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The First Thanksgiving (1621)

And, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come" (1844)

"Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms"
(Psalm 95:2).

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Preface

Since 1863, Americans have celebrated Thanksgiving-- now observed every fourth Thursday of November-- as a national holiday to give thanks for blessings received during the year. As an American tradition, we remember the first Thanksgiving as the gathering of the Pilgrim Fathers in Plymouth, Massachusetts celebrating the success of their Fall Harvest in 1621. And, the familiar Thanksgiving hymn, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," reminds True Christians of what the Pilgrims certainly knew, that *it is God to whom we are to be thankful and that His safe and timely provision occasions our thankfulness.* "In every thing give thanks: for this is the Will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1Thessalonians 5:18). The Providence of the Pilgrims' deliverance in their newfound land of religious freedom-- from their opportune meeting with the English speaking Samoset and Squanto to their learning of the Indian practice of using fish to fertilize their crops-- demonstrated the providential superintendence of the Almighty that made possible their survival and the bounty of their harvest celebration. "O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever" (1Chronicles 16:34). Years later, Dean Alford of the Church of England gave the Church a much remembered voice for its gratitude to the "LORD of the Harvest" (Mark 9:38) through the hymn, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come." Henry Alford (1810-1871), dean of Canterbury Cathedral, is known to theological students and ministers for his exegetical and critical commentary of "The Greek New Testament" (Volume 1, 1844), but especially the Thanksgiving hymn, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," has endeared his name to Christians, since its first publication in his "Psalms and Hymns" (1844). "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving" (Psalm 69:30).

Plymouth's Providentially Thankful Pilgrims

- **The Scrooby Separatists.** Incorporated in 1620, Plymouth, Massachusetts (USA) is presently a thriving community with a population in excess of 50,000 (2002) and is situated in southeastern Massachusetts on Plymouth Bay about 34 miles southeast of Boston. It is a fishing and tourist center with a working wharf and cranberry packing houses, retaining a "small town charm" for "America's Hometown." "The hoary head [gray hair, old age] is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Proverbs 16:31). But, the Pilgrims' story does not begin with Plymouth or the Mayflower, but back in England in the village of Scrooby in Nottinghamshire, the land of Robin Hood. In the early 1600s, a group of English Separatists, led by William Brewster (1567-1644), Richard Clifton, William Bradford (1590-1657), and John Robinson

(1575-1625), broke away from the Church of England to attempt *a life more fully conformed to the Bible*. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Their upright Separatist Protestantism was a Calvinism that used John Calvin's Geneva Bible (1560)-- whose annotated marginal notes were hated by King James I as seditious, whose verses were quoted by Shakespeare more than 5,000 times in his plays, and whose division of the Scriptures into numbered verses was the first in the English language. Because of religious persecution, these Separatists emigrated to Amsterdam, Holland in 1608, and then to the cloth manufacturing city of Leyden. Due to economic hardship and the loss of their English identity, they contemplated yet another move in 1618. Through the friendship of the Brewsters with Sir Edwyn Sandys, treasurer of the London Company-- William Brewster, Richard Clifton, and John Robinson had studied at Cambridge University-- the Pilgrims secured two patents of land at the northernmost boundary of the Virginia Company grant, at the mouth of the Hudson River, where they hoped to have the greatest autonomy and the least chance of further religious persecution. "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house" (Proverbs 21:9).

- **William Brewster Prepared the Pilgrims in England.** William Brewster was a founding father and key figure of the Pilgrim movement, along with Rev. Richard Clifton, in the village of Scrooby. The Scrooby Separatists attempted to go further than their Puritan predecessors, who had already endeavored to purify and reform the Church of England. "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Acts 24:16). The father of William Brewster was in charge of the relay station or post, i.e., like the Pony Express of America's West, at Scrooby, England-- the northern royal route for posts to Scotland-- making him the postmaster of Scrooby. Of note, Oxford University, where Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley were burned, was more aristocratic and high church, while Cambridge University was more open to the intellectual movements of continental Europe, where the republican ideals of government and freedom of speech of Holland were taking hold. At Cambridge, Brewster came under the influence of Puritan preachers. "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1). And, from here, Brewster was called away from his studies to help William Davison, an envoy of Queen Elizabeth. Davison, an elder in an English Puritan Church in Antwerp, already had seen the need of Englishmen to periodically flee to the Low Countries for freedom of conscience. Employing Brewster as his personal secretary, he conducted business for the Queen in Antwerp and at the court; but, he fell out of favor in 1587, after the beheading of Mary Queen of Scots. "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His Purpose" (Romans 8:28). William Brewster retired to Scrooby, where he took on the duties of his father, whose health was failing; and, he later was officially appointed to the postmastership of Scrooby. His income was large enough to entertain the whole Pilgrim company at dinner at the manor house at his own expense, as recounted by William Bradford. From Brewster, the Pilgrims were told of the country of Holland as a place for the practice of their freedom of conscience in the Bible. "14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:14-16).

