

A New England Church

PREFACE

Collecting the material for this book has been like making a journey into a place one can never fully understand. It is about people who lived at another time in another environment for other purposes. They were farmers who left behind them, here on earth, their houses their children, and their land. Their children were similar to, but not like, them; and their grandchildren were even more diverse.

I am a New Englander who knew little of the path my people had trod, either as Englishmen or as Americans, to reach the twentieth century.

The inhabitants of the town of my childhood were homogeneous. They had a profound sense of freedom; they placed high value on sound education; and they lived a deep faith in a logical sequence of nature. They believed each day would bring a reasonable unfolding of the life of the individual.

One small, white clapboard church had been built near the center of the town, close by the combination town hall and grammar school. It always looked freshly painted and completely closed. I can remember the building being opened only twice. Once parents met there in December and, trying to keep a fire burning, trimmed a Christmas tree. Late that afternoon they gave a party for all the children in the town, complete with candy and popcorn balls, and a gift for every child. Again, on a warm August day, after the hay had been gathered, the church was open one Sunday morning and a lady minister held a service. Everyone came. There was congregational singing. The adults seemed to know the tunes and the words of the hymns. My mother brought the lady minister home with us and gave her a good, freshly cooked meal.

The story which opened from the material I could reach is chronicled here. The events occurred in one small New England town, but they could have happened in many. The days were heavy with soul-searching, and they ended with a burden cast aside. The people became intolerant of intolerance, and they turned once again to a way of life which seemed reasonable and logical to them, a way they could justify in their own minds. This is the story of their struggle.