there came over the community a sort of genial repose of spirit,—a sense of something accomplished, and of a new golden mark made in advance on the calendar of life,—and the deacon began to say to the minister, of a Sunday, "I suppose it's about time for the Thanksgiving proclamation. . . ."

We also felt its approach in all departments of the household,—the conversation at this time beginning to turn on high and solemn culinary mysteries and receipts of wondrous power and virtue. New modes of elaborating squash pies and quince tarts were now oftentimes carefully discussed at the evening fireside by Aunt Lois and Aunt Keziah, and notes seriously compared with the experiences of certain other Aunties of high repute in such matters. I noticed that on these occasions their voices often fell into mysterious whispers, and that receipts of especial power and sanctity were communicated in tones so low as entirely to escape the vulgar ear. I still remember the solemn shake of the head with which my Aunt Lois conveyed to Miss Mehitable Rossiter the critical properties of *mace*, in relation to its powers of producing in corn fritters a suggestive resemblance to oysters. As ours was an oyster-getting district, and as that charming bivalve was perfectly easy to come at, the interest of such an imitation can be accounted for only by the fondness of the human mind for works of art.

For as much as a week beforehand, "we children" were employed in chopping mince for pies to a most wearisome fineness, and in pounding cinnamon, allspice, and cloves in a great *lignum-vitæ* mortar; and the sound of this pounding and chopping re-echoed through all the rafters of the old house with a hearty and vigorous cheer, most refreshing to our spirits.

In those days there were none of the thousand ameliorations of the labors of housekeeping which have since arisen,—no ground and prepared spices and sweet herbs; everything came into our hands in the rough, and in bulk, and the reducing of it into a

state for use was deemed one of the appropriate labors of childhood. Even the very salt that we used in cooking was rock-salt, which we were required to wash and dry and pound and sift, before it became fit for use.

At other times of the year we sometimes murmured at these labors, but those that were supposed to usher in the great Thanksgiving festival were always entered into with enthusiasm. There were signs of richness all around us,—stoning of raisins, cutting of citron, slicing of candied orange-peel. Yet all these were only dawnings and intimations of what was coming during the week of real preparation, after the Governor's proclamation had been read.

The glories of that proclamation! We knew beforehand the Sunday it was to be read, and walked to church with alacrity, filled with gorgeous and vague expectations.

The cheering anticipation sustained us through what seemed to us the long waste of the sermon and prayers; and when at last the auspicious moment approached,—when the last quaver of the last hymn had died out,—the whole house rippled with a general movement of complacency, and a satisfied smile of pleased expectation might be seen gleaming on the faces of all the young people, like a ray of sunshine through a garden of flowers.

Thanksgiving now was dawning! We children poked one another, and fairly giggled with unreprieved delight as we listened to the crackle of the slowly unfolding document. That great sheet of paper impressed us as something supernatural, by reason of its mighty size, and by the broad seal of the State affixed thereto; and when the minister read therefrom, "By his Excellency, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, a Proclamation," our mirth was with difficulty repressed by admonitory glances from our sympathetic elders. Then, after a solemn enumeration of the benefits which the Commonwealth had that year received at the hands of Divine Providence, came at last the naming of the eventful day, and, at the end of all, the imposing heraldic words, "God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts." And then, as the congregation broke up and dispersed, all went their several ways with schemes of mirth and feasting in their heads.

And now came on the week in earnest. In the very watches of the night preceding Monday morning, a preternatural stir below stairs, and the thunder of the pounding-barrel, announced that the washing was to be got out of the way before daylight, so as to give "ample scope and room enough" for the more pleasing duties of the season. . . .

In the corner of the great kitchen, during all these days, the jolly old oven roared and crackled in great volcanic billows of flame, snapping and gurgling as if the old fellow entered with joyful sympathy into the frolic of the hour; and then, his great heart being once warmed up, he brooded over successive generations of pies and cakes, which went in raw and came out cooked, till butteries and dressers and shelves and pantries were literally crowded with a jostling abundance.

A great cold northern chamber, where the sun never shone, and where in winter the snow sifted in at the window-cracks, and ice and frost reigned with undisputed sway, was fitted up to be the storehouse of these surplus treasures. There, frozen solid, and thus well preserved in their icy fetters, they formed a great repository for all the winter months; and the pies baked at Thanksgiving often came out fresh and good with the violets of April.

During this eventful preparation week, all the female part of my grandmother's household, as I have before remarked, were at a height above any ordinary state of mind,—they moved about the house rapt in a species of prophetic frenzy. It seemed to be considered a necessary feature of such festivals, that everybody should be in a hurry, and everything in the house should be turned bottom upwards with enthusiasm,—so at least we children understood it, and we certainly did our part to keep the ball rolling. . . .

Moreover, my grandmother's kitchen at this time began to be haunted by those occasional hangers-on and retainers, of uncertain fortunes, whom a full experience of her bountiful habits led to expect something at her hand at this time of the year. . . .

Aunt Lois never had a hearty conviction of the propriety of these arrangements; but my grandmother, who had a prodigious verbal memory, bore down upon her with such strings of quotations from the Old Testament that she was utterly routed.

"Now," says my Aunt Lois, "I s'pose we've got to have Betty Poganut and Sally Wonsamug, and old Obscue and his wife, and the whole tribe down, roosting around our doors, till we give 'em something. That's just mother's way; she always keeps a whole generation at her heels."

"How many times must I tell you, Lois, to read your Bible?" was my grandmother's rejoinder; and loud over the sound of pounding and chopping in the kitchen could be heard the voice of her quotations: "If there be among you a poor man in any of the gates of the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand, from thy poor brother. Thou shalt surely give him; and thy heart shall not be grieved when thou givest to him, because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works; for the poor shall never cease from out of the land. . . ."

Besides these offerings to the poor, the handsomest turkey of the flock was sent, dressed in first-rate style, with Deacon Badger's dutiful compliments, to the minister; and we children, who were happy to accompany black Cæsar on this errand, generally received a seed-cake and a word of acknowledgment from the minister's lady.

Well, at last, when all the chopping and pounding and baking and brewing, preparatory to the festival, were gone through with, the eventful day dawned. All the tribes of the Badger family were to come back home to the old house, with all the relations of every degree, to eat the Thanksgiving dinner. And it was understood that in the evening the minister and his lady would look in upon us, together with some of the select aristocracy of Oldtown.

Great as the preparations were for the dinner, everything was so contrived that not a soul in the house should be kept from the morning service of Thanksgiving in the church, and from listening to the Thanksgiving sermon, in which the minister was expected to express his views freely concerning the politics of the country, and the state of things in society generally, in a somewhat more secular vein of thought than was deemed exactly appropriate to the Lord's day. But it is to be confessed, that, when the good man got carried away by the enthusiasm of his subject to extend these exercises beyond a certain length, anxious glances, exchanged between good wives, sometimes indicated a weakness of the flesh, having a tender reference to the turkeys and chickens and chicken pies, which might possibly be overdoing in the ovens at home. But your old brick oven was a true Puritan institution, and backed up the devotional habits of good housewives, by the capital care which he took of whatever was committed to his capacious bosom. A truly well-bred oven would have been ashamed of himself all his days, and blushed redder than his own fires, if a God-fearing house-matron, away at the temple of the Lord, should come home and find her pie-crust either burned or underdone by his over or under zeal; so the old fellow generally managed to bring things out exactly right.

When sermons and prayers were all over, we children rushed home to see the great feast of the year spread.

What chitterings and chatterings there were all over the house, as all the aunties and uncles and cousins came pouring in, taking off their things, looking at one another's bonnets and dresses, and mingling their comments on the morning sermon with various opinions on the new millinery outfits, and with bits of home news, and kindly neighborhood gossip.

Uncle Bill, whom the Cambridge college authorities released, as they did all the other youngsters of the land for Thanksgiving day, made a breezy stir among them all, especially with the young cousins of the feminine gender.

The best room on this occasion was thrown wide open, and its habitual coldness had been warmed by the burning down of a great stack of hickory logs, which had been heaped up unsparingly since morning. It takes some hours to get a room warm, where a family never sits, and which therefore has not in its walls one particle of the genial vitality which comes from the in-dwelling of human beings. But on Thanksgiving day, at least, every year, this marvel was effected in our best room.

Although all servile labor and vain recreation on this day were by law forbidden, according to the terms of the proclamation, it was not held to be a violation of the precept, that all the nice old aunties should bring their knitting-work and sit gently trotting their needles around the fire; nor that Uncle Bill should start a full-fledged romp among the girls and children, while the dinner was being set on the long table in the neighboring kitchen. Certain of the good elderly female relatives, of serious and discreet demeanor, assisted at this operation.

But who shall do justice to the dinner, and describe the turkey, and chickens, and chicken pies, with all that endless variety of vegetables which the American soil and climate have contributed to the table, and which, without regard to the French doctrine of courses, were all piled together in jovial abundance upon the smoking board? There was much carving and laughing and talking and eating, and all showed that cheerful ability to despatch the provisions which was the ruling spirit of the hour. After the meat came the plum-puddings, and then the endless array of pies, till human nature was actually bewildered and overpowered by the tempting variety; and even we children turned from the profusion offered to us, and wondered what was the matter that we could eat no more.

When all was over, my grandfather rose at the head of the table, and a fine venerable picture he made as he stood there, his silver hair flowing in curls down each side of his clear, calm face, while, in conformity to the old Puritan custom, he called their attention to a recital of the mercies of God in his dealings with their family.

It was a sort of family history, going over and touching upon the various events which had happened. He spoke of my father's death, and gave a tribute to his memory; and closed all with the application of a time-honored text, expressing the hope that as years passed by we might "so number our days as to apply our hearts unto wisdom"; and then he gave out that psalm which in those days might be called the national hymn of the Puritans.

"Let children hear the mighty deeds
Which God performed of old,
Which in our younger years we saw,
And which our fathers told.

"He bids us make his glories known,
His works of power and grace.
And we'll convey his wonders down
Through every rising race.

"Our lips shall tell them to our sons,
And they again to theirs;
That generations yet unborn
May teach them to their heirs.

"Thus shall they learn in God alone
Their hope securely stands;
That they may ne'er forget his works,
But practise his commands."

This we all united in singing to the venerable tune of St. Martin's, an air which, the reader will perceive, by its multiplicity of quavers and inflections gave the greatest possible scope to the cracked and trembling voices of the ancients, who united in it with even more zeal than the younger part of the community.

Uncle Fliakim Sheril, furbished up in a new crisp black suit, and with his spindle-shanks trimly incased in the smoothest of black silk stockings, looking for all the world just like an alert and spirited black cricket, outdid himself on this occasion in singing *counter*, in that high, weird voice that he must have learned from the wintry winds that usually piped around the corners of the old house. But any one who looked at him, as he sat with his eyes closed, beating time with head and hand, and, in short, with every limb of his body, must have perceived the exquisite satisfaction which he derived from this mode of expressing himself. I much regret to be obliged to state that my graceless Uncle Bill, taking advantage of the fact that the eyes of all his elders were devotionally closed, stationing himself a little in the rear of my Uncle Fliakim, performed an exact imitation of his *counter*, with such a killing facility that all the younger part of the audience were nearly dead with suppressed laughter. Aunt Lois, who never shut her eyes a moment on any occasion, discerned this from a distant part of the room, and in vain endeavored to stop it by vigorously shaking her head at the offender. She might as well have shaken it at a bobolink¹ tilting on a clover-top. In fact, Uncle Bill was Aunt Lois's weak point, and the corners of her own mouth were observed to twitch in such a suspicious manner that the whole moral force of her admonition was destroyed.

And now, the dinner being cleared away, we youngsters, already excited to a tumult of laughter, tumbled into the best room, under the supervision of Uncle Bill, to relieve ourselves with a game of "blind-man's-buff," while the elderly women washed up the dishes and got the house in order, and the men-folks went out to the barn to look at the cattle, and walked over the farm and talked of the crops. . . .

Whenever or wherever it was that the idea of the sinfulness of dancing arose in New England, I know not; it is a certain fact that at Oldtown, at this time, the presence of the minister and his lady was held not to be in the slightest degree incompatible with this amusement. I appeal to many of my readers, if they or their parents could not recall a time in New England when in all the large towns dancing assemblies used to be stately held, at which the minister and his lady, though never uniting in the dance, always gave an approving attendance, and where all the decorous, respectable old church-members brought their children, and stayed to watch an amusement in which they no longer actively partook. No one looked on with a more placid and patronizing smile than Dr. Lothrop and his lady, as one after another began joining the exercise, which, commencing first with the children and young people, crept gradually upwards among the elders. . . .

Of course the dances in those days were of a strictly moral nature. The very thought of one of the round dances of modern times would have sent Lady Lothrop behind her big fan in helpless confusion, and exploded my grandmother like a full-charged arsenal of indignation. As it was, she stood, her broad, pleased face radiant with satisfaction, as the wave of joyousness crept up higher and higher round her, till the elders, who stood keeping time with their heads and feet, began to tell one another how they had danced with their sweethearts in good old days gone by, and the elder women began to blush and

¹ A small New World blackbird.

bridle, and boast of steps that they could take in their youth till the music finally subdued them, and into the dance they went.

"Well, well!" quoth my grandmother; "they're all at it so hearty, I don't see why I shouldn't try it myself." And into the Virginia reel she went, amid screams of laughter from all the younger members of the company.

But I assure you my grandmother was not a woman to be laughed at; for whatever she once set on foot, she "put through" with a sturdy energy befitting a daughter of the Puritans.

"Why shouldn't I dance?" she said, when she arrived red and resplendent at the bottom of the set. "Didn't Mr. Despondency and Miss Muchafraid and Mr. Readytohalt all dance together in the Pilgrim's Progress?"—and the minister in his ample flowing wig, and my lady in her stiff brocade, gave to my grandmother a solemn twinkle of approbation.

As nine o'clock struck, the whole scene dissolved and melted; for what well-regulated village would think of carrying festivities beyond that hour?

And so ended our Thanksgiving at Oldtown.

Thanksgiving on Slav Creek

JACK LONDON

In contrast to the previous story, the “prosperity” in this tale exists mainly as a hope—in keeping with the root meaning of the word, (Latin: pro + spes, hope) “according to hope”—as the main characters hopefully prospect (“look forward”: pro + specere) for gold. Like them, Jack London (1876–1916) participated in the Yukon Gold Rush of 1897. But the only gold he brought back was an experience that he would mine for gems of literature for much of his writing life, as evidenced in his well-known novels like Call of the Wild (1903) and White Fang (1906), as well as in his stories like “To Build a Fire” (1908) and “Thanksgiving on Slav Creek” (1900), all of which draw on the places he saw and the people he met during those simultaneously hope-filled and brutal times in the Northwestern Yukon territory.

In this story, Nella and George Tichborne have left their home “down in the States” and come to the Yukon territory in search of gold. Accompanied by Ikeesh, an Indian woman, they brave the darkness and the freezing cold to beat out “the stampede” of fortune hunters rushing to stake a prospecting claim on Slav Creek, rumored to be a place where anyone might strike it rich. Can you imagine what the experience must have been like for these three? What enabled them to bear the brutal conditions? For what purpose do they want to find gold? What would be their ultimate “prosperity”? What is the significance of the uninvited guest who suddenly appears at the end? What makes this story a tale of “true Thanksgiving”?

She woke up with a start. Her husband was speaking in a low voice, insistently.

“Come,” he added. “Get up. Get up Nella. Quick. Get up.”

“But I don’t want to get up,” she objected, striving vainly to lapse back into the comfortable drowse.

“But I say you must. And don’t make any noise, but come along. Hurry! Oh, do hurry. Our fortune’s made if you will only hurry!”

Nella Tichborne was now wide awake, what with the suppressed excitement in his whispers, and she thrust her feet out with a shiver upon the cold cabin floor.

“What is it?” she asked, petulantly. “What is it?”

“Ssh!” he sibilated. “Don’t make a noise. Mum’s the worse. Dress at once.”

“But what is it?”

“Be quiet, if you love me, and dress.”

"Now, George, I won't move an inch until you tell me." She capped the ultimatum by sitting back on the edge of the bunk.

The man groaned. "Oh, the time, the precious time, you're losing! Didn't I tell you our fortune was made? Do hurry! It's a tip. Nobody knows. A secret. There's a stampede on. 'Ssh! Put on warm clothes. It's the coldest yet. The frost is sixty-five below. I'm going to call Ikeesh. She would like to be in on it, I know. And oh, Nella—"

"Yes?"

"Do be quick."

He stepped across to the other end of the cabin where a blanket partitioned the room into two, and called Ikeesh. The Indian woman was already awake. Her husband was up on his Bonanza claim, though this was her cabin, in which she was entertaining George Tichborne and Nella.

"What um matter, Tichborne?" she asked. "Um Nella sick?"

"No, no. Stampede. Rich creek. Plenty gold. Hurry up and dress."

"What um time?"

"Twelve o'clock. Midnight. Don't make any noise."

Five minutes later the cabin door opened and they passed out.

"'Ssh!" he cautioned.

"Oh, George! Have you got the frying-pan?"

"Yes."

"And the gold-pan? And the axe?"

"Yes, yes, Nella. And did you remember the baking-powder?"

They crunched rapidly through the snow, down the hill into sleeping Dawson. Light stampeding packs were on their backs, containing a fur robe each, and the barest necessities for a camp in the polar frost. But Dawson was not sleeping, after all. Cabin windows were flashing into light, and ever and anon the mumble of voices drifted to them through the darkness. The dogs were beginning to howl and the doors to slam. By the time they reached the Barracks the whole town was aroar behind them. Here the trail dropped abruptly over the bank and crossed the packed ice of the Yukon to the farther shore.