- **John Robinson Nurtured Then Sent the Pilgrims on From Holland.** After moving to Holland, Pastor John Robinson was the spiritual leader of the Pilgrims in Leyden; and further, he encouraged the Pilgrim church to emigrate to the New World. But, when at the outset, only a minority of their assembly emigrated, he remained behind until the colony was more established and more had emigrated. However, Pastor Robinson died in 1625 before he, too, could come to Plymouth Plantation. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). The last of the Leyden congregation arrived in Plymouth in 1629. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a Tree of Life" (Proverbs 13:12). Men such as Robinson defined the character of the Pilgrims to be more than merely Merchant Adventurers or opportunists, though they realized the possibility of great gains for great risks. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1Peter 2:11). The Pilgrims' concept of living by the Word of God was the same as that taught by Moses to Israel. "And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every Word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Such boldness to attempt to put into practice whatever conscience perceived from the Scriptures, incurred the wrath of the established Church of England and immoral King James I, who had already rejected the Puritans' demand to reform the Church of England at the Hampton Court Conference (1604), while ironically but providentially authorizing the now famous translation of the Bible, the King James Version (1611). "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain" (Psalm 76:10).
- **Why Such Hardship?** Even for the most noble religious reasons, why would anyone attempt to begin a colony this far north on the North American continent this late in the year? The Pilgrims presumably landed on Plymouth Rock on December 11th 1620. "I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them" (Isaiah 42:16). Since their landfall was well outside of their original patent of land-- they were some 200 miles northeast of the mouth of the Hudson River, where later the Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island would see an estimated 40% of all of America's other ancestors arrive-- the well ordered Pilgrims would preserve themselves from civil anarchy by covenanting together to sign the Mayflower Compact, America's first constitution, on November 11th 1620, while still on board the Mayflower. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). When the venture capital backers of the Pilgrims, the Merchant Adventurers, became aware of the new location of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, they obtained a second patent, the Second Peirce Patent (1620), from England's Council for New England, validating the Pilgrims' settlement and government at Plymouth. Their understanding was that all land and profits accrued by the colonists would be held in common with the company of Merchant Adventurers for seven years, at which time they would divide the assets with the shareholders, which included most of the Pilgrims. "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike" (1Samuel 30:24). In 1626, the Pilgrims renegotiated a more favorable contract, i.e., the Bradford Patent (1630), where William Bradford and his associates ("the Purchasers") agreed to buy out the Merchant Adventurers over a period of years, wherein twelve "Undertakers" agreed to pay off Plymouth's

indebtedness in exchange for trade benefits. "The labourer is worthy of his hire" (Luke 10:7).

- **The Mayflower Compact** reads as follows:

"In the Name of God, Amen. We, whose names are underwritten, the Loyal Subjects of our dread Sovereign Lord, King James, by the Grace of God, of England, France and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, &c. Having undertaken for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia; do by these presents, solemnly and mutually in the Presence of God and one of another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering and Preservation, and Furtherance of the Ends aforesaid; And by Virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal Laws, Ordinances, Acts, Constitutions and Offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the General good of the Colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In Witness whereof we have hereunto subscribed our names at Cape Cod the eleventh of November, in the Reign of our Sovereign Lord, King James of England, France and Ireland, the eighteenth, and of Scotland the fifty-fourth. Anno Domini, 1620" (as recorded in William Bradford's "Of Plymouth Plantation" [written from 1630-1650]).

