

SOME COUNTRY PARSONS OF YE OLDEN TIMES.

BY

MARY H. GRAVES.

Before me lies a well printed pamphlet browned with age, "Mr. Stone's Half Century Sermon," being, as the title page further denotes, "A Discourse delivered at Reading, North Parish, May 19, 1811. In which Warnings of Death are considered as Excitements to review Life. By Eliah Stone, Pastor of the second church in Reading."

Those were the days of single settlements, life-long pastorates. Referring to the records, the preacher on this memorable occasion informed his hearers that he had been continued in the work of the ministry a little more than eleven years, longer than any other who had been ordained in Reading since the incorporation of the town, a period of one hundred and sixty-seven years, and that no other clergyman in Middlesex, Essex or Suffolk County had been in the ministry the same length of time as himself. He remarked that he had had "the very rare instance of six generations in a direct line" sitting under his preaching. From all this he drew the inference that he was then standing on the brink of eternity, that the time of his own departure must be at hand. The case however proved otherwise. His active labors were continued for seven or eight years more, while his life was prolonged eleven years and some months. This is the record, "Elijah Stone ordained pastor of the second, or north Parish of Reading, May 20, 1761; died Aug. 31, 1822, in the sixty-second year of his ministry and eighty-sixth of his age." Two years previously, May 19, 1819, Cyrus Pierce—"Father Pierce" of subsequent Normal School fame—had been ordained as his colleague.

This second parish in Reading, "North Precinct," was incorporated in 1713, sixty years later than the first parish in what is now Wakefield, and fifty-six years earlier than the third, in the central part of the original township, which retains the name Reading. The first minister of the north, Rev. Daniel Putnam, was ordained Jan. 20, 1720, and remained in charge till June 20, 1759, when he "departed this life, after a long indisposition (as from the 10th of September, 1758), in the sixty-third year of his age; having served in the gospel ministry thirty-nine years, wanting nine days."