George Tichborne swore softly and to himself; but aloud: "It's leaked out somehow, and everybody's in it. Sure to be a big stampede now. But hurry up; they're all behind us, and we'll make it yet!"

"George!" A frightened wail punctured the still air and died away as Nella slipped on the icy footing and shot down the twenty-foot embankment into the pit of darkness beneath.

"Nella! Nella! Where are you?" He was falling over the great ice-blocks and groping his way to her as best he could. "Are you hurt? Where are you?"

"All right! Coming!" she answered, cheerily. "Only the snow's all down my back and melting. Brrr!"

Hardly were the trio reunited when two black forms plumped into their midst from above. These were followed by others, some arriving decorously, but the majority scorning the conventional locomotion and peregrinating along on every other portion of their anatomies but their feet. They also had stampeding packs on their backs and a great haste in their hearts.

"Where's the trail?" the cry went up. And thereat all fell to seeking for the path across the river.

At last, George Tichborne found it, and, with Nella and Ikeesh, led the way. But in the darkness they lost it repeatedly, slipping, stumbling, and falling over the wildly piled ice. Finally, in desperation, he lighted a candle, and as there was not a breath of wind, the way was easier. Nella looked back at the fifty stampedeers behind and laughed half-hysterically. Her husband gritted his teeth and plunged savagely on.

"At least we're at the head of the bunch, the very first," he whispered to her, as they swung south on the smoother trailer which ran along under the shadow of the bluffs.

But just then a flaming ribbon rose athwart the sky, spilling pulsating fire over the face of the night. The trail ahead lighted up, and as far as they could see it was cumbered with shadowy forms, all toiling in one direction. And now those behind began to pass them, one by one, straining mightily with the endeavor.

"Oh, Nella! Hurry!" He seized her hand and strove to drag her along. "It's the one chance we've been waiting for so long. Think of it if we fail!"

"Oh! Oh!" She gasped and tottered. "We will never make it! No, never!"

There was a sharp pain in her side, and she was dizzy with the unwonted speed. Ikeesh grunted encouragement and took her other hand. But none the less the vague forms from the rear continued to steadily overtake and pass them.

Hours which were as centuries passed. The night seemed without end to Nella. Gradually her consciousness seemed to leave her, her whole soul narrowing down to the one mechanical function of walking. Ever lifting, ever falling, and ever lifting anon, her limbs seemed to have become great pendulums of time. And before and behind glimmered two eternities, and between the two eternities, ever lifting, ever falling, she pulsed in vast rhythmical movement. She was no longer Nella Tichborne, a woman, but a rhythm—that was all, a rhythm. Sometimes the voices of Ikeesh and her husband came to her faintly; but in her semi-conscious condition she really did not hear. To-morrow there would be no record of the sounds; for a rhythm is not receptive to sound. The stars paled and dimmed, but she did not heed; the aurora-borealis shrouded its fires, and the darkness which is of the dawn fell upon the earth, but she did not know.

But ere the darkness fell, Ikeesh drew up to Tichborne and pointed to the loom of the mountains above the west shore of the river.

"Um Swede Creek?" she asked, laconically, pointing whither the trail led.

"No," he replied. "Slav Creek."

"Um no Slav Creek. Slav Creek—" She turned and pointed into the darkness five degrees to the south. "Um Slav Creek."

He came suddenly to a stop. Nella persisted in walking on, heedless of his outcries, till he ran after her and forced her to stop. She was obedient, but as a rhythm she no longer existed. The two eternities, which it was her task to hold apart, had rushed together, and she was not. So she wandered off to the old home down in the States, and sat under the great trees, and joyed in the warm sunshine—the old home, the old mortgaged home, which had driven them poleward after the yellow gold! The old home which it was their one aim to redeem! But she forgot all this, and laughed, and babbled, and poured the sunshine back and forth from hand to hand. How warm it was! Was there ever the like?

Tichborne conferred with Ikeesh. She so stolidly reiterated that Slav Creek lay farther to the south that he believed.

"Somebody went astray in the dark," he exulted, "and the rest followed his trail like sheep. Come on! Come on! We'll be in at the finish yet, and ahead of no end of those that passed us!"

He cut across a five-mile flat into the south-west, and two hours later, with gray dawn creeping over the landscape, entered the wood-hidden mouth of Slav Creek. The fresh signs of the stampede were so many and so various that he knew Ikeesh had spoken true, though he feared that the mistake had occurred too late in the night to have led enough on the wild-goose chase up Swede Creek.

“Oh, Nella,” he called to his wife, stumbling blindly at his heels, “it’s all right. We are sure to get a claim. Day has come. Look about you. This is Slav Creek, and behold the day is Thanksgiving day!”

She turned a blank face upon him. “Yes, the mortgage shall be lifted, principal and interest, I promise you—George and I both promise you. Even now, to-morrow, do we go north to lift the mortgage.”

Tichborne glanced helplessly at Ikeesh.

“Um much tired,” she commented, dryly. “But um be all right bime-by. Bime-by make camp, um be all right.”

They hastened on for five miles more, when they came to the first white-blazed trees and fresh-planted stakes of the newly located claims. Hour after hour, they traveled up the frozen bed of the creek, and still, stake to stake, the claims stretched in an unbroken line. Even the man and the Indian women grew weary and panted. Ikeesh kept a jealous eye on Nella’s face, and now and again, when it turned white, rubbed with snow the tip of the nose and the stretched skin of the cheek-bones. They passed many men—the successful ones—rolled in their furs by the side of the trail, or cooking and warming themselves over crackling fires of dry spruce. At eleven o’clock the sun rose in the south-east; but though there was no warmth in its rays, it gave a cheerier aspect to things.

“How much farther do the stakes run?” Tichborne asked of a man limping down the trail.

“I staked 179,” the man answered, stopping to pound the aching muscles of his legs. “But there were about ten more behind me: so I guess they’ve run it up to 189.”

“And this is 107,” Tichborne calculated aloud. “Five-hundred-foot claims—ten to the mile—about eight miles yet, eh?”

“Reckon you’ve ’bout hit it on the head,” the other assured him. “But you’d better hurry. Half the stampede went wrong up Swede Creek—that’s the next one to this—but they’re onto themselves now, and crossing the divide and tapping Slav Creek in the hundred-and-eighties.

“But they’re having a terrible time” he shouted back as he went on his way. “I met the first one that succeeded in crossing over. He said the trail was lined with people tee-totally played out, and that he knew himself five frozen to death on the divide.”

Frozen to death! The phrase served to rouse Nella from her maze of memory visions. Her glimmering senses came back to her, and she opened her eyes with a start. The interminable night was gone—spent where or how she could not say—and day broke upon her with a blinding flash. She looked about. Everything was strange and unreal. Both her companions were limping pitifully, and she was aware of a great full pain in her

own limbs. Her husband turned his head, and she saw his face and beard a mass of bristling ice. Ikeesh's mouth was likewise matted with frost, and her brows and lashes long and white. And Nella felt the weight on her own lashes, and the difficulty of drawing them apart from each other whenever she closed her eyes. The double excessive demand of the toil and the frost had burned up all the fuel of her body, and she felt cold and faint with hunger. This latter she found worse than the agony of the overused muscles; for a quivering nausea came upon her, and her knees trembled and knocked together with weakness.

Occasionally Tichborne made excursions to one side or the other in search of the claim-stakes, which were not always posted in the creek-bed. At such times Nella dropped down to rest, but Ikeesh dragged her afoot again, and shook her, and struck her harsh blows upon her body. For Ikeesh knew the way of the cold, and that a five-minute rest without fire meant death. So Nella has lapses and cruel awakenings till the whole thing seemed a hideous nightmare. Sometimes, the trees became glibbering shades, and Slav Creek turned to an Inferno, with her husband as Virgil, and leading her from circle to circle of the damned. But at other times, when she was dimly conscious, the memory of the old home was strong upon her, and the mortgage nerved her on.

A long, long time afterward—ages afterward, it seemed—she heard George cry aloud joyfully, and looking at him as though from a great distance, she saw him slashing the bark from a standing tree, and writing on the white surface with a lead-pencil. *At last!* She sank down into the snow, but Ikeesh struck her a stinging blow across the mouth. Nella came back angrily to her feet, but Ikeesh pushed her away and set her to work gathering dry wood.

Again came a long lapse, during which she toiled mechanically and unknowing; and when she next found herself she was in the furs by a big fire, and Ikeesh was stirring a batter of flour and water and boiling coffee. To her surprise, Nella felt much better after her rest, and was able to look about her. George ran up with a gold-pan of gravel which he had got from the creek bottom through an air-hole, and warmed his hands by the fire. When he had panned it out he brought the prospect over to her. The streak of black sand on the bottom was specked with yellow grains of glistening gold, and there were several small nuggets besides. He leaped up and down and about like a boy, for all his weary body.

"We've struck it at last, Nella!" he cried. "The home is safe! If that is a surface indication, what must it be on bed-rock?"

"Tell you what—"

They turned their heads, startled. A man had crawled up to the fire unobserved in their excitement.

“Tell you what,” he glowed, “it’s the richest creek in Alaska and the Northwest. Sure!” He sat down uninvited, and tried to unfasten his ice-bound moccasins. “Say, I broke through the ice up here a piece and wet my feet. I kind of think they’re freezing.”

Ikeesh stopped from her cooking, and Tichborne lending a hand, they cut off the new-comer’s moccasins and socks and rubbed his white feet till the glow of life returned.

“Tell you what,” the sufferer went on, unconcernedly, while they worked over him, “judging from indications, you people are located on the richest run of the creek. Sure! But I got in on it; you betcher life I did! Got lost on Swede Creek, too, and hit across the divide. Say! No end of frozen men on that trail. But I got in on it, tell you what!”

“A true Thanksgiving, Nella.”

George Tichborne passed her a tin plate of flapjacks swimming in bacon grease and a great mug of piping black coffee. She seized his hand impulsively and pressed it, and her eyes grew luminously soft . . .

“Tell you what—” she heard the new-comer begin; but a vision of the old home, warm in the sunshine, came into her eyes, and she dropped off to sleep without hearing “what.”

The Lost Turkey

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

In this story from 1902, novelist and short story writer Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909) explores the connection between doing good for others and prospering oneself, as well as the relationship between material wealth and some richer prosperity. Jewett was raised in South Berwick, Maine and was profoundly influenced by her experiences observing local farmers and fishermen, as well as her New England coastal upbringing, elements of which are visible in her writing. In this story, for example, a rupture has occurred between old farmer Jones and his daughter-in-law Sarah and grandson Johnny, after the death of Jones's son (and Sarah's husband), leaving the former embittered and the latter impoverished.

Who or what is most responsible for effecting the reconciliation: the doctor with his speech to farmer Jones, the storekeeper who asks Jones to deliver mail to Johnny, Jones's willingness to drop off the mail, Johnny's wishful (mis)taking of the turkey, Sarah's remorse for her part in the rupture, her later offer of hospitality, or Mrs. Jones's welcoming of her grandson? Was this all just the work of chance, or was there some mysterious power working its way through the unintended acts of generosity? Where, according to this story, does true prosperity lie? Does wealth need to become benefaction for the wealthy to prosper? For what sort of prosperity do we most wish to give thanks?

There were only two persons in the kitchen, a woman and a boy, who had spread his school-books on the table by the window, and set a determined elbow on either side of his slate like buttresses for failing energy. The arithmetic was wide open above the slate at an early page of fractions.

The boy's mother, a sad-looking, pretty woman, was busy getting supper, but she hovered near the table and cast many a loving glance at her son's distress. She had been a quick scholar herself, and such sums were as easy as plain knitting. One often hears of the sorrows of hens that have hatched ducks, but Mrs. Sarah Jones knew the more painful solitudes of the duck—the swimming bird who must see her feathered darling balked and landlocked upon the shore.

"I thought they looked easy, Johnny," she ventured, timidly. "If I didn't know 'twas best for you to puzzle 'em out alone I'd—"

"If I can only do this one!" said Johnny, in a dreamy tone, as he figured away with new hopefulness. "There, you see here, mother!" and he held up his slate.

"Yes, you've got it!" she cried, joyfully, as her eager eye found its way through a queer maze of stumbling figures. "Yes, that's all right. Now you've got the right idea, you won't have so much trouble again." She looked the prouder because he could not see

her as she stood over him. Johnny had shown first-rate pluck and courage, and had been pleasant, too, as she reminded her affectionate heart, all through this great emergency.

"Now you won't find the rest of them so hard," she said, as she turned away and stooped down to open the oven door.

"How good my supper's goin' to taste!" exclaimed the boy. "Fred Hollis says they're goin' to have a lot of folks from out West at his house to spend Thanksgiving."

Mrs. Jones sighed, and a quick flush of color came into her face; the boy thought she had burned her hand at the oven.

"No, I ain't hurt," she said, seeing his troubled face. "No, I was only thinking o' your Thanksgiving day. I am afraid I ain't goin' to have anything nice to give you. I hoped to have some kind of a treat, Johnny, but having to pay for shingling the house has taken every mite o' money I had, and I'm owin' four dollars yet. We've got to do with what there is in the house."

"Ain't we goin' to have any turkey?" inquired Johnny, ruefully.

"No, nor any chicken, either. I ain't got 'em, and I can't go in debt to buy. If I begin to get in debt I can't ever get out again. But I'll make you a nice, good cake," she urged, by way of consolation as she saw his disappointed face. "There's lots of people that don't have turkeys."

Johnny could not bring himself to smile or treat so grave a subject lightly. "Cake alone ain't enough for dinner!" he said to himself, bitterly. The news of their poverty was harder to bear at this hungry moment than if it were after supper, instead of before it.

"Why don't we keep turkeys ourselves, mother?" Johnny demanded. "Lots of folks do, and then we could have one whenever we wanted it."

"We did keep them, you know, but something has ailed the chicks of late years. I heard to-day that even your grandfather would have to buy, and I've known him to raise a flock of sixty. Your Grandma Jones was luckier than anybody, and always got the highest prices."

There was a silence. Johnny was now plunged in deep reflection, and his face almost for the first time took on a serious, manly look. "Mother," he said, "what is it makes us feel so poor? Is it because my father died?"

"Yes, dear," said Sarah Jones.

She stood still in the middle of the floor, looking at him, and her eyes were filled with tears. The boy's clothes were faded and outgrown; she could see a great patch on the elbow next her, and his stockings below his short trousers were darned half-way down

the leg. Johnny's face was bright and handsome, but she could hardly bear his honest, questioning look.

"Your grandpa and grandma don't like me, dear. They didn't want your father to marry when he did, and he went right against their wishes. 'Twas chiefly because your Grandfather Jones and my father had quarreled, and there was a lawsuit between them. I see now 'twas hard for the old folks; 'twas like having an enemy come among 'em. When your father died they came and offered to take you and bring you up, and I refused 'em. I said I could get along. But they pressed it too far when my heart was 'most broken, anyway, losing o' your father, and I said things I wish now I hadn't said and reproached 'em as I shouldn't now. So that's why we don't speak together, and why you're so poor. If they had you I don't know but they'd give you every single thing you want. They'd lost their only son; I should have had patience with them," she continued, reproaching herself, and standing before Johnny.

The boy's face did not change; he looked away, and then he took his pencil again and made some marks on his slate as if he were going on with his figuring. His grandfather had the same slow, set way of behaving, and the mother's heart knew a sudden pain. Johnny was nothing but a boy; she ought not to have told him.

"I'd rather live with you," he said, presently, with great effort. "I belong to you and father most, don't I? I don't care if there ain't a turkey just this once," and the mother took a step nearer, and kissed him quite unexpectedly.

"Come, put away your books now; I want the table for supper," she said to him, trying to speak as if there were nothing the matter.

* * *

It was, as everybody said, real Thanksgiving weather. There was not quite snow enough for sleighing, but the sky was already gray with the promise of more. The mountains on the far horizon looked blue and cold, and the nearer hills were black and dismal, as if even the thick fur of pine-trees that covered them could hardly keep the world from freezing.

Old Mr. Jones was one of the last to untie his horse and start toward home. It was three miles from the village to his farm, and he had spent nearly the whole afternoon in Barton's store; there had been some business to do with men whom he met there, and an inner pocket was filled with money that had been paid him for some pine timber.

He was a very stern-looking person as he sat in the old armchair by the stove. One could believe that he was possessed of authority as well as wealth, and that he had kept his mind upon a grudge for years together. The loss of his son had seemed harder to him than it might have seemed to most men; he had almost resented it. Whatever cheerfulness had been his in early life was all gone now, and his wife, a timid, affectionate woman, who feared and obeyed him in all things, believed as he did, that they were unjustly

treated in the matter of happiness. Each year found them better off in this world's goods, and poorer in the power of using things to make either themselves or other people happy.

The good old doctor had come into the store late in the afternoon to wait for the mail-carrier, who was due at five o'clock.

"How's your wife getting on?" he asked, kindly, and was told that she was still ailing, but no worse than common.

"You need a younger woman there to help her, Henry," said the doctor. "She needs somebody there while you are away at work. I thought the other day that she was drooping from being so much alone, and from brooding over the past," he added, in a low voice. "I want to have a talk with you some of these days. You know I mean your good as much as hers. Why don't you let bygones be bygones?"

"You can't make believe if the right feelings aren't there," said Henry Jones. "If you are alluding to my family, I can only say that that woman my son married has expressed her feelings once for all. She probably feels the same way now."