- **The Providence of God Breeds a Confident and Hardy People.** But, for a better appreciation of God's Providence (the hand of God in the affairs of man) in guiding the Pilgrims to land at Plymouth Bay at that time of year, we must back up to their embarkation on their transatlantic journey. "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?" (Jeremiah 23:23). Even before the final journey began aboard the Mayflower, another vessel, the 60-ton Speedwell, initially combined with the Mayflower for a total of 120 passengers, but after two false starts the leaky Speedwell was sidelined and the passengers were trimmed down to 102, of which only 37 were from the Leyden congregation. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and He delighteth in his way" (Psalm 37:23). The Pilgrims understood themselves to be the Saints. The passengers not from Leyden were dubbed by the Separatists as Strangers. The Mayflower-- estimated to be 90 ft. long with a 64 ft. keel, a 26 ft. beam, 25 ft. wide, and a hold 11 ft. deep-- was a 180-ton ship skippered by Captain Christopher Jones with a crew of about 31 sailors. The 65 day journey began on September 15th 1620. The privations of confinement below deck in often damp and shivering quarters must have been unusually hard upon the Pilgrims, weakening them with scurvy and breeding the germs of consumption (tuberculosis) that would later kill so many of their number in America; but still, Oceanus Hopkins (a son) was born on the crossing. "We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Significantly, during a storm, a main beam amidship bowed and cracked, threatening their journey and safety; but providentially, one of the passengers had brought a great iron screw or jackscrew from Holland that enabled them to safely force the dislocated beam back into place. "The horse is prepared against the day of battle: but safety is of the LORD" (Proverbs 21:31). Had the journey begun promptly, the Pilgrims would have completed their journey well before the terrible winter of 1620-1621 had begun, where one-half of *all* those on board the Mayflower died before the ship began its return voyage to England on April 15th 1621. "For My Thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My Ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8). The result was that the surviving colonists were of the hardest stock to colonize the

continent. "O the depth of the riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His Judgments, and His Ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

- **God Directed the Pilgrims to Plymouth Bay.** Though William Bradford first used the term Pilgrim to describe the Leyden Separatists, Americans have traditionally viewed the entire company of colonists as Pilgrims, especially in relation to the account of the First Thanksgiving. But again, we must travel back to their initial landing at Plymouth Harbor. The Pilgrims noted that the forestation of many kinds of timber came down to the sea and were ample and apparent, i.e., "the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue" (from William Bradford's "Of Plymouth Plantation" [1630-1650]). "6 Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, to walk in His ways, and to fear Him. 7 For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; 8 A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; 9 a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. 10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which He hath given thee" (Deuteronomy 8:6-10). They knew that they had arrived at Cape Cod, but they did not run across any Native American Indians until November 15th 1620, when they spotted and unsuccessfully pursued five or six Indians to see if they could communicate with them. When traveling back to their shallop (a small open boat to navigate shallow waters, often launched from a larger ship), they providentially stumbled across what appeared to be an abandoned dwelling near a pond of fresh water and a harvested field of Indian corn. There they uncovered many baskets of corn, giving them seed for their future spring planting. They did not possess such seed, and it would be necessary to stave off probable starvation. "I being in the way, the LORD led me" (Genesis 24:27).
- **Samoset Spoke English to the Amazed Pilgrims.** On March 16th 1621, Samoset, an Indian of the Algonquin tribe, came boldly among the Pilgrims speaking broken English, which he had learned from English fishermen that had come to fish off the coast of southeast Maine. He had been visiting Chief Massasoit of the local Wampanoag tribe. Wampanoag meant "people of the dawn." Further, Samoset informed the Pilgrims that he knew of another Indian, Tisquantum or Squanto of the Patuxet tribe, that spoke better English than himself, who had actually been to England! Squanto had been kidnapped by Captain George Weymouth in 1605 to be shown off to the Captain's financial backers as an example of indigenous natives. He lived with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, who taught him English. Sending Squanto back to America to assist in mapping the coast for trade, Squanto was again kidnapped, this time by the unscrupulous Captain Thomas Hunt! He was sold as a slave in Malaga, Spain. There he lived with friars until 1618, when he boarded a ship for Newfoundland, only to be discovered by Thomas Dernier and sent back to Gorges in England! Gorges organized another mapping and trading expedition that was also to smooth over things with the friends and relatives of the kidnapped Indians and to return Tisquantum to his home at Patuxet. Upon returning to his home in 1619, Squanto found that the entire Patuxet tribe had been wiped out in a plague in 1617-- probably from smallpox introduced by the Europeans. Thus, the Pilgrims' choice of land went relatively uncontested. "4 I said unto the fools, Deal not foolishly: and to the wicked, Lift not up the horn: 5 Lift not up your horn on high: speak not with a stiff neck. 6 For promotion cometh neither from the east,

nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another. 8 For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the Earth shall wring them out, and drink them" (Psalm 75:4-8).

