

Thanksgiving Day in United States.

To-day (Thursday), the last of November, is set apart by proclamation in the United States of America as a general day of Thanksgiving. In referring to the features of this particular occasion, the World Almanac publishes the following article from an early edition of the London Times, which will be read with great interest, coming from such an authoritative source.

"The first Thanksgiving Day in America was celebrated by the little band of Plymouth Colonists in 1621, though they had little to be thankful for except that they were alive. One of the reasons why they were alive was that among the food resources of the new land, besides water fowls there was a great store of wild turkeys; and it shows how well known the bird must already have been in Europe that Bradford should thus have identified it off-hand and assumed that the name needed no explanation. And we know that the festivities of the very earliest Thanksgivings centred largely in the consumption of 'fowls'."

"Our harvest being gotten in, our Governor sent four men on fowling, that we might after a more special manner rejoice together, after we had gathered the fruits of our labours. They four in one day killed as much fowls, as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week."

This earliest festival of the Colonists was a mere holiday after the toll of the harvest, a 'frolic' such as may still be seen in many parts of England, with little or no religious associations or observances. It was a time of dancing or feasting, sports and trials of strength or skill, of rest and relaxation after the labours of the year. Merry-makings at harvest-home were prevalent in England, we know, in, at least, the 16th century; and the Pilgrims did but reproduce, in this as in most other things, the institutions with which they had been familiar at home. As the plantations in North America prospered, the custom persisted and spread and, under Puritan influence, it came to assume throughout New England a more religious character. Still a season of rejoicing, it had for its central episode the gathering at the place of worship to listen to the Thanksgiving Sermon, more secular than other sermons of the year, in which the politics and material topics of the day could be discussed from the pulpit more freely than on ordinary Sundays. In this form it spread from New England over the country, first through the Middle States, and so to the further West, finally and more slowly through the South, until Thanksgiving came to be the most popular and universally observed of all the national holidays hardly excepting the more ebullient and demonstrative Fourth of July. Its associations with the carrying of the harvest came, with the growth of industrial prosperity and the emergence of large cities, to be partially obscured. Above all, it grew to be recognized as a family festival, a day of reunions in the old homestead and for the renewing of old affections, a season of charity and mutual helpfulness.

First Thanksgiving Proclamation.
In 1789, in response to requests from both Houses of Congress, George Washington issued the first Thanksgiving Proclamation, appointing Thursday, November 26, as a day to be set aside for 'acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favours of Almighty God, especially by affording them (the people) an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness; and, in particular, for the favourable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war.' Six years later, February 19, 1795, was similarly appointed a day of Thanksgiving for the 'divine beneficence' as shown especially in the suppression of the recent insurrection (the Whisky Rebellion) and for the continued stability of those 'constitutions of government which unite and by their union establish liberty and order.'

In 1788 the relations of the new Republic with Great Britain were again strained almost to the breaking point, and President Adams proclaimed Wednesday, May 8, as a day of humiliation and fasting inasmuch as the United States was placed 'in a hazardous and afflictive situation by the unfriendly disposition, conduct, and demands of a foreign Power,' but with the prayers and supplications were to be mingled thanks for many blessings, including 'a wonderful increase in population.' In the following year, the situation being still acute, Thursday, April 25, was similarly dedicated to 'humiliation, fasting, and prayer,' in that 'the most precious interests of the people of the United States are still held in jeopardy by the hostile designs and insidious acts of a foreign nation.' Once more thanks were also to be rendered for many blessings, especial reference being made to 'the labor of the husbandmen so that there may be food in abundance for man and beast.'

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