"Now, Henry," said the doctor, pleasantly, "you know that we went to school together and have always been friendly. I've seen you through a good many troubles, and before I die I want to see you through this biggest one. That's a nice boy growing up, and he's got a good mother. You never showed her any great kindness, and yet you wanted to rob her of all she had to live for. She turned on you that day just as any creature will that fights for her young. You took the wrong way to do the right thing, and only got your pay for it. You must put your pride in your pocket and go and tell her you're sorry and want her to come right home and bring Johnny and spend the winter. You've got a better teacher in your district this year than there is in theirs."

The old man shook his head. "You don't understand nothin' at all about it," he began, dolefully. "I don't see what I can do. I wish there was peace amongst us, but—" And at this point the doctor moved impatiently away.

"I had to buy a turkey for Thanksgivin' this year," he heard the old farmer complaining to a fresh arrival. The store was full of neighbors now, who had seen the mail-carrier arrive. "Yes, I had to buy a turkey, first time I ever done such a thing, and there's nobody but wife and me to set down to it. Seems hard; yes, but 'tis one o' them Vermont turkeys, and a very handsome one, too; I don't know's 'twill equal those we've been accustomed to."

The doctor sighed as he looked over his shoulder and saw Henry Jones's stolid face, and saw him lift the great turkey with evident pride because it was the best and largest to be bought that year; the doctor could not help wondering what Johnny and his mother would feast upon.

There was a good deal of cheerfulness in the store—jokes and laughter and humorous questioning of newcomers. The busy storekeeper and postmaster was not averse to taking his part in these mild festivities of Thanksgiving eve.

As Mr. Jones approached to take his evening mail of the weekly newspaper and a circular or two he found another small budget pressed into his hand.

"You're goin' right by, an' I'm goin' to close early. I expect you'll be willin' to leave it. 'Tis for your grandson, Johnny. He'll want his little paper to read to-morrow. It's one the doctor sends him," said the storekeeper, boldly. "You just give a call as you go by, an' they'll come right out."

If Henry Jones had heard the roar of laughter in the store a moment after he had shut the door behind him, that copy of the paper might have been dropped at once and lain under the fresh-fallen snow until spring. A certain pride and stiffness of demeanor stood the old man in good stead, but he was very angry indeed as he put the great turkey into his wagon and the mail-matter beside it. He drove away up the road in grim fury. Perhaps he should meet some one to whom he could depute the unwelcome errand. But the doctor's words could not be put out of mind, and his own conscience became more and more disturbed. It was beginning to snow hard, and the young horse was in a hurry to get home. The turkey soon joggled and bumped from its safe place under the seat to the very back of the farm wagon, while the newspaper, which had been in the corner, blew forward out of sight and got under the buffalo-robe.

Just as the reluctant messenger came to a cold-looking little house by the roadside Johnny himself came out to shut the gate, which was blowing in the wind. He was bareheaded, and as warm as a furry squirrel with his good supper of bread and butter and milk and gingerbread, but he looked very small and thin as his grandfather caught sight of him. For years the two had never been so near together,—Johnny and his mother sat far back in the church,—and there was now an unexpected twinge in the old man's heart, while Johnny was dumb with astonishment at this unexpected appearance.

"That you, John?" said the old farmer, in a businesslike tone, but with no unkindness; his heart was beating ridiculously fast. "There's something there in the wagon for your folks. The postmaster was in a hurry to get it to you," he added. But the horse would not stand, and he did not look back again at the boy. Johnny reached up, and seeing nothing but the great turkey, made a manful effort to master the weight of it and get it over the tail-board, and then went triumphantly through the swinging gate as his grandfather, perfectly unconscious of such an involuntary benefaction, passed rattling up the road trying to hold the colt as best he might.

As for Johnny, his face shone with joy as he dumped the great bird on the kitchen floor and bade his mother look.

"'Twas my grandpa out there, and he said he'd brought something for my folks. Now, sir, ain't we goin' to have a turkey for Thanksgivin'!"

Whereupon, to Johnny's despair and complete surprise, his mother sat down in the little rocking-chair and began to cry.

* * *

"I certain sure put it into the wagon, well under the seat," said old Mr. Jones to his wife, who had come out through the long shed to the barn to hold the lantern. "I certain sure put it in with my own hands; as nice a gobbler as we ever raised ourselves."

"Did you pass anybody on the road, or leave the horse so they could have stolen anything out?" asked Mrs. Jones, looking very cold and deeply troubled. "Why, I've got the stuffing all made a'ready. I counted on your bringin' it, and on getting it all prepared to roast to-morrow. I have to divide up my work; I can't do as I used to," she mourned, adding her mite of trouble to their general feeling of despair. "There, I don't care much whether we have a turkey or not. We don't seem to have as much to be thankful for as some folks."

The lantern-light shone on her face, and Mr. Jones saw how old and pitiful she looked, and by contrast he thought of the little boy's cheerful chirp and hearty "Thank you!" as he took the paper. Whether it was what the doctor had said, or whether it was the natural workings of a slow conscience, there was a queer disturbance in his mind. He could not manage to tell his wife about stopping to leave the mail.

"I guess I'll drive back," he said, doubtfully. But the snow was falling like a blizzard, faster and faster, as he looked out of the door. "I certain would if I had anybody to go with me, but this colt is dreadful restless. I couldn't get out and leave him to pick the turkey up if I saw it laying right in the road. I guess we've got to let it go and trust to Providence. The road's rough enough, but I can't see how that turkey jolted out, either!" he grumbled. "I feel too lame to go afoot."

"There, I thought when you let Asa go off to-day, 'stead of to-morrow, you'd be liable to need him; you ain't so young as you used to be, Henry," said his wife. "I'll have ye a good cup o' tea, and we won't mind about the turkey more than we can help."

They passed a solemn evening together, and the great snow-storm raged about their warm house. Many times the old man reproached his own want of spirit in not going back along the road.

* * *

In the morning, very early, there was a loud knocking at the kitchen door. When Mrs. Jones opened it she found a boy standing there with a happy, eager face.

"Are you my grandma?" demanded Johnny. "Mother sent her best respects, and we thank you very much for the turkey, and she hopes you and my grandpa will stop, going home from meeting, and eat dinner. She'd be real glad to have you."

"What's all this?" demanded Mr. Henry Jones, who had heard the message with astonished ears, and stood in the doorway behind his wife, with his spectacles on his forehead like a lighthouse. "Where'd you get your turkey, sir? I'd like to know!"

"Why, right out of your wagon," said Johnny. "That one you brought last night. It's the handsomest one mother ever had in the house; she cried like everything about it." The child's voice faltered, he was so excited with his errand, and so spent with his eager journey through the deep snow.

"Come right in, dear!" cried the grandmother, grateful enough for the sight of him. And when Henry Jones saw her lead him to the fire, and then with a sob take the little fellow right into her arms and hug him, and begin to cry, too, he turned away and looked out of the window. The boy was their very own.

"There, give him some warm breakfast before he goes back; he must have started early," said the grandfather. "I'll put the colt in and take him back myself. She must have meant what she said, to start him up here like that, soon as day broke!"

When Johnny's mother saw the old man and the little boy plowing along in the old sleigh, and saw how they were talking and even laughing together, she thanked Heaven for this sudden blessing. "I wa'n't going to be slow about taking the next step, when an old man like him had taken the first one," she said to herself.

As for the lost turkey, it was already in the oven at that moment; but the true Thanksgiving feast that year was the feast of happiness in all their hearts.

"O my!" exclaimed Johnny early that afternoon, as he leaned back in his chair. "Grandma, aren't you glad this turkey didn't wander in the wet grass and die when it was a chick?"

Those Who Have No Turkey

LANGSTON HUGHES

This story by celebrated African American poet and short-story writer Langston Hughes (1902–67), written in 1918 when he was still in high school, raises the disturbing possibility that prosperity may in fact be the enemy of gratitude and thanksgiving. Hughes himself did not grow up in material comfort or stability; after his parents separated, he moved with his mother and grandmother half a dozen times before finally settling in Cleveland, Ohio. Here, young Diane Jordan, from rural downstate Ohio, comes to spend Thanksgiving with her wealthy aunt Ruth (her mother’s sister) and her two daughters (Diane’s cousins) in a prosperous part of Cleveland. Distressed over discovering that the local newsboy and his family could not afford turkey for Thanksgiving, Diane impulsively invites him and his entire family to share the festive meal at her aunt’s home.

What is the difference between the life or outlook of Diane’s mother (Mrs. Jordan) and that of her sister Ruth (Mrs. Samuel P. Crane)? What do you think is responsible for that difference: is it the contrast between country and city life and customs, or is it something else? Why is Diane so interested in Tubby Sweeny, and so eager to invite him and his family? Imagine yourself as an invisible guest at the Thanksgiving dinner at Aunt Ruth’s. What was the experience like? Why is the story called “Those Who Have No Turkey”? How should our knowledge of the existence of such people influence the way we celebrate Thanksgiving? The way we live the rest of the year? How can the wealthy best show their gratitude?

A stretch of farmland, gray in the dawning, a flash of blue lake water, long lines of freight cars, the sound of many whistles and the shrill shriek of the brakes, with the sleepy voice of the porter calling “Cleveland,” told the girl that she had arrived at the end of her journey. One big puff, a final jolt, and the long limited came to a stop. Clasp ing her old traveling bag in one hand, a bundle under her arm and a shawl over her shoulder, fifteen-year-old Diane Jordan stepped to the platform, for the first time in her life in a large city.

It was early Thanksgiving morning, sometimes called the Day of Big Dinners, that Diane got her first view of Cleveland. Of course, her two cousins with Aunt Ruth were at the station to meet her. After many kisses and exclamations of welcome they guided the rather dazed little country girl out to their big limousine and whirled away uptown. Diane looked out of the auto window and enjoyed the ride, while Aunt Ruth asked about her only sister, Diane’s mother, and her activities in the country, for Mrs. Crane had not been to visit her relative for some years.

The Jordan family and the Crane family were in no wise alike, as the two sisters had married into vastly different positions in life. One went to a farm down in the southern part of Ohio with her husband and tilled the soil for a living. Their crops were usually

good and they did well, but their mode of living remained that of simple, generous-hearted countryfolk. The other girl married Samuel Crane, a wealthy banker. The whisper of gossips said that she loved his money and not the man, but be that as it may, she gained an enviable social position; she lived in one of the finest houses on upper Euclid Avenue and sent her daughter to an exclusive private school. Mr. Crane died four years after their marriage. Mrs. Crane, busy with her social duties, seldom saw her country sister, but since her two children had spent a summer on the farm, she had always intended to have her niece, Diane, visit in the city. So that accounts for the presence of countrified, tomboyish, unsophisticated Diane Jordan seated in a richly lined limousine between the stylishly clad daughters of Mrs. Samuel P. Crane.

Soon the big auto rolled up a cement driveway and stopped under the porte cochere of the largest house Diane had ever seen. She marveled at its size, but the inside was still more wonderful. It is useless to attempt to describe Diane's feelings upon entering this mansion, so different from her rural home, as no one but a Dickens could do it.

However, after an hour or so of this indoor splendor and her doll-like cousins, Diane, a hardy child of the out-of-doors, grew a bit tired and decided to inspect the yard since Aunt Ruth would not let her help get dinner. Once in a while the scent of turkey floated in from the kitchen. In the country she always helped her mother cook, but here they seemed to hire folks to do the work. Well, city people were queer. Even their yards were not the same. Why, in the country, one had a whole farm to play in, but here the houses took up all the room, so finding the space between the house and the fence too small, Diane's adventurous feet led her to examine the neighborhood.

She had walked a block or two, stopping now and then to stare at some strange new object, when she reached a corner where two car lines crossed and many autos were passing in all directions. The scene was interesting, so she leaned against a lamppost and watched the city people go by until her attention was attracted to a small red-haired boy yelling at the top of his voice, "Extra papers, just out!" He reminded Diane of little brother at home. Her gaze must have attracted his attention for he demanded, "Paper, lady?" Perhaps he called her lady because her dresses were unusually long for a girl of fifteen, but on the farm clothes are not of the latest fashion.

"What kind o' paper you got?" asked the girl.

"*Press or News*," replied the little urchin.

Diane pondered. "Well, give me the best one," she said, "'cause Pa told me to bring him a city paper."

"I've only got two left and if you take 'em both you'll be sure and get the best one," urged the little newsie, anxious to sell out.

"All right, I'll take them," she agreed. "You're in a hurry to get home and eat some turkey, aren't you?"

“Turkey! What do yuh mean?” asked the boy to whom the word was but a name. “We ain’t got no turkey.”

This answer was surprising to Diane. The girl could not imagine anyone not having turkey for Thanksgiving. All the people in the country had one. Truly, city ways were strange! Why, she had never known anybody to be without a turkey on Thanksgiving Day except once when her Uncle Si said that he was “just durned tired of having what other folks had,” so his wife cooked two ducks and a chicken instead of the usual fowl. Perhaps this boy’s mother intended to have duck.

“Well, you’re going to have duck for dinner, then?” Diane said.

“Naw, we ain’t got no duck,” he replied.

“Poor little boy,” she thought. “Why then, it must be chicken, isn’t it?” her voice suggested.

“Naw, we ain’t got no chicken, either.”

“Well, what in the world have you got?” she demanded of this peculiar boy who had neither turkey, duck, nor chicken for dinner on Thanksgiving.

“We ain’t got nothin’ yet,” he said, and looking up into Diane’s sympathetic face, he added, “and we won’t have much if dere’s not enough pennies in my pocket to get somethin’. My mother’s sick.”

“Oh-o—,” said Diane, looking down at the ragged little boy. It took her a long time to comprehend. She had never heard of anybody having nothing for dinner except the poor war-stricken Belgians, and that was because the Germans had eaten up everything. “Oh,” she repeated. “Are you going to buy something?”

“Sure I am,” he replied proudly. “Want to help me count my change?”

He had a dollar fifty-four cents.

“Gee, I kin get a dandy dinner with this,” he said. “Ma’s able to cook now.”

However, Diane was not very sure about how much a dollar fifty-four cents would buy, especially for a Thanksgiving meal. Suddenly a big thought came to her. She would ask the little boy and his mother to her aunt’s house for dinner. Surely Aunt Ruth would not mind. In the country they always had lots of extra company at the Thanksgiving table.

The newsie was rather puzzled at the strange girl’s generosity. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before and he had sold papers in the streets since the age of three. Finally Diane forced him to accept her invitation, the lure of unknown turkey being too much for the little fellow. He promised to come at three.

"Where do you live?" he asked skeptically.

"Down there," Diane pointed to the large house not far away. "I mean I don't live there but I am staying there now and you and your mother can come down today for dinner."

"But I got two sisters," said the boy.

"Oh, bring them along." What were two sisters added to a dinner party? Why, her mother's table at home could feed twenty at once, if necessary.

"And I got a little brother, too," he continued.

"Well," murmured Diane, "bring him with you. I like babies." However, she hoped that he had no more relatives. "Now, tell me your name," she demanded, "so I can tell Aunt Ruth who's coming."

"Tubby Sweeny," he replied, "and we'll sure be there. S'long." Off he ran down the street to deliver the invitation.

Diane went back to the great house without a doubt in the world but that her aunt would be "tickled to death" to have extra company for dinner. Mrs. Crane had been worried about her niece for the last twenty minutes and when she learned of the invitation, that august lady was too shocked for words. At first she hotly refused to admit the coming guests to her home. However, after many hugs and kisses and tearful entreaties from her two daughters, who thought it would be great fun to have such queer company, and from Diane, who declared she would not eat unless the newsboy and his family could eat, too, the elderly lady finally consented. She gave one of the maids instructions to have every one of the guests, when they came, wash their face and hands thoroughly before entering the drawing room. Diane was satisfied, although she thought the washing unnecessary. They never sterilized visitors at her house.

About three o'clock the family came. They were of foreign extraction and none of them, except Tubby, spoke English well. There was the weak little mother, who did not understand the invitation at all but came only because her son insisted; the small twin sisters; and the cute, but none too fat, baby with big black eyes and tiny, mischievous hands that kept Mrs. Crane's nerves on edge. They always wanted to touch something and babies quite often break things!

During dinner the quiet little mother did not talk much, but the young Sweenys—they ate and jabbered to their hearts' content. They expressed a marvelous joy and delight over the turkey, as they had never even tasted that fowl before. And as for the plum pudding and large, round pies, no words in the world could express their feelings! But when they had finished, their stomachs were as tight as kettledrums from very fullness, and the baby resembled a pert little cherub like those painted around Madonna's pictures. Indeed, the

tired-looking woman who held the babe would have made a wonderful model if some artist wished to paint "A Madonna of the Poor."

After the ice cream had been eaten and each one of the children had a handful of nuts, the little mother said that they must go, much to Mrs. Crane's relief. The woman thanked them very sincerely for the grand dinner and each one of the little Sweenys kissed Diane and would have kissed the others too, but the Cranes refused to go through the ordeal as they said kissing breeds germs. After the door had closed upon the departing Sweeny party, Mrs. Crane declared: "Those people were the strangest dinner guests I have ever entertained!" And when Diane got back to the farm, she told her mother all about it and ended her story with "Well, Ma, I never knew before that there are people in the world who have no turkey on Thanksgiving."