- **Squanto Provided Indispensable Aid to the Pilgrims.** This brings us to Squanto's meeting with the Pilgrims on March 22nd 1621. On that very day, Squanto negotiated a peace treaty between the local Indians and the Pilgrims. Chief Massasoit (1590-1661) of the Wampanoag tribe signed a treaty of peace and friendship with the Pilgrims covenanting mutual aid in time of war and friendly relations in time of peace. Massasoit would gain the use of English guns against his enemies the Narragansetts (if they attacked him) and would profit from direct trade with the English, while the Pilgrims would benefit from the tranquility to flourish their colony and would gain assistance from the Indians to better understand their environment for survival and prosperity. Squanto's intimate knowledge of the area of the Plymouth Plantation gave the Pilgrims expert advice of where to hunt and fish, how to manure their Indian corn with fish, and how to live amicably with the local Indians. "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the Earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Genesis 45:7). Unfortunately, Squanto became enamored with his power and began to use his position for personal gain, e.g., threatening the Indians that he would instruct the Pilgrims to release again upon them the plague that had decimated his own tribe, if they did not do as he told them. "9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 nor **thieves**, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor **extortioners**, shall inherit the Kingdom of God" (1Corinthians 6:9-10). Though Massasoit demanded his execution, the reluctant Pilgrims stalled for time using the excitement of the approach of an English ship. But, justice prevailed in November 1622, when Squanto fell sick with the Indian fever, bleeding from the nose and dying a few days later. However, before he died, he asked Governor William Bradford to pray for him that he might go to the Englishman's God in Heaven. Eternity shall soon reveal the efficacy of Bradford's supplication and the truthfulness of Squanto's request. "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).
- **In America, the First Thanksgiving Was a Sincere Act of Joyous Celebration.** The Pilgrim company had *survived* the winter and harvested sufficient to feel themselves bountifully *blest*. "1 O give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. 2 Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom He hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; 3 and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south. 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. 5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. 6 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses. 7 And He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. 8 Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! 9 For He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness" (Psalm 107:1-9). The Pilgrims disdained all manmade holidays, and held only to the weekly Sabbath and the specially appointed days of fasting (occasioned by drought, war, etc.) and days of thanksgiving (enacted due to such events as the drought ending rainfall of 1623). And technically, they did not consider their celebration under

one of those headings. But practically, the First Thanksgiving was a spontaneous and sincere act of rejoicing "with joy unspeakable" (2Peter 1:8) in the bounty that the Almighty had spared them to enjoy. Only two eyewitness accounts were made of what we now would call the First Thanksgiving-- in William Bradford's "Of Plymouth Plantation" (1630-1650) and Edward Winslow's "Mourt's Relation" (1622). Recording the circumstances that led to the First Thanksgiving, Governor Bradford wrote: "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 a 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 the proportion. Which made many afterwards write so largely of their plenty here to their friends in England, which were not feigned but true reports" (from "Of Plymouth Plantation").

- **The First Thanksgiving Was the Enjoyment of the Bounty of the Pilgrim's Harvest.** At Plymouth Plantation, the First Thanksgiving-- observed between September 21st and November 9th 1621-- was celebrated over a three day period. 51 colonists of Plymouth Plantation, which included John Alden, Governor William Bradford, William and Mary Brewster, Priscilla Mullins, Captain Myles Standish, and Edward and Susanna Winslow, and 90 Indians of the Wampanoag tribe with their Chief Massasoit were present. Very probably Squanto was in attendance, and most likely the celebration was an outdoor event, since no buildings were large enough to house such a feast. For the Pilgrims, like the Jews returning from the Babylonian Captivity, their sense of relief from having survived the dreadful past and their anticipation of the potential of their bountiful land, must have caused them to break forth into ecstatic joy and unmitigated happiness in a celebration of thanksgiving to the One From Whom All Blessings Flow. "1 When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. 2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. 3 The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. 4 Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south. 5 They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. 6 He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Psalm 126:1-6). A firsthand account of that First Thanksgiving was recorded by Edward Winslow in "Mourt's Relation" (1622): "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 fruit of our labors. 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 they 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 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." "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving"

(1Timothy 4:4).

The Thanksgiving Hymn: "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come" (1844)

"Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin.
God our Maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.

"All the world is God's own field, fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear;
Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

"For the Lord our God shall come, and shall take His harvest home;
From His field shall in that day all offenses purge away,
Giving angels charge at last in the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store in His garner evermore.

