



# THANKSGIVING



Before the days of James I, a group of farmers disagreed with the Church of England. "They will conform", said King James, "or I will harry them out of the kingdom". They did not conform and he harried them out of the kingdom. They got on a ship called the Mayflower and sailed to the New World and landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts, and established a colony. And since they called themselves "pilgrims" they became known to the American history as the Pilgrim Fathers.

Now, frankly, they were no better than they should be. Driven out of England for refusing to conform to the Church of England, they promptly drove out of Plymouth all who refused to conform to the Church of Plymouth. Never mind : they gave us a lovely holiday.

What happened was: the pilgrims were befriended by the native Americans – the Indians – who taught them how to fertilize the land with eels , how to grow Indian corn and eat it off the cob, and how to cook and eat an American bird called a turkey, and so forth. And the next Autumn, when the pilgrims reaped a bountiful harvest, they invited the Indians to a feast where everybody gave thanks to God for the harvest. That feast was the first American Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving Day is the fourth Thursday in November. The whole country shuts down for it, and a Pilgrim would have a heart attack if he could see how it's celebrated , especially in New York. What makes New York's Thanksgiving unique is the Macy's Parade, which has been hauling parents out of bed early on Thanksgiving Day for 55 years. The parade features helium-filled balloon likenesses of cartoon characters, each as tall as a 6 or 7 -storey building. It is therefore the only parade that floats high above the street- Central Park West- and is watched by huge crowds , all staring upwards.

But the real hallmark of Thanksgiving is the homecoming of family members living, or working , or going to college far from home. Even though many of them will have to be back at their jobs on Friday.

Americans across the country are determined to get home for Thanksgiving , our quintessential family holiday, more so even than Christmas , since it embraces all religions and recalls the Dissenter's faith on which this country was /is founded . So every fourth Thursday in November, I lift a Martini glass in salute to Samoset and the Pilgrims, who gave us the warmest homecoming holiday ever made in America.