Neighborliness and Hospitality



The Night Before Thanksgiving

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

This selection, like the next one, explores the blessings of neighborliness and hospitality, given and received. In this story (1899) by Sarah Orne Jewett (1849–1909), old Mrs. Mary Ann Robb, a woman who formerly had delighted in bringing aid and sustenance to the poor, is sadly contemplating her situation on the night before Thanksgiving. Her nearest neighbor, John Marder, has been leading a group of townspeople who are trying to force Mrs. Robb to give up her home and to enter the town poorhouse, and the time for her departure now seems imminent. But as she looks out her window at the sunset, a sudden gleam of light induces a ray of hope. She begins to think of an orphan boy (Johnny Harris) whom she had once cared for in his time of great need: “Poor Johnny Harris, perhaps he’s thinkin’ o’ me, if he’s alive.” Her thought proves father to the deed, as Harris arrives to produce a most splendid and heartwarming Thanksgiving. Describe in detail the plight of Mrs. Robb. Why does her nearest neighbor want to remove her? What is the significance of the gleam of light? Why does remembering her previous assistance to Johnny Harris lift her spirits? Why does Johnny Harris return? Can neighborly gifts given or received ever be forgotten? How can they be properly “re-paid”? What is their connection to Thanksgiving and to giving thanks?

I.

There was a sad heart in the low-storied, dark little house that stood humbly by the roadside under some tall elms. Small as her house was, old Mrs. Robb found it too large for herself alone; she only needed the kitchen and a tiny bedroom that led out of it, and there still remained the best room and a bedroom, with the low garret overhead.

There had been a time, after she was left alone, when Mrs. Robb could help those who were poorer than herself. She was strong enough not only to do a woman’s work inside her house, but almost a man’s work outside in her piece of garden ground. At last sickness and age had come hand in hand, those two relentless enemies of the poor, and together they had wasted her strength and substance. She had always been looked up to by her neighbors as being independent, but now she was left, lame-footed and lame-handed, with a debt to carry and her bare land, and the house ill-provisioned to stand the siege of time.

For a while she managed to get on, but at last it began to be whispered about that there was no use for any one so proud; it was easier for the whole town to care for her than for a few neighbors, and Mrs. Robb had better go to the poorhouse before winter, and be done with it. At this terrible suggestion her brave heart seemed to stand still. The people whom she cared for most happened to be poor, and she could no longer go into their households to make herself of use. The very elms overhead seemed to say, “Oh, no!” as they groaned in the late autumn winds, and there was something appealing even

to the strange passer-by in the look of the little gray house, with Mrs. Robb's pale, worried face at the window.

II.

Some one has said that anniversaries are days to make other people happy in, but sometimes when they come they seem to be full of shadows, and the power of giving joy to others, that inalienable right which ought to lighten the saddest heart, the most indifferent sympathy, sometimes even this seems to be withdrawn.

So poor old Mary Ann Robb sat at her window on the afternoon before Thanksgiving and felt herself poor and sorrowful indeed. Across the frozen road she looked eastward over a great stretch of cold meadow land, brown and wind-swept and crossed by icy ditches. It seemed to her as if before this, in all the troubles that she had known and carried, there had always been some hope to hold: as if she had never looked poverty full in the face and seen its cold and pitiless look before. She looked anxiously down the road, with a horrible shrinking and dread at the thought of being asked, out of pity, to join in some Thanksgiving feast, but there was nobody coming with gifts in hand. Once she had been full of love for such days, whether at home or abroad, but something chilled her very heart now.

Her nearest neighbor had been foremost of those who wished her to go to the town farm, and he had said more than once that it was the only sensible thing. But John Mander was waiting impatiently to get her tiny farm into his own hands; he had advanced some money upon it in her extremity, and pretended that there was still a debt, after he cleared her wood lot to pay himself back. He would plough over the graves in the field corner and fell the great elms, and waited now like a spider for his poor prey. He often reproached her for being too generous to worthless people in the past and coming to be a charge to others now. Oh, if she could only die in her own house and not suffer the pain of homelessness and dependence!

It was just at sunset, and as she looked out hopelessly across the gray fields, there was a sudden gleam of light far away on the low hills beyond; the clouds opened in the west and let the sunshine through. One lovely gleam shot swift as an arrow and brightened a far cold hillside where it fell, and at the same moment a sudden gleam of hope brightened the winter landscape of her heart.

"There was Johnny Harris," said Mary Ann Robb softly. "He was a soldier's son, left an orphan and distressed. Old John Mander scolded, but I couldn't see the poor boy in want. I kept him that year after he got hurt, spite o' what anybody said, an' he helped me what little he could. He said I was the only mother he'd ever had. 'I'm goin' out West, Mother Robb,' says he. 'I sha'n't come back till I get rich,' an' then he'd look at me an' laugh, so pleasant and boyish. He wa'n't one that liked to write. I don't think he was doin' very well when I heard,—there, it's most four years ago now. I always thought if he got sick or anything, I should have a good home for him to come to. There's poor Ezra Blake, the deaf one, too,—he won't have any place to welcome him."

The light faded out of doors, and again Mrs. Robb's troubles stood before her. Yet it was not so dark as it had been in her sad heart. She still sat by the window, hoping now, in spite of herself, instead of fearing; and a curious feeling of nearness and expectancy made her feel not so much light-hearted as light-headed.

"I feel just as if somethin' was goin' to happen," she said. "Poor Johnny Harris, perhaps he's thinkin' o' me, if he's alive."

It was dark now out of doors, and there were tiny clicks against the window. It was beginning to snow, and the great elms creaked in the rising wind overhead.

III.

A dead limb of one of the old trees had fallen that autumn, and, poor firewood as it might be, it was Mrs. Robb's own, and she had burnt it most thankfully. There was only a small armful left, but at least she could have the luxury of a fire. She had a feeling that it was her last night at home, and with strange recklessness began to fill the stove as she used to do in better days.

"It'll get me good an' warm," she said, still talking to herself, as lonely people do, "an' I'll go to bed early. It's comin' on to storm."

The snow clicked faster and faster against the window, and she sat alone thinking in the dark.

"There's lots of folks I love," she said once. "They'd be sorry I ain't got nobody to come, an' no supper the night afore Thanksgivin'. I'm dreadful glad they don't know." And she drew a little nearer to the fire, and laid her head back drowsily in the old rocking-chair.

It seemed only a moment before there was a loud knocking, and somebody lifted the latch of the door. The fire shone bright through the front of the stove and made a little light in the room, but Mary Ann Robb waked up frightened and bewildered.

"Who's there?" she called, as she found her crutch and went to the door. She was only conscious of her one great fear. "They've come to take me to the poorhouse!" she said, and burst into tears.

There was a tall man, not John Mander, who seemed to fill the narrow doorway.

"Come, let me in!" he said gayly. "It's a cold night. You didn't expect me, did you, Mother Robb?"

"Dear me, what is it?" she faltered, stepping back as he came in, and dropping her crutch. "Be I dreamin'? I was a-dreamin' about— Oh, there! What was I a-sayin'? 'Tain't true! No! I've made some kind of a mistake."

Yes, and this was the man who kept the poorhouse, and she would go without complaint; they might have given her notice, but she must not fret.

"Sit down, sir," she said, turning toward him with touching patience. "You'll have to give me a little time. If I'd been notified I wouldn't have kept you waiting a minute this stormy night."

It was not the keeper of the poorhouse. The man by the door took one step forward and put his arm round her and kissed her.

"What are you talking about?" said John Harris. "You ain't goin' to make me feel like a stranger? I've come all the way from Dakota to spend Thanksgivin'. There's all sorts o' things out here in the wagon, an' a man to help get 'em in. Why, don't cry so, Mother Robb. I thought you'd have a great laugh, if I come and surprised you. Don't you remember I always said I should come?"

It was John Harris, indeed. The poor soul could say nothing. She felt now as if her heart was going to break with joy. He left her in the rocking-chair and came and went in his old boyish way, bringing in the store of gifts and provisions. It was better than any dream. He laughed and talked, and went out to send away the man to bring a wagonful of wood from John Mander's, and came in himself laden with pieces of the nearest fence to keep the fire going in the mean time. They must cook the beef-steak for supper right away; they must find the pound of tea among all the other bundles; they must get good fires started in both the cold bedrooms. Why, Mother Robb didn't seem to be ready for company from out West! The great, cheerful fellow hurried about the tiny house, and the little old woman limped after him, forgetting everything but hospitality. Had not she a house for John to come to? Were not her old chairs and tables in their places still? And he remembered everything, and kissed her as they stood before the fire, as if she were a girl.

He had found plenty of hard times, but luck had come at last. He had struck luck, and this was the end of a great year.

"No, I couldn't seem to write letters; no use to complain o' the worst, an' I wanted to tell you the best when I came;" and he told it while she cooked the supper. "No, I wa'n't goin' to write no foolish letters," John repeated. He was afraid he should cry himself when he found out how bad things had been; and they sat down to supper together, just as they used to do when he was a homeless orphan boy, whom nobody else wanted in winter weather while he was crippled and could not work. She could not be kinder now than she was then, but she looked so poor and old! He saw her taste her cup of tea and set it down again with a trembling hand and a look at him. "No, I wanted to come myself," he blustered, wiping his eyes and trying to laugh. "And you're going to have everything you need to make you comfortable long's you live, Mother Robb!"

She looked at him again and nodded, but she did not even try to speak. There was a good hot supper ready, and a happy guest had come; it was the night before Thanksgiving.

Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen

O. HENRY

For those who are down and out or who live alone, even our most beloved holidays can be depressing. Yet hospitable and neighborly acts in their direction can be costly, and not only to the benefactor. These issues are humorously but powerfully raised in this short story (1905) by O. Henry (pseudonym for William Sydney Porter [1862–1910]), who casts an ironic and irreverent eye on Thanksgiving Day—perhaps on institutionalized ritual altogether. Every Thanksgiving for the past nine years, Stuffy Pete, a homeless man, has been summoned from his bench in New York’s Union Square by an “Old Gentleman,” who takes him to a restaurant, orders up a sumptuous dinner, and sits by watching Stuffy eat. This year, however, Stuffy is interrupted on his way to the park when “two old ladies of ancient family” invite him into their home and serve him a meal more sumptuous than his traditional fare. By the time he meets the old gentleman at the familiar bench, Stuffy is already stuffed to the gills. Nonetheless, he goes with the old gentleman to eat his traditional dinner. The story concludes with one of O. Henry’s famous “twisty” endings.

Why does Stuffy Pete go? Why does the old gentleman invite him? Would you consider either of them a good neighbor? What is the meaning of the story’s title? In what ways, if any, might both Stuffy Pete and the old man be regarded as “gentlemen”? Does the outcome of the story vindicate the narrator’s seeming irreverence for tradition and for gentlemanliness? Or has there been, despite the outcome, an expression of true neighborliness and the spirit of Thanksgiving?¹

There is one day that is ours. There is one day when all we Americans who are not self-made go back to the old home to eat saleratus biscuits and marvel how much nearer to the porch the old pump looks than it used to. Bless the day. President Roosevelt gives it to us. We hear some talk of the Puritans, but don’t just remember who they were. Bet we can lick ’em, anyhow, if they try to land again. Plymouth Rocks? Well, that sounds more familiar. Lots of us have had to come down to hens since the Turkey Trust got its work in. But somebody in Washington is leaking out advance information to ’em about these Thanksgiving proclamations.

The big city east of the cranberry bogs had made Thanksgiving Day an institution. The last Thursday in November is the only day in the year on which it recognizes the part of America lying across the ferries. It is the one day that is purely American. Yes, a day of celebration, exclusively American.

And now for the story which is to prove to you that we have traditions on this side of the ocean that are becoming older at a much rapider rate than those of England are—thanks to our git-up and enterprise.

¹For more questions, see the Discussion Guide below. We also invite you to visit [our website](#) to view a video model conversation about this selection.

Stuffy Pete took his seat on the third bench to the right as you enter Union Square from the east, at the walk opposite the fountain. Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years he had taken his seat there promptly at one o'clock. For every time he had done so things had happened to him—Charles Dickensy things that swelled his waistcoat above his heart, and equally on the other side.

But to-day Stuffy Pete's appearance at the annual trysting place seemed to have been rather the result of habit than of the yearly hunger which, as the philanthropists seem to think, afflicts the poor at such extended intervals.

Certainly Pete was not hungry. He had just come from a feast that had left him of his powers barely those of respiration and locomotion. His eyes were like two pale gooseberries firmly imbedded in a swollen and gravy-smeared mask of putty. His breath came in short wheezes; a senatorial roll of adipose tissue denied a fashionable set to his upturned coat collar. Buttons that had been sewed upon his clothes by kind Salvation fingers a week before flew like popcorn, strewing the earth around him. Ragged he was, with a split shirt front open to the wishbone; but the November breeze, carrying fine snowflakes, brought him only a grateful coolness. For Stuffy Pete was overcharged with the caloric produced by a super-bountiful dinner, beginning with oysters and ending with plum pudding, and including (it seemed to him) all the roast turkey and baked potatoes and chicken salad and squash pie and ice cream in the world. Wherefore he sat, gorged, and gazed upon the world with after-dinner contempt.

The meal had been an unexpected one. He was passing a redbrick mansion near the beginning of Fifth Avenue, in which lived two old ladies of ancient family and a reverence for traditions. They even denied the existence of New York, and believed that Thanksgiving Day was declared solely for Washington Square. One of their traditional habits was to station a servant at the postern gate with orders to admit the first hungry wayfarer that came along after the hour of noon had struck, and banquet him to a finish. Stuffy Pete happened to pass by on his way to the park, and the seneschals gathered him in and upheld the custom of the castle.

After Stuffy Pete had gazed straight before him for ten minutes he was conscious of a desire for a more varied field of vision. With a tremendous effort he moved his head slowly to the left. And then his eyes bulged out fearfully, and his breath ceased, and the rough-shod ends of his short legs wriggled and rustled on the gravel.

For the Old Gentleman was coming across Fourth Avenue toward his bench. Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years the Old Gentleman had come there and found Stuffy Pete on his bench. That was a thing that the Old Gentleman was trying to make a tradition of.

Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years he had found Stuffy there, and had led him to a restaurant and watched him eat a big dinner. They do those things in England unconsciously. But this is a young country, and nine years is not so bad. The Old Gentleman was a stanch American patriot, and considered himself a pioneer in American

tradition. In order to become picturesque we must keep on doing one thing for a long time without ever letting it get away from us. Something like collecting the weekly dimes in industrial insurance. Or cleaning the streets.

The Old Gentleman moved, straight and stately, toward the Institution that he was rearing. Truly, the annual feeding of Stuffy Pete was nothing national in its character, such as the Magna Charta or jam for breakfast was in England. But it was a step. It was almost feudal. It showed, at least, that a Custom was not impossible to New Y—ahem!—America.

The Old Gentleman was thin and tall and sixty. He was dressed all in black, and wore the old-fashioned kind of glasses that won't stay on our nose. His hair was whiter and thinner than it had been last year, and he seemed to make more use of his big, knobby cane with the crooked handle.

As his established benefactor came up Stuffy wheezed and shuddered like some woman's over-fat pug when a street dog bristles up at him. He would have flown, but all the skill of Santos-Dumont could not have separated him from his bench. Well had the myrmidons of the two old ladies done their work.

"Good morning," said the Old Gentleman. "I am glad to perceive that the vicissitudes of another year have spared you to move in health about the beautiful world. For that blessing alone this day of thanksgiving is well proclaimed to each of us. If you will come with me, my man, I will provide you with a dinner that should make your physical being accord with the mental."

That is what the Old Gentleman said every time. Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years. The words themselves almost formed an Institution. Nothing could be compared with them except the Declaration of Independence. Always before they had been music in Stuffy's ears. But now he looked up at the Old Gentleman's face with tearful agony in his own. The fine snow almost sizzled when it fell upon his perspiring brow. But the Old Gentleman shivered a little and turned his back to the wind.

Stuffy had always wondered why the Old Gentleman spoke his speech rather sadly. He did not know that it was because he was wishing every time that he had a son to succeed him. A son who would come there after he was gone—a son who would stand proud and strong before some subsequent Stuffy, and say: "In memory of my father." Then it would be an Institution.

But the Old Gentleman had no relatives. He lived in rented rooms in one of the decayed old family brownstone mansions in one of the quiet streets east of the park. In the winter he raised fuchsias in a little conservatory the size of a steamer trunk. In the spring he walked in the Easter parade. In the summer he lived at a farmhouse in the New Jersey hills, and sat in a wicker armchair, speaking of a butterfly, the ornithoptera amphrisius, that he hoped to find some day. In the autumn he fed Stuffy a dinner. These were the Old Gentleman's occupations.

Stuffy Pete looked up at him for a half minute, stewing and helpless in his own self-pity. The Old Gentleman's eyes were bright with the giving-pleasure. His face was getting more lined each year, but his little black necktie was in as jaunty a bow as ever, and his linen was beautiful and white, and his gray mustache was curled gracefully at the ends. And then Stuffy made a noise that sounded like peas bubbling in a pot. Speech was intended; and as the Old Gentleman had heard the sounds nine times before, he rightly construed them into Stuffy's old formula of acceptance.

"Thankee, sir. I'll go with ye, and much obliged. I'm very hungry, sir."

The coma of repletion had not prevented from entering Stuffy's mind the conviction that he was the basis of an Institution. His Thanksgiving appetite was not his own; it belonged by all the sacred rights of established custom, if not by the actual Statute of Limitations, to this kind old gentleman who had preëmpted it. True, America is free; but in order to establish tradition some one must be a repetend—a repeating decimal. The heroes are not all heroes of steel and gold. See one here that wielded only weapons of iron, badly silvered, and tin.

The Old Gentleman led his annual protégé southward to the restaurant, and to the table where the feast had always occurred. They were recognized.

"Here comes de old guy," said a waiter, "dat blows dat same bum to a meal every Thanksgiving."

The Old Gentleman sat across the table glowing like a smoked pearl at his cornerstone of future ancient Tradition. The waiters heaped the table with holiday food—and Stuffy, with a sign that was mistaken for hunger's expression, raised knife and fork and carved for himself a crown of imperishable bay.