"Even so, Lord, quickly come, bring Thy final harvest home;
Gather Thou Thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified, in Thy garner to abide;
Come, with all Thine angels come, raise the glorious harvest home."

The words for the Thanksgiving hymn, "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come," were written by Dr. Henry Alford, a noted hymnologist and Greek scholar, and published in 1844, the same year of the publication of the first of his four volume work, "The Greek New Testament: With a Critically Revised Text; a Digest of Various Readings; Marginal References to Verbal and Idiomatic Usage; Prolegomena; and a Critical and Exegetical Commentary, For the use of theological students and ministers." Alford, the son of the Rector of Aston Sandford, was the picture of a 19th century Anglican churchman-- educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, took Holy Orders in 1833, vicar of Wymeswold, Leicestershire for 18 years, and Dean of Canterbury in 1857. The St. George's, Windsor tune for "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come" was originally composed by Sir George J. Elvey (1816-1893) in Thorne's "A Selection of Psalm and Hymn Tunes" (1858) for the hymn, "Hark, the Song of Jubilee." Elvey's tune was subsequently set to Alford's words in "Hymns Ancient and Modern" (1861). Elvey was the organist of St. George's Chapel, Windsor from 1835 to 1882. What diversity, that the Separatist Pilgrims and their later counterparts from the Church of England should combine on both sides of the Atlantic to give to us a Christian appreciation of the celebration of Thanksgiving! ⁴ Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. ⁵ One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. **Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.** ⁶ He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the LORD; and he that regardeth not the day, to the LORD he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the LORD, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the LORD he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. ⁷ For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. ⁸ For whether we live, we live unto the LORD; and whether we die, we die unto the LORD: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the LORD's" (Romans 14:4-8).

This festive harvest hymn was revised by Alford in his "Poetical Works" (1865/1868) and his "Year of Praise" (1867)-- containing seven verses-- but has been restricted in most modern hymn books to four verses. The first verse is a true expression of God's safe provision and a call for man's thanksgiving. "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19). It addresses the common theme of harvest festivals, called in England the Harvest Home, which is celebrated in English churches usually during the month of September. A thanksgiving service would be held in the church, where the bounty of the harvest is collected, displayed with the fall trappings of pumpkins and autumn leaves, and then dispensed to the needy. And, of course, unlike the humanist that is essentially grateful to only himself, a true Harvest Home celebration acknowledges the provision of God, as did the Pilgrims in 1621 and the ancient Hebrews in their Feast of Firstfruits in the spring on the first day after Passover at the time of the barley harvest. "9 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 10 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: 11 and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD. 13 And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. 14 And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings" (Leviticus 23:9-14). [Read about the Feast of Firstfruits in our article, "[The Appointed Times](#)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Timeline/The.Appointed.Times.html>--.]

Though Henry Alford was decidedly not a Methodist, he found common ground with his Christian brother John Wesley in his disdain for sin, e.g., "Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be." Any Pilgrim would much rather have a bountiful yield of the "finest of the wheat" (Psalm 147:14) than the pitiful remains of a sin blighted harvest, and the LORD God of the Harvest is no different. "I am the Vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Though Alford differed widely with Wesley's Christian perfection, viewing it akin to Pelagianism; likewise, he aspired to give the LORD of the Harvest His due e.g., "Gather Thou Thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin, There, forever purified, in Thy garner to abide." "6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the First Resurrection: on such the Second Death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years... 11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still" (Revelation 20:6; 22:11). [Read John Wesley's "[A Plain Account of Christian Perfection](#)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/Wesley.Christian.Perfectio.html> -- for his understanding of Sanctification.]

While the first verse chiefly addresses the theme of thanksgiving, the last three verses deal with the theme of final harvest in the judgment of the world as paralleled in Christ's parables of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30) and the parable of the seed springing up without the sower knowing of it (Mark 4:26-29). "24 Another parable put He forth unto them, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: 25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. 26 But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also... 27 So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst

not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? 28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Matthew 13:24-30). Commenting upon this parable of the wheat and the tares, where an enemy sows tares in the field where true wheat had already been planted, Alford wrote: "Our Lord was speaking of an act of malice practised in the East: persons of revengeful disposition watch the ground of a neighbour being ploughed, and in the night following sow destructive weeds... The practice is not unknown even to England at present. Since the publication of the first edition of this commentary, a field belonging to the editor at Gaddesby in Leicestershire was maliciously sown with charlock (*sinapis arvensis*) over the wheat. An action at law was brought by the tenant, and heavy damages obtained against the offender" (excerpted from Volume I of "The Greek New Testament," commenting on Matthew 13:24-30).

