Some heretics of yesterday

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SOME HERETICS OF YESTERDAY

BY

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This page
OF HONOR AND AFFECTION
I HAVE WRITTEN LAST,
THAT I MIGHT INSCRIBE IT, WITHOUT HER KNOWLEDGE,
TO THE MOST FAITHFUL
AND YET MOST KINDLY OF CRITICS,
MY WIFE,
UNDER WHOSE PATIENT SCRUTINY
EVERY PAGE OF MY BOOK
HAS PASSED.
PREFACE.

Lest some reader should be disappointed in the contents of the present volume, let me briefly say by way of preface that no new facts are brought to light in the following pages; they are old stories simply retold — not for students — but for the young men and women of the Congregation to which it is my privilege to minister, and whom I am trying to train, from Sunday to Sunday, in the Christian graces of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and in that Kingdom which is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."

The several chapters were prepared from week to week and delivered as a course of Sunday Evening Lectures during the last winter, with no thought of publication until the last one had been given. Indeed such a purpose, arising at an earlier day, would have suggested a preparation so protracted and thorough as to preclude the possibility of producing them at intervals so brief. Nor would they now be committed to the types but for the strenuous entreaty of my people. The Luther celebrations of last autumn turned the minds of men anew, throughout the Christian world,
to that great revolt against traditionalism and authority which we call the Reformation. To show that the revolt neither began nor ended with Luther—if indeed it can be said to be finished yet; to follow it in its gradual development in principle and trace it in its geographical and national expansion; at the same time to exhibit it concretely in the lives of its leaders, and so to bring the reader into a personal sympathy with them and awaken an interest in personal investigation; is the object which I have endeavored to accomplish. And yet, I should not be content, if I could feel that only this were attained. The great Protestants of the past have gained comparatively little for the world, if they have not established for all succeeding ages the indefectible right to question even their authority, and the perpetual privilege of intellectual readjustment. In other words, a traditional Protestantism has no more right to a claim of infallibility than a traditional ecclesiasticism.

Every age that the world has seen so far has been prefatory; it is hardly probable that the present age is final. The five centuries from the birth of Tauler to the death of Wesley (1290–1791) are unified by a visible progress of religious thought and of spiritual life. There is no good reason for supposing that the lines along which that progress has developed have yet found their termini. It may be said of these “Hericies of Yesterday,” as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says of the worthies of the Ancient Jewish Church: “These all having obtained a good report
through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” Nor shall we be perfected without the work and attainment, the broader light and clearer knowledge, of the coming years.

Mt. Vernon Church, Boston, July, 1884.