No more valiant hero ever fought his way through the ranks of an enemy. Turkey, chops, soups, vegetables, pies, disappeared before him as fast as they could be served. Gorged nearly to the uttermost when he entered the restaurant, the smell of food had almost caused him to lose his honor as a gentleman, but he rallied like a true knight. He saw the look of beneficent happiness on the Old Gentleman's face—a happier look than even the fuchsias and the ornithoptera amphrisius had ever brought to it—and he had not the heart to see it wane.

In an hour Stuffy leaned back with a battle won.

"Thankee kindly, sir," he puffed like a leaky steampipe; "thankee kindly for a hearty meal."

Then he arose heavily with glazed eyes and started toward the kitchen. A waiter turned him about like a top, and pointed him toward the door. The Old Gentleman carefully counted out \$1.30 in silver change, leaving three nickels for the waiter.

They parted as they did each year at the door, the Old Gentleman going south, Stuffy north.

Around the first corner Stuffy turned, and stood for one minute. Then he seemed to puff out his rags as an owl puffs out his feathers, and fell to the sidewalk like a sunstricken horse.

When the ambulance came the young surgeon and the driver cursed softly at his weight. There was no smell of whiskey to justify a transfer to the patrol wagon, so Stuffy and his two dinners went to the hospital. There they stretched him on a bed and began to test him for strange diseases, with the hope of getting a chance at some problem with the bare steel.

And lo! an hour later another ambulance brought the Old Gentleman. And they laid him on another bed and spoke of appendicitis, for he looked good for the bill.

But pretty soon one of the young doctors met one of the young nurses whose eyes he liked, and stopped to chat with her about the cases.

“That nice old gentleman over there, now,” he said, “you wouldn’t think that was a case of almost starvation. Proud old family, I guess. He told me he hadn’t eaten a thing for three days.”



Liberty and Equal Opportunity



Excerpt from “The First Settlement of New England”

DANIEL WEBSTER

In 1820, the bicentennial of the Pilgrims’ arrival at Plymouth Rock—well before Thanksgiving became a national holiday—the great statesman, orator, and United States Senator Daniel Webster (1782–1852) delivered this oration (excerpted) at the landing site. In this speech, he performs his duty to “our ancestors and our posterity” and to “this memorable spot” by paying homage to our Pilgrim fathers and to the blessings of liberty and equality that Americans enjoy thanks to their legacy. His oration moves from an attempt to articulate for the assembled the “genius of the place” to a discussion of our system of government, and he concludes with a look into the future and a charge to future generations.

Imagine yourself standing where Webster stood, now almost double his “a hundred years hence.” Can you experience the “genius of the place” and appreciate what the Pilgrims accomplished? What, exactly, does Webster praise in our form of government, and how is it connected with the Pilgrims and their New England settlements? What is the connection between the American laws about property and the practices of freedom and equality—and between these and the slave trade? For what would Webster have us be thankful today, and how should we express our gratitude?

Standing in relation to our ancestors and our posterity, we are assembled on this memorable spot, to perform the duties which that relation and the present occasion impose upon us. We have come to this Rock, to record here our homage for our Pilgrim Fathers; our sympathy in their sufferings; our gratitude for their labors; our admiration of their virtues; our veneration for their piety; and our attachment to those principles of civil and religious liberty, which they encountered the dangers of the ocean, the storms of heaven, the violence of savages, disease, exile, and famine, to enjoy and to establish. And we would leave here, also, for the generations which are rising up rapidly to fill our places, some proof that we have endeavored to transmit the great inheritance unimpaired; that in our estimate of public principles and private virtue, in our veneration of religion and piety, in our devotion to civil and religious liberty, in our regard for whatever advances human knowledge or improves human happiness, we are not altogether unworthy of our origin.

There is a local feeling connected with this occasion, too strong to be resisted; a sort of *genius of the place*, which inspires and awes us. We feel that we are on the spot where the first scene of our history was laid; where the hearths and altars of New England were first placed; where Christianity, and civilization, and letters made their first lodgement, in a vast extent of country, covered with a wilderness, and peopled by roving barbarians. We are here, at the season of the year at which the event took place. The imagination irresistibly and rapidly draws around us the principal features and the leading characters in the original scene. We cast our eyes abroad on the ocean, and we see where the little barque, with the interesting group upon its deck, made its slow progress to the shore. We

look around us, and behold the hills and promontories where the anxious eyes of our fathers first saw the places of habitation and of rest. We feel the cold which benumbed, and listen to the winds which pierced them. Beneath us is the Rock, on which New England received the feet of the Pilgrims. We seem even to behold them, as they struggle with the elements, and, with toilsome efforts, gain the shore. We listen to the chiefs in council; we see the unexampled exhibition of female fortitude and resignation; we hear the whisperings of youthful impatience, and we see, what a painter of our own has also represented by his pencil, chilled and shivering childhood, houseless, but for a mother's arms, couchless, but for a mother's breast, till our own blood almost freezes. The mild dignity of CARVER and of BRADFORD; the decisive and soldierlike air and manner of STANDISH; the devout BREWSTER; the enterprising ALLERTON; the general firmness and thoughtfulness of the whole band; their conscious joy for dangers escaped; their deep solicitude about danger to come; their trust in Heaven; their high religious faith, full of confidence and anticipation; all of these seem to belong to this place, and to be present upon this occasion, to fill us with reverence and admiration . . .

The nature and constitution of society and government in this country are interesting topics, to which I would devote what remains of the time allowed to this occasion. Of our system of government the first thing to be said is, that it is really and practically a free system. It originates entirely with the people and rests on no other foundation than their assent. To judge of its actual operation, it is not enough to look merely at the form of its construction. The practical character of government depends often on a variety of considerations, besides the abstract frame of its constitutional organization. Among these are the condition and tenure of property; the laws regulating its alienation and descent; the presence or absence of a military power; an armed or unarmed yeomanry; the spirit of the age, and the degree of general intelligence. In these respects it cannot be denied that the circumstances of this country are most favorable to the hope of maintaining a government of a great nation on principles entirely popular. In the absence of military power, the nature of government must essentially depend on the manner in which property is holden and distributed. There is a natural influence belonging to property, whether it exists in many hands or few; and it is on the rights of property that both despotism and unrestrained popular violence ordinarily commence their attacks. Our ancestors began their system of government here under a condition of comparative equality in regard to wealth, and their early laws were of a nature to favor and continue this equality.

A republican form of government rests not more on political constitutions, than on those laws which regulate the descent and transmission of property. Governments like ours could not have been maintained, where property was holden according to the principles of the feudal system; nor, on the other hand, could the feudal constitution possibly exist with us. Our New England ancestors brought hither no great capitals from Europe; and if they had, there was nothing productive in which they could have been invested. They left behind them the whole feudal policy of the other continent. They broke away at once from the system of military service established in the Dark Ages, and which continues, down even to the present time, more or less to affect the condition of property all over Europe. They came to a new country. There were, as yet, no lands

yielding rent, and no tenants rendering service. The whole soil was unreclaimed from barbarism. They were themselves, either from their original condition, or from the necessity of their common interest, nearly on a general level in respect to property. Their situation demanded a parcelling out and division of the lands, and it may be fairly said, that this necessary act *fixed the future frame and form of their government*. The character of their political institutions was determined by the fundamental laws respecting property. The laws rendered estates divisible among sons and daughters. The right of primogeniture, at first limited and curtailed, was afterwards abolished. The property was all freehold. The entailment of estates, long trusts, and the other processes for fettering and tying up inheritances, were not applicable to the condition of society, and seldom made use of

I deem it my duty on this occasion to suggest, that the land is not yet wholly free from the contamination of a traffic, at which every feeling of humanity must forever revolt,—I mean the African slave trade. Neither public sentiment, nor the law, has hitherto been able entirely to put an end to this odious and abominable trade. At the moment when God in his mercy has blessed the Christian world with a universal peace, there is reason to fear, that, to the disgrace of the Christian name and character, new efforts are making for the extension of this trade by subjects and citizens of Christian states, in whose hearts there dwell no sentiments of humanity or of justice, and over whom neither the fear of God nor the fear of man exercises a control. In the sight of our law, the African slave trader is a pirate and a felon; and in the sight of Heaven, an offender beyond the ordinary depth of human guilt. There is no brighter page of our history, than that which records the measures which have been adopted by the government at an early day, and at different times since, for the suppression of this traffic; and I would call on all the true sons of New England to cooperate with the laws of man, and the justice of Heaven. If there be, within the extent of our knowledge or influence, any participation in this traffic, let us pledge ourselves here, upon the rock of Plymouth, to extirpate and destroy it. It is not fit that the land of the Pilgrims should bear the shame longer. I hear the sound of the hammer, I see the smoke of the furnaces where manacles and fetters are still forged for human limbs. I see the visages of those who by stealth and at midnight labor in this work of hell, foul and dark, as may become the artificers of such instruments of misery and torture. Let that spot be purified, or let it cease to be of New England. Let it be purified, or let it be set aside from the Christian world; let it be put out of the circle of human sympathies and human regards, and let civilized man henceforth have no communion with it

The hours of this day are rapidly flying, and this occasion will soon be passed. Neither we nor our children can be expected to behold its return. They are in the distant regions of futurity, they exist only in the all-creating power of God, who shall stand here a hundred years hence, to trace, through us, their descent from the Pilgrims and to survey, as we have now surveyed, the progress of their country, during the lapse of a century. We would anticipate their concurrence with us in our sentiments of deep regard for our common ancestors. We would anticipate and partake the pleasure with which they will then recount the steps of New England's advancement. On the morning of that day, although it will not disturb us in our repose, the voice of acclamation and gratitude,

commencing on the Rock of Plymouth, shall be transmitted through millions of the sons of the Pilgrims, till it lose itself in the murmurs of the Pacific seas.

We would leave for consideration of those who shall then occupy our places, some proof that we hold the blessings transmitted from our fathers in just estimation; some proof of our attachment to the cause of good government, and of civil and religious liberty; some proof of a sincere and ardent desire to promote every thing which may enlarge the understandings and improve the hearts of men. And when, from the long distance of a hundred years, they shall look back upon us, they shall know, at least, that we possessed affections, which, running backward and warming with gratitude for what our ancestors have done for our happiness, run forward also to our posterity, and meet them with cordial salutation, ere yet they have arrived on the shore of Being.

Advance, then, ye future generations! We would hail you, as you rise in your long succession, to fill the places which we now fill, and to taste the blessings of existence where we are passing, and soon shall have passed, our own human duration. We bid you welcome to this pleasant land of the fathers. We bid you welcome to the healthful skies and the verdant fields of New England. We greet your accession to the great inheritance which we have enjoyed. We welcome you to the blessings of good government and religious liberty. We welcome you to the treasures of science and the delights of learning. We welcome you to the transcendent sweets of domestic life, to the happiness of kindred, and parents, and children. We welcome you to the immeasurable blessings of rational existence, the immortal hope of Christianity, and the light of everlasting Truth!

A New Pioneer

DOROTHY CANFIELD FISHER

Daniel Webster asked his auditors to imagine themselves in the place of the Pilgrims two hundred years before. In this story from 1940, for and about young schoolchildren, Dorothy Canfield Fisher (1879–1958)—American author, education reformer, and activist—enables her readers to appreciate the immigrant experience in their own time. The daughter of the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska, Fisher was a contemporary of Willa Cather and took a PhD in Romance Languages from Columbia University. She served as secretary of Horace Mann School in New York, and later as the first female member of the Vermont Board of Education.

Magda, a newly arrived Jewish immigrant from Austria possessing an old-world appearance and but a smattering of English, feels herself adjusting wonderfully to her new country, even while her classmates regard her with hostility. Why does Magda write her prayer for Thanksgiving, and for what does she give thanks? Why is she so pleased with the day of Thanksgiving? How does she win over her bigoted classmates? Is it true that immigrants are more able, and more likely, to appreciate the blessings of living in America than are the native born? Why did your ancestors come to America? Why do you stay? What is the meaning of the story's title?

A new girl came into the Winthrop Avenue public school about the beginning of November, and this is how she looked to the other boys and girls in the seventh grade.

She couldn't understand English although she could read it enough to get her lessons. (This was a small public school in a small inland American town where they seldom saw any foreigners, and people who couldn't speak English seemed outlandish.) She wore the queerest-looking clothes you ever saw and clumping shoes and great thick woolen stockings. (All the children in that town, as in most American towns, dressed exactly like everybody else, because their mothers mostly bought their clothes at Benning and Davis' department store on Main Street.)

Her hair wasn't bobbed and curled, neither a long nor short bob; it looked as though her folks hadn't ever had enough sense to bob it. It was done up in two funny looking pigtails. She had a queer expression on her face, like nothing anybody had ever seen—kind of a smile and yet kind of offish. She couldn't see the point of wise-cracks, but she laughed over things that weren't funny a bit, like the way a cheerleader waves his arms.

She got her lessons *terribly* well (the others thought somebody at home must help her more than the teachers like), and she was the dumbest thing about games—didn't even know how to play duck on a rock or run sheep run. And, queerest of all, she wore *aprons*! Can you beat it!

That's how she looked to the school. This is how the school looked to her. They had come a long way, she and her grandfather, from the town in Austria where he had a shop in which he repaired watches and clocks and sold trinkets the peasant boys bought for their sweethearts.

Men in uniforms and big boots had come suddenly one day—it was in vacation, and Magda was there—and had smashed in the windows of the shop and the showcase with the pretty things in it and had thrown all the furniture from their home back of the shop out into the street and made a bonfire of it.

Magda had been hiding in a corner and saw this; and now, after she had gone to sleep, she sometimes saw it again and woke up with a scream, but Grandfather always came quickly to say smilingly, "All right, Magda child. We're safe in America with Uncle Harry. Go to sleep again."

He had said she must not tell anybody about that day. "We can do something better in the New World than sow more hate," he said seriously. She was to forget about it if she could, and about the long journey afterward, when they were so frightened and had so little to eat; and, worst of all, when the man in the uniform in New York thought for a minute that something was wrong with their precious papers and they might have to go back.

She tried not to think of it, but it was in the back of her mind as she went to school every day, like the black cloth the jewelers put down on their counters to make their pretty gold and silver things shine more. The American school (really a rather ugly old brick building) was for Magda made of gold and silver, shining bright against what she tried to forget.

How kind the teachers were! Why, they *smiled* at the children. And how free and safe the children acted! Magda simply loved the sound of their chatter on the playground, loud and gay and not afraid even when the teacher stepped out for something. She did wish she could understand what they were saying.

She had studied English in her Austrian school, but this swift, birdlike twittering didn't sound a bit like the printed words on the page. Still, as the days went by she began to catch a word here and there, short ones like "down" and "run" and "back." And she soon found what *hurrah!* means, for the Winthrop Avenue school made a specialty of mass cheering, and every grade had a cheerleader, even the first graders.

Madga thought nearly everything in America was as odd and funny as it was nice. But the cheerleaders were the funniest, with their bendings to one side and the other and then jumping up straight in the air till both feet were off the ground. But she loved to yell, "Hurrah!" too, although she couldn't understand what they were cheering about.

It seemed to her that the English language was like a thick, heavy curtain hanging down between her and her new schoolmates. At first she couldn't see a thing through it.

But little by little it began to have thinner spots in it. She could catch a glimpse here and there of what they were saying when they sometimes stood in a group, looking at her and talking among themselves. How splendid it would be, she thought, to have the curtain down altogether so she could really understand what they were saying!

This is what they were saying—at least the six or seven girls who tagged after Betty Woodworth. Most of the seventh graders were too busy studying and racing around at recess time to pay much attention to the queer new girl. But some did. They used to say, “My goodness, look at that dress! It looks like her grandmother’s—if she’s got one.”

“Of all the dumb clucks. She doesn’t know enough to play squat tag. My goodness, the first graders can play *tag*.”

“My father told my mother this morning that he didn’t know why *our* country should take in all the disagreeable folks that other countries can’t stand any more.”

“She’s Jewish. She must be. Everybody that comes from Europe now is Jewish. We don’t want our town all filled up with Jews!”

“My uncle Peter saw where it said in the paper we ought to keep them out. We haven’t got enough for ourselves as it is.”

Magda could just catch a word or two, “country” and “enough” and “uncle.” But it wouldn’t be long now, she thought happily, till she could understand everything they said and really belong to seventh grade.

About two weeks after Magda came to school Thanksgiving Day was due. She had never heard of Thanksgiving Day, but since the story was all written out in her history book she soon found out what it meant. She thought it was perfectly lovely!

She read the story of the Pilgrim Fathers and their long, hard trip across the ocean (she knew something about that trip), and their terrible first winter, and the kind Indian whose language they couldn’t understand, who taught them how to cultivate the fields, and then—oh, it was poetry, just *poetry*, the setting aside of a day forever and forever, every year, to be thankful that they could stay in America!

How could people (as some of the people who wrote the German textbooks did) say that Americans didn’t care about anything but making money? Why, here, more than three hundred years after that day, this whole school and every other school, everywhere all over the country, were turning themselves upside down to celebrate with joy their great-grandfathers’ having been brave enough to come to America and to stay here, even though it was hard, instead of staying in Europe, where they had been so badly treated. (Magda knew something about that, too.)

Everybody in school was to do something for the celebration. The first graders had funny little Indian clothes, and they were going to pretend to show the second graders (in

Puritan costumes) how to plant corn. Magda thought they were delightful, those darling little things, being taught already to be thankful that they could go on living in America.