Likewise, I have commented upon the same parable in expounding upon Revelation 13:17 ("And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the Beast, or the number of his name"):

"As in the end game of a chess match, the LORD of the Harvest (Luke 10:2) must skillfully position His game pieces to harvest **all** the Elect, while carefully punishing only the wicked. '12 Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire' (Matthew 3:12). When the LORD Jesus Christ returns at His Second Coming, and 'every eye shall see Him' (Revelation 1:7), He will carefully separate for judgment and damnation (cp. 14:9-11), the 'tares', which are the recipients of the Mark of the Beast. '28 He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto Him, Wilt Thou then that we go and gather them up? 29 But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares [a kind of darnel, which is a poisonous grass], ye root up also the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into My barn' (Matthew 13:28-30). Thus, the Almighty's use of the 'wrath of man' (Psalm 76:10) in the form of the Mark of the Beast, will 'praise' (76:10) Himself, when He separates for judgment the wicked, and preserves all the remaining Righteous ones. '[Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane:] While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy Name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled' (John 17:12)" (excerpted from [Chapter 13](#) -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/The.Holy.Bible/Commentary.Revelations.13.html> -- of "[A Commentary on the Book of Revelation](#)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/The.Holy.Bible/Commentary.Revelations.1.html> --).

The other harvest theme addressed by Alford's Thanksgiving hymn, e.g., "First the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear," is the parable concerning spiritual growth and the proper timing of the harvest by the All Wise Husbandman. "26 And He said, So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; 27 and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. 28 For the Earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. 29 But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:26-29). Life emanates from

God alone. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). Though modern agronomy may explain sufficiently the planting, cultivation, and harvest of crops, it is embarrassingly deficient in explaining the Source of Life, at least without embarking upon the "oppositions of science falsely so called" (1Timothy 6:20) in the form of the theory of evolution. But, after faith has firmly grasped Almighty God as the Giver of Life, then the harvest of the fruit of those lives, either as "wholesome grain and pure" or "offenses" and "tares," is entirely acceptable to the faithful. "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

Conclusion

American history demonstrates that the concept of Thanksgiving has changed for the nation from a sacred to a secular tradition, e.g. Turkey Day. "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever" (1Chronicles 28:9). Boston established the precedent of Thanksgiving on Thursdays, while Connecticut made Thanksgiving an annual holiday. The Continental Congress declared the first national Thanksgiving in 1777, following the victory at Saratoga. Presidents and Congress have declared national Thanksgivings off and on until 1815, but it was not until the Union victory at Shiloh that President Abraham Lincoln resurrected the practice by declaring April 13th 1862 as a national day of Thanksgiving. And again, August 6th 1863 was proclaimed by Lincoln as another day of Thanksgiving following Gettysburg. [Read [Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation](#) -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Stories/Lincoln.Thanks.Proclam.html> -- following Gettysburg.] President Lincoln finally declared October 3rd 1863 as the first of a nearly unbroken string of annual last Thursday in November Thanksgivings-- with the exceptions of President Andrew Johnson's proclamation of Thanksgiving for December 7th 1865 following the Union victory and conclusion of the Civil War and President Franklin D. Roosevelt's advancing of the celebration to the third Thursday of November for 1939-1941. Finally, on November 26th 1941, FDR signed a bill that established the fourth Thursday in November as the national day of Thanksgiving. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12).

And, concerning those providentially thankful Pilgrims, it was not the blueness of their blood, but the trueness of their heart that made it such a pleasure for the LORD God Almighty to give them that First Thanksgiving. "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful unto Him, and bless His name" (Psalms 100:4). How could God not but honor them who had honored Him? Look at what a nation such a humble group of grateful Pilgrims produced! "A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the LORD will hasten it in his time" (Isaiah 60:22). "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' [Ezra 3:11]. Yea, let them which have been redeemed of the Lord, show how He hath delivered them from the hand of the oppressor. When they wandered in the desert wilderness out

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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 [Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31]'" (from William Bradford's "Of Plymouth Plantation" [1630-1650]).

"Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be."

From all those who have been so bountifully blessed, All thanks be to the LORD of the Harvest!

Happy Thanksgiving!