

Thanksgiving Day...

What does it mean to YOU?

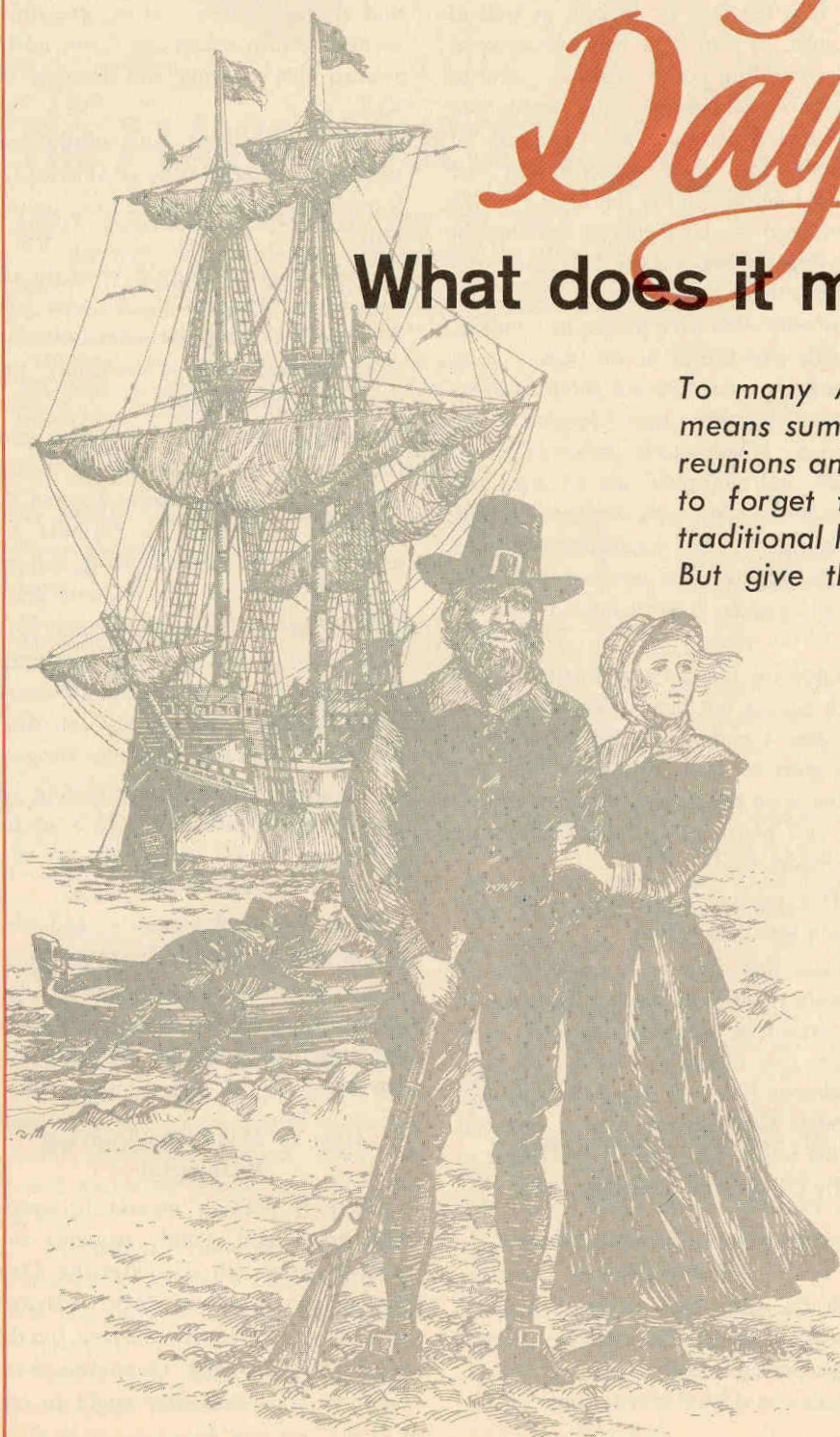
To many Americans Thanksgiving Day means sumptuous turkey dinners, family reunions and football games. Most seem to forget that the very name of this traditional holiday means to give thanks. But give thanks to whom? For what? And why?

by Eugene M. Walter

IN 1630 the little 350-ton *Arbella* was plowing westward through the rough Atlantic to the Massachusetts coast. From its deck John Winthrop preached a striking sermon that accurately predicted America's future.

"Wee shall be," prophesied Winthrop, "as a Citty upon a Hill, the Eies of all people are uppon us; soe that if wee shall deale falsely with our god in this worke we have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world."

Those are remarkable words! They indicate that at least some of the early colonists sensed that their endeavors



were being favored by the hand of God.

These early settlers seemed to grasp that they were being given very special opportunities, special blessings — and special responsibilities. For all this, the indications are, some were grateful, at first.