Some grades had songs; others were going to act in short plays. The children in Magda's own seventh grade, that she loved so, were going to speak pieces and sing. She had an idea all her own, and because she couldn't be sure of saying the right words in English she wrote a note to the teacher about it.

She would like to write a thankful prayer (she could read English pretty well now) and learn it by heart and say it, as her part of the celebration. The teacher, who was terrifically busy with a bunch of boys who were to build a small "pretend" log cabin on stage, nodded that it would be all right. So Magda went happily to write it and learn it by heart.

"Kind of nervy, if you ask me, of that little Jew girl to horn in on *our* celebration," said Betty.

"Who asked her to come to America, anyhow?" said another.

"I thought Thanksgiving was for *Americans!*" said another.

Magda, listening hard, caught the word "Americans," and her face lighted up. It wouldn't be long now, she thought, before she could understand them.

No, no, they weren't specially bad children, no more than you or I—they had heard older people talking like that—and they gabbled along, thoughtlessly, the way we are all apt to repeat what we hear, without considering whether it is right or not.

On Thanksgiving Day a lot of those grownups whose talk Betty and her gang had been repeating had come, as they always did, to the "exercises." They sat in rows in the assembly room, listening to the singing and acting of the children and saying, "the first graders are too darling," and "how time flies," and "can you believe it that Betty is up to my shoulder now? Seems like last week she was in the kindergarten."

The tall principal stood at one side of the platform and read off the different numbers from a list. By and by he said, "We shall now hear a prayer written by Magda Bensheim and spoken by her. Madga has been in this country only five weeks and in our school only three."

Magda came out to the middle of the platform, a bright, striped apron over her thick woolen dress, her braids tied with red ribbons. Her heart was beating fast. Her face was shining and solemn.

She put her hands together and lifted them up over her head and said to God, "Oh, thank you, thank you, dear God, for letting me come to America and nowhere else, when Grandfather and I were driven from our home. I learn out of my history book that

Americans all came to this country just how Grandfather and I come, because Europe treat them wrong and bad. Every year they gather like this—to remember their brave grandfathers who come here so long ago and stay on, although they had such hard times.

“American hearts are so faithful and true that they forget never how they were all refugees, too, and must thankful be that from refugees they come to be American citizens. So thanks to you, dear, dear God, for letting Grandfather and me come to live in a country where they have this beautiful once-a-year Thanksgiving, for having come afraid from Europe to be here free and safe. I, too, feel the same beautiful thank-you-God that all Americans say here today.”

Magda did not know what is usually said in English at the end of a prayer so did not say anything when she finished, just walked away back where the other girls of her class were. But the principal said it for her—after he had given his nose a good blow and wiped his eyes. He looked out over the people in the audience and said in a loud, strong voice, “Amen! I say Amen, and so does everybody here, I know.”

And then—it was sort of queer to applaud a prayer—they all began to clap their hands loudly.

Back in the seventh-grade room the teacher was saying, “Well, children, that’s all. See you next Monday. Don’t eat too much turkey.” But Betty jumped up and said, “Wait a minute, Miss Turner. Wait a minute, kids. I want to lead a cheer. All ready?”

“Three cheers for Magda!

“Hip! Hip!” She leaned ’way over to one side and touched the floor, and they all shouted, “Hurrah!”

She bent back to the other side. “Hurrah!” they shouted.

She jumped straight up till both feet were off the ground and clapped her hands over her head, and “Hurrah!” they all shouted.

The wonderful moment had come. The curtain that had shut Magda off from her schoolmates had gone. “Oh! Ach!” she cried, her eyes wide. “Why, I understand every word. Yes, now I can understand American!”

Thanksgiving at the Polls

EDWARD EVERETT HALE

Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909), Unitarian minister, antislavery activist, and for a time chaplain in the United States Senate, was also a prolific author of essays and stories, many on American political subjects. He is best remembered for his story “The Man without a Country” (1863). In this story from 1899, Hale explores the relation between the holiday of Thanksgiving and the practice of generosity. But by building the story around immigrants and polling-booths, Hale also invites us to think about citizenship and the meaning of America, as well as our principles of freedom and equal opportunity.

Why does Frederick Dane first move into the polling place? What moves him to “extend the benefits of his new discovery”? What are the effects of his generosity on those he brings “home” with him? How does he end up with so much abundance for Thanksgiving, and why does he choose to share it beyond “his own” polling-booth? What is the meaning of the fact that the same events are taking place in other polling-booths, or of the final gathering in Faneuil Hall, with the Mayor in attendance? What is the meaning of the story’s title (and especially “at” the polls)? What is the symbolic significance of the fact that the gatherings occur in (at) polling-booths? What is the significance of the fact that most of the characters who take up residence in the polling-booths are wandering homeless immigrants? How is Thanksgiving connected to American citizenship?

I.

Frederick Dane was on his way towards what he called his home. His home, alas, was but an indifferent attic in one of the southern suburbs of Boston. He had been walking; but he was now standing still, at the well-known corner of Massachusetts and Columbus Avenues.

As often happens, Frederick Dane had an opportunity to wait at this corner a quarter of an hour. As he looked around him on the silent houses, he could not but observe the polling-booth, which a watchful city government had placed in the street, a few days before, in preparation for the election which was to take place three weeks afterward. Dane is of an inquiring temper, and seeing that the polling-booth had a door and the door had a keyhole, he tried in the keyhole a steel key which he had picked up in Dock Square the day before. Almost to his surprise, the key governed the lock at once, and he found himself able to walk in.

He left the door wide open, and the gaslight streaming in revealed to him the aspect of the cells arranged for Australian voting. The rails were all in their places, and the election might take place the very next day. It instantly occurred to Dane that he might save the five cents which otherwise he would have given to his masters of the street railway, and be the next morning three miles nearer his work, if he spent the night in the

polling-cabin. He looked around for a minute or two, and found some large rolls of street posters, which had been left there by some disappointed canvasser the year before, and which had accompanied one cell of the cabin in its travels. Dane is a prompt man, and, in a minute more, he had locked the door behind him, had struck a wax taper which he had in his cigar-box, had rolled the paper roll out on the floor, to serve as a pillow. In five minutes more, covered with his heavy coat, he lay on the floor, sleeping as soundly as he had slept the year before, when he found himself on the lee side of an iceberg under Peary's command.

This is perhaps unnecessary detail, by way of saying that this is the beginning of the arrangement which a city, not very intelligent, will make in the next century for unsettled people, whose own houses are not agreeable to them. There exist in Boston at this moment three or four hundred of the polling-booths,—nice little houses, enough better than most of the peasantry of most of Europe ever lived in. They are, alas, generally packed up in lavender and laid away for ten months of the year. But in the twentieth century we shall send them down to the shores of islands and other places where people like to spend the summer, and we shall utilize them, not for the few hours of an election only, but all the year round. This will not then be called "Nationalism," it will be called "Democracy," and that is a very good name when it is applied to a very good thing.

Dane was an old soldier and an old seaman. He was not troubled by disagreeable dreams, and in the morning, when the street-cars began to travel, he was awaked a little after sunrise, by their clatter on the corner. He felt well satisfied with the success of his experiment, and began on a forecast, which the reader shall follow for a few weeks, which he thought, and thought rightly, would tend to his own convenience, possibly to that of his friends.

Dane telegraphed down to the office that he should be detained an hour that morning, went out to his home of the day before at Ashmont, paid his landlady her scot, brought in with him his little possessions in a valise to the office, and did not appear at his new home until after nightfall.

He was then able to establish himself on the basis which proved convenient afterwards, and which it is worth while to explain to a world which is not too well housed. The city had provided three or four chairs there, a stove, and two tables. Dane had little literature, but, as he was in the literary line himself, he did not care for this so much; men who write books are not commonly eager to read books which are worse than their own. At a nine-cent window of a neighboring tinman's he was able to buy himself the few little necessities which he wanted for housekeeping. And not to detain the reader too long upon merely fleshly arrangements, in the course of a couple of hours of Tuesday evening and Wednesday evening, he had fitted up his convenient if not pretty bower with all that man requires. It was easy to buy a mince pie or a cream cake, or a bit of boiled ham or roast chicken, according as payday was near or distant. One is glad to have a tablecloth. But if one have a large poster warning people, a year before, that they should vote the Prohibition ticket, one's conscience is not wounded if this poster, ink down, takes the place which a tablecloth would have taken under other circumstances. If there is

not much crockery to use, there is but little to wash. And, in short, as well trained a man of the world as Dane had made himself thoroughly comfortable in his new quarters before the week was over.

II.

At the beginning Frederick's views were purely personal, or, as the preachers say, selfish. Here was an empty house, three miles nearer his work than his hired attic was, and he had taken possession. But conscience always asserts itself, and it was not long before he felt that he ought to extend the benefits of this new discovery of his somewhat further. It really was a satisfaction to what the pulpits call a "felt want" when as he came through Massachusetts Avenue on Thursday evening, he met a boy and a girl, neither of them more than ten years old, crying on the sidewalk. Dane is sympathetic and fond of children. He stopped the little brats, and satisfied himself that neither had had any supper. He could not understand a word of the language in which they spoke, nor could they understand him. But kindness needs little spoken language; and accordingly Frederick led them along to his cabin, and after waiting, as he always did, a minute or two, to be sure that no one was in sight, he unlocked the door, and brought in his little companions.

It was clear enough that the children were such waifs and strays that nothing surprised them, and they readily accepted the modest hospitalities of the position. Like all masculine housekeepers, Frederick had provided three times as much food as he needed for his own physical wants, so that it was not difficult to make these children happy with the pieces of mince pie and lemon pie and cream cake and eclairs which were left from his unknown festivals of the day before. Poor little things, they were both cold and tired, and, before half an hour was over, they were snugly asleep on and under a pile of Prohibition posters.

III.

Fortunately for Frederick Dane, for the nine years before he joined Peary, he had lived in the city of Bagdad. He had there served as the English interpreter for the Caliph of that city. The Caliph did most of his business at night, and was in the habit of taking Mr. Dane with him on his evening excursions. In this way Mr. Dane had made the somewhat intimate acquaintance of Mr. Jaffrey, the private secretary of the Caliph; and he had indeed in his own employment for some time, a wide-awake black man, of the name of Mezrou, who, for his "other place," was engaged as a servant in the Caliph's household. Dane was thus not unfamiliar with the methods of unexpected evening visits; and it was fortunate for him that he was so. The little children whom he had picked up, explained to him, by pantomime which would have made the fortune of a ballet-girl, that they were much more comfortable in their new home than they had been in any other, and that they had no wish to leave it. But by various temptations addressed to them, in the form of barley horses and dogs, and sticks of barber's candy, Dane, who was of a romantic and enterprising disposition, persuaded them to take him to some of their former haunts.

These were mostly at the North End of Boston, and he soon found that he needed all his recollections of Bagdad for the purpose of conducting any conversation with any of the people they knew best. In a way, however, with a little broken Arabic, a little broken Hebrew, a great deal of broken China, and many gesticulations, he made acquaintance with two of their compatriots, who had, as it seemed, crossed the ocean with them in the same steerage. That is to say, they either had or had not; but for many months Mr. Dane was unable to discover which. Such as they were, however, they had been sleeping on the outside of the upper attic of the house in Salutation Alley where these children had lodged, or not lodged, as the case might be, during the last few days. When Mr. Dane saw what were called their lodgings, he did not wonder that they had accepted pot-luck with him.

It is necessary to explain all this, that the reader may understand why, on the first night after the arrival of these two children, the population of the polling-booth was enlarged by the presence of these two Hebrew compatriots. And, without further mystery, it may be as well to state that all four were from a village about nine hundred and twenty-three miles north of Odessa, in the southern part of Russia. They had emigrated in a compulsory manner from that province, first on account of the utter failure of anything to eat there; second, on account of a prejudice which the natives of that country had contracted against the Hebrew race.

The two North End friends of little Ezra and Sarah readily accepted the invitation of the two children to join in the College Settlement at the corner of the two avenues. The rules of the institution proved attractive, and before a second week was well advanced ten light excelsior mattresses were regularly rolled up every morning as the different inmates went to their duties; while, as evening closed in, eight cheerful companions told stories around the hospitable board.

IV.

It is no part of this little tale to follow, with Mr. Stevenson's magic, or with that of the Arabian Nights, the fortunes from day to day of the little circle. Enough that men of Hebrew race do not prove lazy anywhere. Dane, certainly, gave them no bad example. The children were at once entered in a neighboring school, where they showed the quickness of their race. They had the advantage, when the week closed and began, that they could attend the Sabbath school provided for them by the Hebrews on Saturday and the several Sunday-schools of the Parker Memorial, the Berkeley Temple, and the other churches of the neighborhood. The day before the election, Frederick Dane asked Oleg and Vladimir to help him in bringing up some short boards, which they laid on the trusses in the roof above them. On the little attic thus prepared, they stored their mattresses and other personal effects before the great election of that year began. They had no intention of interfering, even by a cup of cold coffee, with the great wave of righteous indignation which, on that particular day of that particular year, "swept away, as by a great cosmic tidal flood, the pretences and ambitions, etc., etc., etc." These words are cited from Frederick Dane's editorial of the next morning, and were in fact used by him or by some

of his friends, without variations, in all the cosmic changes of the elections of the next six years.

V.

But so soon as this election was well over, the country and the city settled down, with what Ransom used to call "amazin'" readiness to the new order, such as it was. Only the people who "take up the streets" detached more men than ever to spoil the pavement. For now a city election was approaching. And it might be that the pavers and ditchers and shovellers and curbstone men and asphalt makers should vote wrong. Dane and his settlement were well aware that after this election they would all have to move out from their comfortable quarters. But, while they were in, they determined to prepare for a fit Thanksgiving to God, and the country which makes provision so generous for those in need. It is not every country, indeed, which provides four hundred empty houses, every autumn, for the convenience of any unlodged night-editor with a skeleton key, who comes along.

He explained to his companions that a great festival was near. They heard this with joy. He explained that no work would be done that day,—not in any cigar-shop or sweating-room. This also pleased them. He then, at some length, explained the necessity of the sacrifice of turkeys on the occasion. He told briefly how Josselyn and the fathers shot them as they passed through the sky. But he explained that now we shoot them, as one makes money, not directly but indirectly. We shoot our turkeys, say, at shooting-galleries. All this proved intelligible, and Frederick had no fear for turkeys.

As for Sarah and Ezra, he found that at Ezra's boys' club and at Sarah's girls' club, and each of her Sabbath-school classes and Sunday-school classes, and at each of his, it had been explained that on the day before Thanksgiving they must come with baskets to places named, and carry home a Thanksgiving dinner.

These announcements were hailed with satisfaction by all to whom Dane addressed them. Everything in the country was as strange to them as it would have been to an old friend of mine, an inhabitant of the planet Mars. And they accepted the custom of this holiday among the rest. Oddly enough, it proved that one or two of them were first-rate shots, and, by attendance at different shooting-galleries, they brought in more than a turkey apiece, as Governor Bradford's men did in 1621. Many of them were at work in large factories, where it was the custom of the house to give a roasted turkey and a pan of cranberry sauce to each person who had been on the pay-list for three months. One or two of them were errand men in the market, and it was the practice of the wholesale dealers there, who at this season become to a certain extent retailers, to encourage these errand men by presenting to each of them a turkey, which was promised in advance. As for Dane himself, the proprietors of his journal always presented a turkey to each man on their staff. And in looking forward to his Thanksgiving at the polls, he had expected to provide a twenty-two pound gobbler which a friend in Vermont was keeping for him. It may readily be imagined, then, that, when the day before Thanksgiving came, he was more oppressed by an embarrassment of riches than by any difficulty on the debtor side of his

account. He had twelve people to feed, himself included. There were the two children, their eight friends, and a young Frenchman from Paris who, like all persons of that nationality who are six months in this country, had found many enemies here. Dane had invited him to dinner. He had arranged that there should be plates or saucers enough for each person to have two. And now there was to be a chicken-pie from Obed Shalom, some mince pies and Marlborough pies from the Union for Christian Work, a turkey at each end of the board; and he found he should have left over, after the largest computation for the appetites of the visitors, twenty-three pies of different structure, five dishes of cranberry sauce, three or four boxes of raisins, two or three drums of figs, two roasted geese and eleven turkeys. He counted all the turkeys as roasted, because he had the promise of the keeper of the Montgomery House that he would roast for him all the birds that were brought in to him before nine o'clock on Thanksgiving morning.

VI.

Having stated all this on a list carefully written, first in the English language and second in the language of the Hebrews, Frederick called his fellow-lodgers together earlier than usual on the evening before Thanksgiving Day. He explained to them, in the patois which they used together, that it would be indecent for them to carry this supply of food farther than next Monday for their own purposes. He told them that the occasion was one of exuberant thanksgiving to the God of heaven. He showed them that they all had great reason for thanksgiving. And, in short, he made three heads of a discourse which might have been expanded by the most eloquent preacher in Boston the next day, and would have well covered the twenty-five minutes which the regulation would have required for a sermon. He then said that, as they had been favored with much more than they could use for their own appetites, they must look up those who were not so well off as themselves.

He was well pleased by finding that he was understood, and what he said was received with applause in the various forms in which Southern Russia applauds on such occasions. As for the two children, their eyes were wide open, and their mouths, and they looked their wonder.

Frederick then proposed that two of their number should volunteer to open a rival establishment at the polling-booth at the corner of Gates Street and Burgoyne Street, and that the company should on the next day invite guests enough to make another table of twelve. He proposed that the same course should be taken at the corner of Shapleigh and Bowditch Streets, and yet again at the booth which is at the corner of Curtis Avenue and Quincy Street. And he said that, as time would press upon them, they had better arrange to carry a part at least of the stores to these places that evening. To this there was a general assent. The company sat down to a hasty tea, administered much as the Israelites took their last meal in Egypt; for every man had on his long frieze coat and his heavy boots, and they were eager for the active work of Thanksgiving. For each the stewards packed two turkeys in a basket, filled in as far as they could with other stores, and Frederick headed his procession.

