

Thanksgiving was declared only in April 1862, by Abraham Lincoln. In 1863, he declared Thanksgiving for 6 August, and for the *last* Thursday in November.

## Thanksgiving; a Pilgrim's Refuge Story of Hope, for a Better Tomorrow



The laws and representative institutions of England were first introduced into the New World in the settlement of Virginia: some years later a principle as unknown to England as it was to the greater part of Europe found its home in another colony, which received its name of Maryland from Henrietta Maria, the Queen of Charles the First. Calvert, Lord Baltimore, one of the best of the Stuart counselors, was forced by his conversion to Catholicism to seek a shelter for himself and colonists of his new faith in the district across the Potomac, and round the head of the Chesapeake. As a purely Catholic settlement was impossible, he resolved to open the new colony to men of every faith. "No person within this province," ran the earliest law of Maryland, "professing to believe in Jesus Christ, shall be in any ways troubled, molested, or

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discountenanced for his or her religion, or in the free exercise thereof."

Long however before Lord Baltimore's settlement in Maryland, only a few years indeed after the settlement of Smith in Virginia, the church of Brownist or Independent refugees, whom we saw driven in the reign of James to Amsterdam, had resolved to quit Holland and find a home in the wilds of the New World. They were little disheartened by the tidings of suffering which came from the Virginian settlement. "Weare well weaned," wrote



Turkey is the traditional dish for the Thanksgiving feast. In the US, about 280 million turkeys are sold for the Thanksgiving celebrations.

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their minister, John Robinson, "from the delicate milk of the mother-country, and inured to the difficulties of a strange land: the people are industrious and frugal. We are knit together as a body in a most sacred covenant of the Lord, of the violation whereof we make great conscience, and by virtue whereof we hold ourselves strictly tied to all care of each other's good and of the whole. It is not with us as with men whom small things can discourage."

Returning from Holland to Southampton, they started in two small vessels for the new land; but one of these soon put back, and only its companion, the *Mayflower*, a bark of a hundred and eighty tons, with forty-one emigrants and their families on board, persisted in prosecuting its voyage. The little company of the "Pilgrim Fathers," as after-times loved to call them, landed on the barren coast of Massachusetts at a spot to which they gave the name of Plymouth, in memory of the last English port at which they touched. They had soon to face the long hard winter of the north, to bear sickness and famine: even when these years of toil and suffering had passed there was a time when "they knew not at night where to have a bit in the morning." Resolute and industrious as they were, their progresses was very slow; and at the end of ten years they numbered only three hundred souls. But small as it was, the colony was now firmly established and the struggle for mere existence was over. "Let it not be grievous unto you," some of their brethren had written from England to the poor emigrants in the midst of their sufferings, "that you have been instrumental to break the ice for others. The honor shall be yours to the world's end."

From the moment of their establishment the eyes of the English Puritans were fixed on the little Puritan settlement in North America. Through the early years of Charles projects were canvassed for a new settlement beside the little Plymouth; and the aid which the merchants of Boston in Lincolnshire gave to the realization of this project was acknowledged in the name of its capital. At the moment when he was dissolving his third Parliament, Charles granted the charter which established the colony of Massachusetts; and by the Puritans at large the grant was at once regarded as a providential call. Out of the failure of their great constitutional struggle, and the pressing danger to "godliness" in England, rose the dream of a land in the West where religion and liberty could find a safe and lasting home. The Parliament was hardly dissolved, when "conclusions" for the establishment of a great colony on the other side the Atlantic were circulating among gentry and traders, and descriptions of the new country of Massachusetts were talked over in every Puritan household.

The proposal was welcomed with the quiet, stern enthusiasm which marked the temper of the time; but the words of a well-known emigrant show how hard it was even for the sternest enthusiasts to tear themselves from their native land. "I shall call that my country," said the younger Winthrop, in answer to feelings of this sort, "where I may most glorify God and enjoy the presence of my dearest friends." The answer was accepted, and the Puritan emigration began on a scale such as England had never before seen. The two hundred who first sailed for Salem were soon followed by John Winthrop with eight hundred men; and seven hundred more followed ere the first year of the king's personal rule had run its course. Nor were the emigrants, like the earlier colonists of the South, "broken men," adventurers, bankrupts, criminals; or simply poor men and artisans, like the Pilgrim Fathers of the *Mayflower*. They were in great part men of the professional and middle classes; some of them men of large landed estate some zealous clergymen like Cotton, Hooker, and Roger Williams, some shrewd London lawyers, or young scholars from Oxford.

The bulk of these were God-fearing farmers from Lincolnshire and the Eastern counties. They desired in fact "only the best" as sharers in their enterprise; men driven forth from their fatherland not by earthly want, or by the greed of gold, or by the lust of adventure, but by the fear of God, and the zeal for a godly worship. But strong as was their zeal, it was not without a wrench that they tore themselves from their English homes. "Farewell, dear England!" was the cry which burst from the first little company of emigrants as its shores faded from their sight. "Our hearts," wrote Winthrop's followers to the brethren whom they had left behind, "shall be fountains of tears for your everlasting welfare, when we shall be in our poor cottages in the wilderness."

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During the next two years, as the sudden terror which had found so violent an outlet in Eliot's warnings died for the moment away, there was a lull in the emigration. But the measures of Laud soon revived the panic of the Puritans. The shrewdness of James had read the very heart of the man when Buckingham pressed for his first advancement to the see of St. David's. "He hath a restless spirit," said the old King, "which cannot see when things are well, but loves to toss and change, and to bring matters to a pitch of reformation floating in his own brain. Take him with you, but by my soul you will repent it." Cold, pedantic, superstitious as he was (he notes in his diary the entry of a robin-redbreast into his study as a matter of grave moment), William Laud rose out of the mass of court-prelates by his industry, his personal unselfishness, his remarkable capacity for administration.

We can hardly wonder that with such a world around them "godly people in England began to apprehend a special hand of Providence in raising this plantation" in Massachusetts; "and their hearts were generally stirred to come over." It was in vain that weaker men

returned to bring news of hardships and dangers, and told how two hundred of the new comers had perished with their first winter. A letter from Winthrop told how the rest toiled manfully on. "We now enjoy God and Jesus Christ," he wrote to those at home, "and is not that enough?"

I thank God I like so well to be here as I do not repent my coming. I would not have altered my course though I had foreseen all these afflictions. I never had more content of mine'." With the strength and manliness of Puritanism, its bigotry and narrowness had crossed the Atlantic too. Roger Williams, a young minister who held the doctrine of freedom of conscience, was driven from the new settlement, to become a preacher among the settlers of Rhode Island. The bitter resentment stirred in the emigrants by persecution at home was seen in their rejection of Episcopacy

and their prohibition of the use of the Book of Common Prayer. The intensity of its religious sentiments turned the colony into a theocracy. "To the end that the body of the Commons may be preserved of honest and good men, it was ordered and agreed that for the time to come no man shall be admitted to the freedom of the body politic but such as are members of some of the churches within the bounds of the same." As the contest grew hotter at home the number of Puritan emigrants rose fast. Three thousand new colonists arrived from England in a single year. The growing stream of emigrants marks the terrible pressure of the time. Between the sailing of Winthrop's expedition and the assembly of the Long Parliament, in the space, that is, of ten or eleven years, two hundred emigrant ships had crossed the Atlantic, and twenty thousand Englishmen had found a refuge of hope for a better tomorrow.

Since that time, nearly four hundred years later, we continue to give renewing thanks at this time of year; that each and every tomorrow is better than all of our yester-years.