




Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen

HERE IS ONE DAY THAT IS OURS. THERE IS ONE day when all Americans go back to the old home and eat a big dinner. Bless the day. The President gives it to us every year.

Sometimes he talks about the people who had the first **Thanksgiving**. They were the Puritans. They were some people who landed on our Atlantic shore. We don't really remember much about them.

But those people ate a large bird called turkey on the first Thanksgiving Day. So we have turkey for Thanksgiving dinner, if we have enough money to buy turkey. That is a **tradition**.

Yes. Thanksgiving Day is the one day of the year that is purely American. And now here is the story to prove to you that we have old traditions in this new country. They are growing older more quickly

than traditions in old countries. That is because we are so young and full of life. We do everything quickly.

Stuffy Pete sat down on a seat in the New York City park named Union Square. It was the third seat to the right as you enter Union Square from the east.

Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years he had sat down there at one in the afternoon. Every time, things had happened to him. They were wonderful things. They made his heart feel full of joy—and they filled another part of him, too. They filled the part below his heart.

On those other Thanksgiving Days he had been hungry. (It is a strange thing. There are rich people who wish to help the poor. But many of them seem to think that the poor are hungry only on Thanksgiving Day.)

But today Pete was not hungry. He had come from a dinner so big that he had almost no power to move. His light green eyes looked out from a gray face on which there was still a little food. His breath was short. His body had suddenly become too big for his clothes; it seemed ready to break out of them. They were torn. You could see his skin through a hole in the front of his shirt. But the cold wind, with snow in it, felt pleasantly cool to him.

For Stuffy Pete was overheated with the warmth of all he had had to eat. The dinner had been much too big. It seemed to him that his dinner had included all the turkey and all the other food in the whole world.

So he sat, very, very full. He looked out at the world without interest, as if it could never offer him anything more.

The dinner had not been expected.

He had been passing a large house near the beginning of that great broad street called Fifth Avenue. It was the home of two old ladies of an old family. These two old ladies had a deep love of traditions. There were certain things they always did. On Thanksgiving Day at noon they always sent a **servant** to stand at the door. There he waited for the first hungry person who walked by. The servant had orders to bring that person into the house and feed him until he could eat no more. Stuffy Pete

happened to pass by on his way to the park. The servant had gathered him in. Tradition had been followed.

Stuffy Pete sat in the park looking straight before him for ten minutes. Then he felt a desire to look in another direction. With a very great effort, he moved his head slowly to the left.

Then his eyes grew wider and his breath stopped. His feet in their torn shoes at the ends of his short legs moved about on the ground.

For the Old Gentleman was coming across Fourth Avenue toward Stuffy's seat.

Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years the Old Gentleman had come there to find Stuffy Pete on his seat. That was a thing that the Old Gentleman was trying to make into a tradition. Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years he had found Stuffy there. Then he had led Stuffy to a restaurant and watched him eat a big dinner.

They do these things more easily in old countries like England. They do them without thinking about them.

But in this young country, we must think about them. In order to build a tradition, we must do the same thing again and again for a long time. The Old Gentleman loved his country. He believed he was helping to build a great American tradition. And he had been doing very well. Nine years is a long time here.

The Old Gentleman moved, straight and proud, toward the tradition that he was building. Truly feeding Stuffy Pete once a year was not a very important tradition. There are greater and more important traditions in England. But it was a beginning. It proved that a tradition was at least possible in America.

The Old Gentleman was thin and tall and sixty. He was dressed all in black. He wore eye-glasses. His hair was whiter and thinner than it had been last year. His legs did not seem as strong as they had seemed the year before.

As this kind Old Gentleman came toward him, Stuffy began to shake and his breath was shorter. He wished he could fly away. But he could not move from his seat.

"Good morning," said the Old Gentleman. "I am glad to see that

the troubles of another year have not hurt you. You continue to move in health about the beautiful world. For that blessing you and I can give thanks on this day of thanksgiving. If you will come with me, my man, I will give you a dinner that will surely make your body feel as thankful as your mind.”

That is what the Old Gentleman said every time. Every Thanksgiving Day for nine years. The words themselves were almost a tradition. Always before, they had been music in Stuffy’s ear. But now he looked up at the Old Gentleman’s face with tears of suffering in his eyes. The snow turned quickly to water when it fell upon his hot face. But the Old Gentleman was shaking with the cold. He turned away, with his back to the wind, and he did not see Stuffy’s eyes.

Stuffy had always wondered why the Old Gentleman seemed sad as he spoke. He did not know that it was because the Old Gentleman was wishing that he had a son. A son would come there after he himself was gone. A son would stand proud and strong before Stuffy, and say: “In remembrance of my father.” Then it would really be a tradition.

But the Old Gentleman had no family. He lived in a room in one of the old houses near the park. In the winter he grew a few flowers there. In the spring he walked on Fifth Avenue. In the summer he lived in a farmhouse in the hills outside New York, and he talked of a strange bug he hoped some day to find. In the fall season he gave Stuffy a dinner. These were the things that filled the Old Gentleman’s life.

Stuffy Pete looked up at him for a half minute, helpless and very sorry for himself. The Old Gentleman’s eyes were bright with the giving-pleasure. His face was getting older every year, but his clothes were very clean and fresh.

And then Stuffy made a strange noise. He was trying to speak. As the Old Gentleman had heard the noise nine times before, he understood it. He knew that Stuffy was accepting.

“Thank you. I’m very hungry.”

Stuffy was very full, but he understood that he was part of a tradition. His desire for food on Thanksgiving Day was not his own. It belonged to this kind Old Gentleman. True, America is free. But there

are some things that must be done.

The Old Gentleman led Stuffy to the restaurant and to the same table where they had always gone. They were known here.

“Here comes that old man,” said a waiter, “that buys that old no-good fellow a dinner every Thanksgiving.”

The Old Gentleman sat at the table, watching. The waiters brought food, and more food. And Stuffy began to eat.

No great and famous soldier ever battled more strongly against an enemy. The turkey and all the other food were gone almost as quickly as they appeared. Stuffy saw the look of happiness on the Old Gentleman’s face. He continued to eat in order to keep it there.

In an hour the battle was finished.

“Thank you,” Stuffy said. “Thank you for my Thanksgiving dinner.”

Then he stood up heavily and started to go to the wrong door. A waiter turned him in the right direction.

The Old Gentleman carefully counted out \$1.30, and left fifteen cents more for the waiter.

They said goodbye, as they did each year, at the door. The Old Gentleman went south, and Stuffy went north.

Stuffy went around the first corner, and stood for one minute. Then he fell.

There he was found. He was picked up and taken to a hospital. They put him on a bed, and began to try to discover what strange sickness had made him fall.

And an hour later the Old Gentleman was brought to the same hospital. And they put him on another bed, and began to try to discover what his sickness could be.

After a little time one of the doctors met another doctor, and they talked.

“That nice old gentleman over there,” he said. “Do you know what’s wrong with him? He is almost dead for need of food. A very proud old man, I think. He told me he has had nothing to eat for three days.”