It was then that he was to learn, for the first time, that he was not the only person in Boston.

It was then that he found out that the revelation made to one man is frequently made to many.

He found out that he was as wise as the next fellow, but was no wiser; was as good as the next fellow, but was no better; and that, in short, he had no special patent upon his own undertaking.

The little procession soon arrived at the corner of Shapleigh and Bowditch Streets. Whoever had made the locks on the doors of the houses had been content to use the same pattern for all. It proved, therefore, that the key of No. 237 answered for No. 238, and it was not necessary to open the door with the "jimmy" which Simeon had under his ulster.

But on the other hand, to Frederick's amazement, as he threw the door open, he found a lighted room and a long table around which sat twelve men, guised or disguised in much the same way as those whom he had brought with him. A few moments showed that another leader of the people had discovered this vacant home a few weeks before, and had established there another settlement of the un-homed. As it proved, this gentleman was a Mashpee Indian. He was, in fact, the member of the House of Representatives from the town of Mashpee for the next winter. Arriving in Boston to look for lodgings, he, not unnaturally, met with a Mohawk, two Dacotahs, and a Cherokee, who, for various errands, had come north and east. A similarity of color, not to say of racial relations, had established a warm friendship among the five, and they had brought together gradually twelve gentlemen of copper color, who had been residing in this polling-booth since the second day after the general election. Their fortune had not been unlike that of Frederick and his friends, and at this moment they were discussing the methods by which they might distribute several brace of ducks which had been sent up from Mashpee, a haunch of venison which had come down from above Machias, and some wild turkeys which had arrived by express from the St. Regis Indians of Northern New York. At the moment of the arrival of our friends, they were sending out two of their number to find how they might best distribute thus their extra provender.

These two gladly joined in the little procession, and all went together to the corner of Quincy Street and Curtis Avenue. There a similar revelation was made, only there was some difficulty at first in any real mutual understanding. For here they met a dozen, more or less, of French Canadians. These gentlemen had left their wives and their children in the province of Quebec, and, finding themselves in Boston, had taken possession of the polling-booth, where they were living much more comfortably than they would have lived at home. They too had been well provided for Thanksgiving, both by their friends at home and by their employers, and had been questioning as to the distribution which they could make of their supplies. Reinforced by four of their number, the delegation in search of hungry people was increased to fourteen in number, and with a certain curiosity, it must be confessed, they went together to try their respective keys on No. 311.

Opening this without so much as knocking at the door to know if here they might not provide the “annex” or “tender” which they wished to establish, they found, it must be confessed without any amazement or amusement, a company of Italians under the charge of one Antonio Fero, who had also worked out the problem of cheap lodgings, and had established themselves for some weeks here. These men also had been touched, either by some priest’s voice or other divine word, with a sense of the duties of the occasion, and were just looking round to know where they might spread their second table. Five of them joined the fourteen, and the whole company, after a rapid conversation, agreed that they would try No. 277 on the other side of the Avenue. And here their fortunes changed.

For here it proved that the “cops” on that beat, finding nights growing somewhat cold, and that there was no provision made by the police commissioners for a club-room for gentlemen of their profession, had themselves arranged in the polling-booth a convenient place for the reading of the evening newspapers and for conference on their mutual affairs. These “cops” were unmarried men, and did not much know where was the home in which the governor requested them to spend their Thanksgiving. They had therefore determined to spread their own table in their club-room, and this evening had been making preparations for a picnic feast there at midnight on Thanksgiving Day, when they should be relieved from their more pressing duties. They also had found the liberality of each member of the force had brought in more than would be requisite, and were considering the same subject which had oppressed the consciences of the leaders of the other bands.

No one ever knew who made the great suggestion, but it is probable that it was one of these officials, well acquainted with the charter of the city of Boston and with its constitution and by-laws, who offered the proposal which was adopted. In the jealousy of the fierce democracy of Boston in the year 1820, when the present city charter was made, it reserved for itself permission to open Faneuil Hall at any time for a public meeting. It proves now that whenever fifty citizens unite to ask for the use of the hall for such a meeting, it must be given to them. At the time of which we are reading the mayor had to preside at every such meeting. At the “Cops” club it was highly determined that the names of fifty citizens should at once be obtained, and that the Cradle of Liberty should be secured for the general Thanksgiving.

It was wisely resolved that no public notice should be given of this in the journals. It was well known that that many-eyed Argus called the press is very apt not to interfere with that which is none of its business.

VII.

And thus it happened that, when Thanksgiving Day came, the worthy janitor of Faneuil Hall sent down his assistant to open it, and that the assistant, who meant to dine at home, found a good-natured friend from the country who took the keys and lighted the gas in his place. Before the sun had set, Frederick Dane and Antonio Fero and Michael Chevalier and the Honorable Mr. Walk-in-the-Water and Eben Kartschoff arrived with an express-wagon driven by a stepson of P. Nolan. There is no difficulty at Faneuil Hall in bringing

out a few trestles and as many boards as one wants for tables, for Faneuil Hall is a place given to hospitality. And so, before six o'clock, the hour assigned for the extemporized dinner, the tables were set with turkeys, with geese, with venison, with mallards and plover, with quail and partridges, with cranberry and squash, and with dishes of Russia and Italy and Greece and Bohemia, such as have no names. The Greeks brought fruits, the Indians brought venison, the Italians brought red wine, the French brought walnuts and chestnuts, and the good God sent a blessing. Almost every man found up either a wife or a sweetheart or a daughter or a niece to come with him, and the feast went on to the small hours of Friday. The Mayor came down on time, and being an accomplished man, addressed them in English, in Latin, in Greek, in Hebrew, and in Tuscan. And it is to be hoped that they understood him.

But no record has ever been made of the feast in any account-book on this side the line. Yet there are those who have seen it, or something like it, with the eye of faith. And when, a hundred years hence, some antiquary reads this story in a number of the "Omaha Intelligencer," which has escaped the detrition of the thirty-six thousand days and nights, he will say,—

"Why, this was the beginning of what we do now! Only these people seem to have taken care of strangers only one month in the twelve. Why did they not welcome all strangers in like manner, until they had made them feel at home? These people, once a year, seem to have fed the hungry. Would it not have been simpler for them to provide that no man should ever be hungry? These people certainly thanked God to some purpose once a year; how happy is the nation which has learned to thank him always!"

3



Discussion Guides

Discussion Guide for Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation

- I. About the Author**
- II. Summary**
- III. Thinking about the Text**
- IV. Thinking with the Text**

I. About the Author

For any American, George Washington (1732–99) is—or ought to be—a man who needs no introduction. Commander-in-chief of the Continental Army in the War of American Independence (1775–83), president of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, and unanimously chosen to be the first president of the United States (1789–97), Washington has long enjoyed the deserved reputation as the Father of his Country. Universally admired for his courage, integrity, and judgment, Washington had great influence and power as the nation's first president. But ever mindful of the precedents that he would be setting for future leadership, he took pains to cultivate practices and manners that would stand the nation in good stead long after he was gone from the scene. Such considerations appear evident in his Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789, Washington's (and the nation's) first presidential proclamation, issued in the first year of his first term as President of the United States.

II. Summary

In colonial times, Thanksgiving was a harvest festival, in which the colonists offered thanks to God Almighty for a good harvest, sometimes by feasting, sometimes by fasting. Such a holiday was celebrated already in the Spanish colony of Florida in the sixteenth century, and in the British colonies of Virginia and Massachusetts in the seventeenth century, most famously in 1621, when the Pilgrims at Plymouth Plantation celebrated their first successful harvest in the company of some of the Native American tribesmen. Thanksgiving became a regularly celebrated national holiday only during the Civil War, when Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a day of national Thanksgiving in 1863, and each president since has annually issued Thanksgiving Day proclamations. The date for the holiday was set as the fourth Thursday in November by an act of Congress only in 1941.

But the first day of national Thanksgiving was proclaimed by George Washington in the first year of the new American republic, whose appearance on the world stage—after the perilous Revolutionary War, the failure of the Articles of Confederation, and the contentious Constitutional Convention—seemed little short of miraculous. Washington spoke not of harvests but (mainly) of matters political.

The structure of his proclamation is straightforward. After the formal introductory opening—"By the President of the United States of America. A Proclamation."—the

three paragraphs deal in turn with the reasons President Washington is issuing the proclamation, the things for which he recommends we give thanks to God, and the things for which we should humbly offer God our prayers and supplications.

III. Thinking about the Text

A. The Reasons for the Proclamation

1. What are the two reasons Washington gives for issuing the proclamation?
2. How are they related to each other? Which do you think is more important?
3. Why does Washington emphasize that he is only doing his duty and acceding to Congress's request?
4. Why does Congress ask him merely to "*recommend*" a day of public thanksgiving and prayer?
5. To whom is the proclamation addressed? What does it recommend that they do?

IN CONVERSATION

In this conversation, Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass discuss Washington's Proclamation with Diana Schaub, coeditor of What So Proudly We Hail, and Christopher DeMuth, distinguished senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.

Diana Schaub: Washington first says that giving thanks is the duty of all nations, so his proclamation is not exclusively American. Second, he says that he is responding to the will of Congress: it is Congress who has made this request of him. It is not an executive decree that Washington himself has come up with.

Christopher DeMuth: Washington was very conscious of the precedential value of everything that he did. The important thing about these two reasons he gives is this: he is being dutiful. He is not stepping out as the chief executive; he is not bossing anyone around. In fact, he is pursuing this matter of great importance as a duty as president, both because nations have a duty to give thanks and because Congress has asked that he make this recommendation.

Diana Schaub: There is one new element, which is that Washington's proclamation is addressed directly to the people of the states, whereas the previous proclamations of the Continental Congress were addressed simply to the states themselves. In this proclamation, you can see a movement in the direction of a more consolidated nation—a true union.

Leon Kass: Exactly. This is the first presidential proclamation to an entire nation, recommending some activity on their part—but Washington only does this because the representatives of those people have requested that he do so. To this

he adds that the duty is a universal one. So it is a combination of the universal and the particular, the national, just in the point of departure.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

B. The Things for Which Thanks Should Be Given

1. Make a list of the several items in the proclamation (second paragraph) for which thanks should be given. Do you see any order in the list?
2. Which items do you think are most important? To Washington? To us today?
3. To whom are thanks to be given? What view of the divine is operative here?
4. Are the “great and various favors which He hath been pleased to bestow on us” personal and private or communal and public? What is the relation between the private and public blessings?
5. What do you think of Washington's language? Can you find in it echoes of the Bible or of the Constitution? (Compare, for instance, the language of the final paragraph to [St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, Chapter 2](#), or to Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution.)

IN CONVERSATION

Amy Kass: Washington turns this celebration, which was a harvest festival to begin with, into what is clearly a political holiday. And so our thanks are, first and foremost, to God Almighty for blessing the nation and for the nation's establishment and perpetuation. And secondly, he turns the citizenry toward thanking God for the blessings He has provided and will continue to provide. The structure is past, present, and future.

Christopher DeMuth: This proclamation was issued after thirteen years of intense activity: a war which looked like it was going to be lost from month to month, the dissolution of the original constitution and the construction of the new Constitution, and the creation of an entirely new political order. This was an extraordinarily intense period, and to some extent everything was political. But, at the end of it, with the new Constitution and the new president, everything had fallen into place, and it seemed miraculous. When Washington says that we should take this occasion of the harvest thanksgiving to give thanks for what is more important to all of us, he is really speaking for the entire nation.

I find the language very interesting. He has some Biblical cadences, and he has some constitutional cadences. His emphasis is very much on the great blessings of this new constitutional order. He has very few references to things that are purely private and personal, but every one of them is derivative of the Constitution: civil

and political liberties, for example, or the progress of science. So the proclamation is strongly political, but it came at a time that is probably the most intensely political time of our whole history.

Amy Kass: And the very fact that Washington turns our attention to God and to Providence makes this proclamation utterly enduring. In fact, it reflects the insight of a wise man who once said: “No gods, no city.”

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

C. The Things for Which We Should Pray

1. Make a list of the several items for which prayer should be made (third paragraph). Do you see any order in the list?
2. Which items do you think are most important? To Washington? To us today?
3. Why does Washington begin with the prayer “to pardon our national and other transgressions”? Which national transgressions might he have in mind?
4. What do you make of the double prayer “to promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue *and* the encrease of science among them and Us” (emphasis added)? How does Washington see the relation between religion and science?
5. What do you make of the qualification in the final prayer for temporal prosperity: that it be (only) of “such a degree . . . as he alone knows to be best”? Were you to pray for prosperity today, would you include such a qualifying clause?

IN CONVERSATION

Diana Schaub: Most striking is the first thing Washington encourages us to pray for. He says that our prayers should be “supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions.” This is an element that tends to drop out of presidential proclamations, though it is, of course, present in Lincoln’s and in Adams’s. Indeed, John Adams actually called for a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer—and he did this on two occasions, which may have led Thomas Jefferson to abandon the tradition altogether when he was president.

Leon Kass: The motion of the prayers begins with our transgressions, moves to our duties, then asks that our government be, in fact, a blessing to all people. Then it moves out to the sovereigns of other nations, and then to humankind altogether to “promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the encrease of science . . . and generally to grant unto all Mankind such a degree

of temporal prosperity as he alone knows to be best.” I like this last touch very much. It’s not a prayer for the maximum amount of increase of this or that, but the recognition that even in our prayers we should understand the limitations of what might be good for us, as opposed to what we might wish for.

Amy Kass: The suggestion is that God alone knows measure.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

D. Washington's Purposes

1. What does Washington hope the Proclamation will accomplish?
2. In both the paragraph about thanksgiving and the paragraph about prayers, Washington speaks about the people uniting: “That we may then all unite in rendering him our sincere and humble thanks”; “that we may then unite in humbly offering our prayers and supplications.” What kind of unity is he proposing for his fellow citizens? Why does Washington think it important?

IV. Thinking with the Text

Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation raises questions about the role of government in our private and religious lives, about the place of religion and piety in the American political order, about the connection between our public and our private—and between our natural and our political—blessings. It also invites questions about the meaning of the holiday of Thanksgiving and the role it should play in American life today.

A. Government, Private Life, and Religion

1. Should government in a free society be in the position of recommending a day of service to God? Is Washington's Proclamation a violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution?
2. Can a governmental—or any other—proclamation such as this induce the gratitude that it recommends? Or is genuine gratitude something that cannot be willed? If so, can setting aside time for gratitude make room for its expression?

IN CONVERSATION

Christopher DeMuth: I don't think that it is too much of a stretch to see this proclamation as an aspect of American exceptionalism. There are many great and worthy nations, and Washington begins by saying that they all have the duty to

give thanks, but *this* is the nation where the president is recognizing this duty and recommending it to the people of his nation. And though many of the blessings for which we are to give thanks were like manna from heaven—gifts directly from God—many came in the form of God working through the agency of the agents of the American Revolution for the past thirteen years.

Ours is a nation that created itself, more so than many other great nations. And in that sense we as a nation have more to unite us and more to give thanks for. It is not just that we are all on this same piece of geography or that we share common blood or traditions, but that this nation is one that *we* created. We are not the only nation that has a Thanksgiving, but I think it has an importance to Americans in that it melds our personal lives and our national lives in a way that is fitting for a nation with our peculiar history.

Amy Kass: It never would have occurred to me to think of this as an aspect of American exceptionalism, but I think that makes sense. But, on the really basic question of whether a government can exhort somebody to give thanks: you can tell somebody to give thanks, just as we try to teach our children always to say thank you, but genuine gratefulness is not something you can insist upon. It is something that has to come from the heart. And for that reason, I think Washington is very smart to say that he *recommends* this. The emphasis is on recommendation, not on insistence.

Diana Schaub: It is not a command, it is a recommendation—or, as Lincoln says, an “invitation.” But it is very important to extend that invitation and to provide the occasion. When you provide the occasion in a public way like this, in a communal way, it does help to draw that feeling forth.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

B. Religion, Piety, and the American Political Order

1. What is the relation between the strength of the American nation and the spirit of religion?
2. Can the United States of America do without a connection to something higher than itself?

C. Public and Private Blessings

1. Thanksgiving was, to begin with, a holiday of the harvest, expressing thanks to God for the bounty of nature. Washington’s Proclamation emphasizes mainly the blessings of our political—constitutional—order. Is one more important than the other? For which should we Americans today be most grateful?

2. On what do our greatest blessings depend? God and nature? Human enhancement of the gifts of nature and/or nature's God? Fortune? Something else?
3. To what extent are our private and personal blessings dependent on public and political ones?
4. When we gather around our own Thanksgiving tables, for what are we inclined to be most grateful? For private and personal goods and joys? For communal and political benefits? For divine gifts?
5. For what should we give thanks this year, as American citizens? For what should we be praying, as American citizens?

IN CONVERSATION

Christopher DeMuth: Thanksgiving is a time for pause. It is a sort of national Sabbath. We gather in a home as a family, and we have a set meal—a meal that is a kind of set menu that many people follow, and we give thanks.