The Early Thanksgivings

In 1621 the first American thanksgiving was held by Plymouth colony. It was observed in gratitude for the ending of a difficult year and a bountiful harvest. The native foods — fruits and vegetables, wild turkeys, pumpkin pies and such — constituted the fare of that first thanksgiving day and became the traditional food for the day.

In succeeding years, thanksgiving festivals became very popular in New England. The colonists celebrated thanksgiving days in recognition of such happy events as good harvests and victories over Indians. President Washington issued the first presidential thanksgiving proclamation in honor of the new constitution in 1789.

During the 19th century, an increasing number of states observed the day annually, each appointing its own date.

As America grew, there was ever more to be thankful for. In the years that had passed since John Winthrop's prophetic sermon, America had truly become the "Citty upon a Hill." As the Civil War ended, the downtrodden masses of the world looked expectantly to America as the new land of hope and opportunity. Immigrants from many lands arrived on American shores to try to catch the American dream.

But success and prosperity were bringing the problems and pitfalls which John Winthrop had so vividly foreseen. President Lincoln also recognized these problems and was quick to act.

Lincoln's Sober Warning

"We find ourselves," Lincoln said, "in the peaceful possession of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards fertility of soil, extent of territory, and sa-

lubrity of climate . . . We . . . find ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement or the establishment of them."

On April 30, 1863, President Lincoln proclaimed a national day of fasting and prayer. In making this proclamation he said:

"It is the duty of nations, as well as of men, to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God . . . and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. . . . We have been the recipients of the choicest blessings of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation ever has grown; BUT WE HAVE FORGOTTEN GOD! We have forgotten the gracious Hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own."

President Lincoln saw a nation drunk with success not due to its own efforts. He saw a nation taking all the credit and glory to itself. This great president called upon the nation for a day of fasting and prayer to confess this national sin before God.

That petition was heard — and the nation was then spared.

Later that same year, on October 3, Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day — a day to give thanks to God for the multitudinous blessings He had bestowed. (Today Thanksgiving Day is observed on the fourth Thursday of November as set by Congress in December, 1941).

America's Greatest Years — and Now

In the years that followed Lincoln, America rose to become the greatest single power, and the most wealthy nation this world has ever known.

At the zenith of her power, America's six percent of the world's population possessed some 50 percent of the world's wealth. In commodity after commodity, and in product after product, America led the world.

But with the Korean War in the early 1950's, America began to slip. Troubles began to mount on all sides — at home and abroad. Where, before, everything seemed to turn out in our favor, now it seemed that nothing was turning out well.

What happened — and what is continuing to happen? Why is America fast losing its reputation as a "Citty upon a Hill"?

Today America is torn by strife and dissension. We have no national goal. We have recklessly squandered our fabulous wealth, and indescribably polluted our beautiful land.

Greed, selfishness and ingratitude form the warp and woof of society. "Has the American Dream become the American damnation, a formula for selfishness rather than equality and excellence?" asks *Time* (Jan. 24, 1969).

Other nations are no longer impressed with America and the way Americans do things. "Very few people are enamoured of the American way of life," says British historian Sir Denis Brogan.

Historians are now speculating on whether the tenure of the U. S. as the first power in the world will not also be one of the briefest in history.

What does all this mean — and what does it have to do with Thanksgiving?

Just this: our careless, godless, decadent way of life has stripped the value and meaning from the Thanksgiving Day holiday.

How to Make Thanksgiving Meaningful

There is nothing necessarily wrong with good food, family reunions and football games on Thanksgiving Day. But all too many use these activities wrongly and forget the purpose for the holiday. Many glut themselves with far more food than they ought to eat;

few, however, stop to give God thanks for this food — even on Thanksgiving Day.

Family reunions all too often turn out to be family brawls. Many a tense Thanksgiving Day with relatives ends in violence. And in recent years, there have been several cases of someone jumping up from the Thanksgiving dinner to grab a gun and shoot some member of his or her family!

Millions of others push and shove one another in large crowds at football games and parades, and kill one another on the highway as they madly strive to

make sure they get their fair quota of pleasure.

And where is the giving of thanks in all this? In the overwhelming vast majority of the cases, it is nowhere to be found! What a travesty!

As we observe Thanksgiving Day this year, we need to stop and soberly reflect on why we have so much, why we are losing it so fast, and where we are headed. As perhaps no other literature you might read, our free book on *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy* will help you do this. If you have not yet received your copy, write for it immediately.

But Thanksgiving is not just for Americans and should not be limited to one day a year. It should be a daily occurrence for all of us. We all have much to be thankful for — all the time.

Now as never before, we need to stop and thank God for the many blessings we still have — and change from our wrong ways so that the blessings we have lost can be restored.

If we fail to do this, and if we fail to acknowledge God as the Giver of all our blessings, He will surely “withdraw his present help from us, [and] we *shall be* made a story and a by-word through the world.”