When we look at Washington's Proclamation, the emphasis is on giving thanks to and for the nation, and there is very much a public character to that. But my own Thanksgivings when I was a boy had no political or national components to them. But even when it is focused on the personal, on the family, where we share our family trials and tribulations and triumphs and talk about the day, Thanksgiving is different from other such family meals because millions and millions of other people are doing it at the same time. It does have this sacramental character in that we are talking about the personal, but we are one of millions of small platoons who are doing the same thing.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

D. Thanksgiving and the National Calendar

1. What is special about Thanksgiving as a national holiday today? Is it a public or a private and familial holiday?
2. What is the place of Thanksgiving on our national calendar? How does it compare—in substance, tone, and manner of celebration—to the Fourth of July?
3. How does Thanksgiving express American identity and American character?
4. What does Thanksgiving contribute to American identity and American character?
5. Does our current mode of celebrating Thanksgiving—centered around huge family feasts—fit the deeper meaning of the holiday? What could be added to your own family celebration that might make the day more meaningful?
6. John Adams, who succeeded George Washington as president, recommended a [National Day of Humiliation, Fasting, and Prayer](#) rather than a Thanksgiving

Proclamation. What do you think of this idea? Would a more somber fast add something that is currently missing in our Thanksgiving rituals?

7. Can there be genuine thanksgiving on a purely secular foundation?
8. Can there be a solid and enduring political order on a purely secular foundation?

IN CONVERSATION

Christopher DeMuth: I think Thanksgiving has gained importance because it is more and more difficult to observe in the traditional manner. We live in an age of bounty. We live in a world where there are football games and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, and some department stores now want to start Black Friday on Thursday evening . . .

Diana Schaub: I think it is good to place the holiday in juxtaposition with the Fourth of July. On the Fourth, we take credit for ourselves. We celebrate what *we* did. On Thanksgiving, we place the credit elsewhere. We look higher.

Amy Kass: The [Declaration of Independence](#) ends with “and for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”—we firmly rely on it!—“we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” Thanksgiving really turns this inside out. Thanksgiving is very close to the Fourth of July, but in a certain way, it's absolutely the opposite. If the Fourth is about *independence*, Thanksgiving is really about *dependence*.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

Discussion Guide for “Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen”

- I. About the Author**
- II. Summary**
- III. Thinking about the Text**
- IV. Thinking with the Text**

I. About the Author

The life of O. Henry, like his much loved short stories, was filled with twists and surprises. Born William Sydney Porter in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1862, O. Henry later moved to Texas, where he worked as a ranch hand, bank teller, and journalist. In 1896 he was indicted for and convicted of embezzling funds from an Austin bank, and he spent three years in prison. Prison turned out to be a blessing in disguise, for it was there that he started to write short stories using the pseudonym by which he later became famous. Released from prison in 1901, O. Henry moved to New York City, where he lived for the last ten years of his life, continuing to write short stories, many of which, like the one discussed here, were set in New York City. “Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,” like so many of O. Henry’s other stories, is rife with irony, mocking humor, and his signature surprise—or as some have described them, “twisty”—endings. These qualities make it difficult to say with certainty what O. Henry is up to: is he irreverently satirizing the tradition of Thanksgiving, or is he, at the same time, showing us and celebrating its redeeming essence?

II. Summary

The plot is fairly straight-forward, at least until O. Henry’s characteristic final twist. After an opening editorial about President Theodore Roosevelt, Thanksgiving proclamations, and the state of “tradition” in America, the story proper begins with Stuffy Pete, a homeless man who occupies a bench in New York’s Union Square. There, as has happened annually for nine years on Thanksgiving Day, he is met by an elderly gentleman, who escorts him to a restaurant and treats him to a lavish dinner which the old gentleman watches Stuffy Pete eat. But this year, while Stuffy is en route to his park bench, he passes the mansion of two old ladies of an ancient family, who have their own tradition of feasting the first hungry wayfarer that comes along after the clock strikes noon. The servants of the elderly sisters take Stuffy Pete in and banquet him to a finish. So he is well stuffed by the time he reaches his bench. When the old gentleman appears as usual, Stuffy Pete doesn’t have the heart to disappoint the kindly old man, whose “eyes were bright with the giving pleasure.” He goes with him to the traditional table at the traditional restaurant, and—like a valiant knight—consumes a second huge Thanksgiving Day meal. As soon as the men go their separate ways, Stuffy Pete, now dangerously overstuffed, collapses and is taken by ambulance to the hospital. An hour later, the old gentleman is brought in, and, as the story’s surprise final sentence tells us, he is

discovered to be near starvation, not having had anything to eat for three days past.

III. Thinking about the Text

“Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen” is a story that links the spirit of giving and the impulse to charity with the development of tradition and the holiday of Thanksgiving. But the “twisty” ending shows us that good intentions may have bad consequences, and, more specifically, that generous impulses toward our less fortunate fellow citizens do not always yield genuine benefaction. Indeed, the ending seems to support the view—encouraged by the narrator’s ironic and mocking tone throughout—that the entire story is intended to expose the hollowness or foolishness of gentlemanly generosity, American traditions, and the holiday of Thanksgiving in particular. Does a careful consideration of the story support this conclusion? Or does the story, by means of irony, turn the reader against himself and toward more elevated teachings about these important things?

A. The Characters

1. Describe Stuffy Pete and the “old gentleman” and also what you know about their circumstances and their lives.
2. Can you explain why each one does what he does? On previous Thanksgiving Days? On this one?
3. What do you think of their intentions? Their deeds? Their relation to each other? Do you admire the old gentleman? Do you admire Stuffy Pete?
4. What might we criticize about the relationship between the old gentleman and Stuffy Pete? About the way they shared (or, rather, *didn’t* share) a meal? About the way they interacted with each other?

IN CONVERSATION

In this conversation, Amy A. Kass and Leon R. Kass discuss O. Henry’s story with Diana Schaub, coeditor of What So Proudly We Hail, and Christopher DeMuth, distinguished senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.

Christopher DeMuth: I would say their tradition is satirical, in the sense that it is a twisted, reductionist form of the Thanksgiving tradition. There is bounteous food, but the food, the biological feeding, is all there is. The bounty does not represent any greater bounties or blessings. No families are present. The old gentleman wishes that he had a son. We don’t know Stuffy Pete’s background, but the people in the restaurant refer to him as a bum. There is no sharing between them. There is only one formulaic sentence that the old gentleman and Stuffy Pete recite.

In fact, there is so little sharing between them that the gentleman doesn’t even realize that Stuffy Pete is stuffed. And we’ve been given a vivid account of his

being stuffed—the buttons are flying off his coat like popcorn. Their Thanksgiving has just been reduced to this eating ritual.

Diana Schaub: It does seem very odd. The old gentleman just watches Stuffy Pete eat. They don’t dine together. There is no community.

Amy Kass: Unlike Chris, I think this is a wonderful tradition. Though this is clearly not a model for what a philanthropist should do—it is not what we would call “giving well and doing good”—it does seem that the story shows the peculiar grace that attaches to tradition.

The giving is *not* just one way. Both men are made better by the tradition. Stuffy Pete, who we have every reason to believe is homeless, or, as the men say, is a bum, really does become a gentleman. And the old gentleman, who lives alone, who has no family, who has no community—we see him happy. We see a smile on his face, which is the only kind of communication over his meal with Stuffy Pete.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

B. Gentlemen

1. Who—what—is a “gentleman”? What defines a “gentleman”?
2. Why does O. Henry call his story “*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*”? In what ways, if any, might *both* Stuffy Pete and the old man be regarded as gentlemen?
3. Why does O. Henry call his story “*Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen*”? In what ways, if any, does the holiday of Thanksgiving contribute to their gentlemanliness? Has it made them better than they otherwise would be?

IN CONVERSATION

Christopher DeMuth: The title is important. One of the deepest things about this story is that both the old gentleman and Stuffy Pete become true gentlemen. An important aspect of being a gentleman is a desire to make the other person comfortable, to put the other person at ease. And that is what motivates both of our characters. Stuffy Pete is suffering to put the old gentleman, whom he hardly knows, at ease. And the old gentleman is starving himself to put this person whom he only sees once a year at ease and to make him happy. They really are both quintessential gentlemen.

The twist comes in that by being gentlemen, they are actually hurting the other

person. The scene of the second meal is torture. The old gentleman has gone without food for three days. We are supposed to feel pain on both sides, caused by the gentlemanliness of the other.

Leon Kass: We are struggling with the question of O. Henry's ironies and his mockery. Is the title ironic? Yes. They both become gentlemen, but gentlemanship of this sort is catastrophic.

But despite the irony, there has been a kind of lifting up. The twist at the end causes the reader to ask: "Can we look past the fact that both of the characters end up in the hospital and say that, despite this, something beautiful happened here?" I don't know the answer, but I think that, by stripping down the story in this way, O. Henry is asking us to consider what really is at the heart of Thanksgiving. What is it that really matters? This particular year, thanks to the fact that he is stuffed, Stuffy Pete has the chance to return the old gentleman's kindness, at great personal expense.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

C. Tradition

1. What do you think of the "traditions" reported in the story? What are their strengths and weaknesses?
2. Should either of the traditions reported—that of the two old ladies' or that of the old gentleman (and Stuffy Pete)—be attributed to American "git-up and enterprise"? If not, how might you account for them?
3. Do you think better or worse of the old ladies or the old gentleman (and Stuffy Pete) for establishing and keeping their respective traditions? How much does your answer depend on the end of the story, with the harm suffered by both men?

D. Thanksgiving

1. Is the restaurant meal a fitting celebration of Thanksgiving? Why or why not? What elements are present, and what are lacking? Which are most important?
2. At the beginning of the story, the narrator asserts that Thanksgiving Day is the one day celebrated by "all . . . Americans who are *not self-made*" (emphasis added). What is the meaning of "self-made"? What does the narrator mean by suggesting that this is a holiday for the "*not self-made*"?
3. Annually, the old gentleman (in the only words we hear him say) greets Stuffy Pete in the same formulaic way: "Good morning. I am glad to perceive that the vicissitudes of another year have spared you to move in health about the beautiful world. For that blessing alone this day of thanksgiving is well proclaimed to each of us. If you will come with me, my man, I will provide

you with a dinner that should make your physical being accord with the mental” (4). What understanding of Thanksgiving informs the old gentleman’s remarks? Is it, in your opinion, the right understanding of the holiday and its guiding spirit?

4. Does the story express the spirit of Thanksgiving as George Washington would have us understand it? Why or why not?
5. Where is America in this story? Where are gratitude and prayer, or religion and piety? Is this a purely secularized Thanksgiving Day celebration?
6. The story begins with a reference to the then president, Theodore Roosevelt, whose own [1901 Thanksgiving Day Proclamation](#) directed the holiday toward generosity to one’s fellow man: “We can best prove our thankfulness to the Almighty by the way in which we on this earth and at this time each of us does his duty to his fellow man.” Are the citizens in the story confirming or refuting Roosevelt’s view?

IN CONVERSATION

Diana Schaub: In certain ways, I’m baffled by this story, and I’m especially baffled by the opening, which opens in a rather political way with a reference that it is President Theodore Roosevelt who gives us this day. I actually went and looked at Roosevelt’s [Thanksgiving Day Proclamation](#), and it seems that he was the first president to redirect the holiday away from giving thanks to God—vertical charity—and instead directed us toward generosity to our fellow man. Roosevelt declares, “We can best prove our thankfulness to the Almighty by the way in which on this earth and at this time each of us does his duty to his fellow men.” In a certain way, these citizens in the story are acting on that advice. They look for the needy among them and feast them. But this act leads to a strangely one-dimensional relationship between the individuals involved. In other words, the problem with their tradition is that it’s a brand new tradition and, in fact, is a violation of the original one.

Christopher DeMuth: The story begins with this mocking of President Roosevelt. O. Henry is setting the stage. We may not remember who the Puritans are, but I’m sure that if they tried it again, we could really lick ’em when they showed up. O. Henry is making light of the tradition. It is not just that these men are bizarre because they are not part of the actual, long-standing tradition. They are not part of that tradition because they are not part of families. They do not have homes.

Diana Schaub: O. Henry, in fact, offers the story as evidence to the Old World that Americans can, through their own determination and enterprise, sort of “get up a tradition” overnight.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

IV. Thinking with the Text

O. Henry's story, like George Washington's Thanksgiving Proclamation, invites attention to larger issues: the meaning of Thanksgiving, its place in our national calendar, and its role in expressing and shaping our national identity and national character; the best ways of giving and receiving, and the place of philanthropy or charity in our public life; and the importance of tradition, ritual, and religion for American civic life.

A. Thanksgiving and the National Calendar

1. What is special about Thanksgiving as a national holiday today? Is it a public or a private and familial holiday?
2. What does or should Thanksgiving mean for people who are without families or who are down and out?
3. What is the place of Thanksgiving on our national calendar? How does it compare—in substance, tone, and manner of celebration—to the Fourth of July?
4. How does Thanksgiving express American identity and American character?
5. What does Thanksgiving contribute to American identity and American character?
6. What is the meaning of the Thanksgiving feast?
7. Does our current mode of celebrating Thanksgiving—centered around huge family feasts—fit the deeper meaning of the holiday? What could be added to your own family celebration that might make the day more meaningful?
8. Can we square the spirit of Thanksgiving and the spirit of “Black Friday,” the fanatical shopping day “celebrated” on the day after Thanksgiving?

B. Giving and Receiving: The Place of Charity and Philanthropy in Public Life

1. What does it mean to give well? Does one give well if one's gift does harm? (For example: Does the “old gentleman” give well? Is his giving admirable?)
2. What does it mean to receive a gift well? Does one receive well if receiving does harm? (For example: Does Stuffy Pete receive his gift well? Is the way in which he received the old gentleman's gift admirable?)
3. Is it better to give than to receive?
4. What is the proper response to a gift: admiration and appreciation of the benevolent act itself? Gratitude for the specific benefit received? A desire or felt duty to reciprocate? Something else?
5. How should we treat fellow citizens like Stuffy Pete—both on Thanksgiving Day and during the rest of the year? Are good intentions enough? Or are good deeds and, especially, good results the only true measures of philanthropic action?
6. Which is more important: seeing someone's problem and trying to solve it, or seeing someone as a person and being present to him or her?

7. Who and what should define what charity should give: the beneficent impulses and notions of the donor, as experienced *by the donor*, or the needs and wishes of the recipient, as enunciated *by the recipient*?

IN CONVERSATION

Amy Kass: The consequences of the meal are torture, but the scene itself is not. O. Henry says that Stuffy Pete “rallied, like a true knight.” This is a man who really did his duty, and he sees the beneficent happiness on the old gentleman’s face. The old gentleman lives his life according to traditions—he has one for winter, one for spring, one for summer, and one for fall. This is the only one that has brought a smile to his face. There is something to be said for what happens right there between them at the meal, regardless of what happens later.

Leon Kass: In years past, Stuffy Pete joins the old gentleman because he is hungry. This time he goes not because he is hungry, but because it is tradition. He has become a kind of valiant knight with a crown of laurels, as it is this occasion where the generosity goes both ways. It is no longer just the donor and the recipient, but Stuffy Pete is making it possible for the old man to enjoy his act of generosity.

I grant that the consequences are bad, and so there is the question of whether generosity that produces bad consequences is genuine generosity. But, you can also turn that question around and say that the way you really can see what is in the heart is by separating the generosity from its consequences. You try to see the inner meaning of the deed as between these two people.

Christopher DeMuth: That’s a very convincing exegesis. Although they do not have family, they do not have real homes, they do not have a lot of the things that make Thanksgiving special to us, they are doing the best they can in their circumstances. The fact that each of them is physically in extremis when they meet and they don’t even recognize it.

Amy Kass: To call attention to their mutual neediness would really move us in a very different direction. In a certain way, each of them rises to the occasion. They rise above their own neediness.

Christopher DeMuth: I’ll grant you this: if they had communicated and Stuffy Pete had told the old gentleman that he was stuffed, that he had just eaten a big Thanksgiving meal, the old gentleman would have been devastated. It would have been terrible news to him.

*For more discussion on this question,
[watch the video online.](#)*

C. Tradition, Ritual, and Religion and American Civic Life

1. How important are traditions and rituals for American civic life? Which traditions and rituals are most important, and why?
2. How do we keep our rituals and traditions from losing their meaning?
3. What is the relation between the strength of the American polity and the spirit of religion?
4. Can the United States of America do without the disposition to gratitude and prayer? Without a connection to something higher than itself?

About the Cover



Jennie August Brownscombe
The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth, 1914

Born in a log cabin in rural Pennsylvania to English immigrant farmers William Brownscombe and Elvira Kennedy, a direct descendant of an original *Mayflower* passenger, Jennie Augusta Brownscombe (1850–1936) was raised on a farm throughout her youth. Upon her father's death in 1868, she began selling illustrations to books and magazines as a means to support herself.

Brownscombe attended the Cooper Institute School of Design for

Women and the National Academy of Design in New York City. She traveled widely and held exhibitions in cities across Europe and America, and her work was widely reprinted for greeting and Christmas cards, calendars, and magazine illustrations. She became a popular artist known for depictions of rural life and images from her childhood, as evidenced in the painting *The First Thanksgiving at Plymouth* (1914). The log cabin pictured in the right background of the scene, for example, is not historically accurate, but rather incorporates elements of her own rustic upbringing into the work. Further creative liberties include the Native American headdresses in the scene, which are more characteristic of the Midwestern Sioux tribes than the coastal Wampanoag of Massachusetts. The painting, an oil on canvas, became nationally familiar after it was reprinted in a 1914 issue of *Life*.

Examining the painting in all its details, describe the scene before you, with special attention to the human community (communities) and their relation to the natural world (land, water, mountain, sky). To what places in the painting is your gaze directed, and how are they related? What idea or mood does this painting convey? How does it relate to your idea of what Thanksgiving is all about?

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