

considered good and sufficient reasons for lying down quietly under our remarks. Marked copies of this issue of the 'Tablet' will be sent to him, to the Rev. Mr. Isitt, to the 'Prohibitionist,' and to all others concerned whose addresses we can discover. Our columns are open to them for any temperate reply they may desire to make. Perhaps, even at this late hour of the day, they, or some of them, may clear up the mystery that hangs like a 'record' London fog around the undiscovered 'Committee' and those missing '200 Catholics' of Wellington. All these must have a local habitation and a name. But if they are lost or mislaid, stolen or strayed, it is high time that those most interested in establishing their living and objective reality should show more charity than careless little Bo-Peep, and tramp about to find 'em.

## LUTHER AND SLAVERY

### A LUTHERAN CLERGYMAN IN DEFENCE

In the course of a public debate held in Dunedin in December, Mr. Bedford, M.H.R.—probably a well-meaning but certainly a somewhat inexperienced young man—made an uncalled-for and ill-mannered attack upon what he called the 'Romish' ('hurch. Among other high crimes and misdemeanors laid to its charge was this: that it 'fought against Christ' when it opposed Luther. 'Christianity' was credited by Mr. Bedford (as reported) with the overthrow of slavery; but 'the Romish' ('hurch' was set apart by the speaker from 'Christianity' as understock in his remarks, and the inference left to be drawn by the unlearned or incautious reader of the report was this: that the 'Romish' Church had done nothing to achieve the emancipation of the toiler, but that this was in some way due to the 'Christianity' preached by Luther, and to which the 'Romish' institution had played the part of anti-Christ.

The obvious reply—which we gave in our issue of December 22—was this: that the 'Christianity' which overthrew slavery was that which was professed and practised by the adherents of the 'Romish' Church. It was (we said) they and they alone who broke down the slavery of the old pagan days. We traced in briefest terms the history of the emancipation movement and then, by way of contrast and of completion of our contention, pointed out how Luther and other Reformers advocated the re-infliction of slavery, which, at the time of their great religious revolt, was non-existent in Europe. We also instanced the re-introduction of slavery into England and Scotland after the Reformation.

### A LUTHERAN CLERGYMAN WRITES.

A Lutheran clergyman—Rev. Christopher Gaustad, of Halcombe—had his attention directed at the time to our remarks. In the course of a letter to us he says: 'I was asked to reply to the article, but was not able to do so at the time.' In the course of his introductory remarks, which are very lengthy and for the most part of a strongly personal nature, he declares his inability to determine 'what may have been the writer's object in writing and publishing such an article.' 'It seems really,' says he, 'that the writer must either be entirely ignorant of the historical facts relating to the subject which he writes about, or, if not ignorant, he must know that what he writes with regard to Luther is false and contrary to well-known facts.' Our reverend correspondent follows up this alternative imputation of wilful and deliberate falsehood by stoutly denying that 'Luther or any of the Reformers did recommend or defend slavery in a form and in a sense in which the term slavery is generally defined and understood by all.' The 'full truth' of the matter is (he gives us to understand) set forth in the following

#### Defence of Luther

on historical grounds, which we print in full, and which is the only part of his letter that is relevant to the issue between us—

'Now, for the sake of truth, it is important that we should carefully ascertain what the real facts of the case are, and what the proceedings and the conduct of Luther were, when he was informed of the revolt of the peasants. We know that, at the time of the Reformation, some misguided persons made their appearance who rejected the evangelical principles of the Reformation, and who represented to the poorer classes that the time was come to throw off the intolerable yoke imposed upon

them by their rulers and civil authorities. Among these ringleaders was the notorious Thomas Munzer. This man and his followers came to a miserable end. Luther, when he heard of this deplorable revolt of the peasants, and how they had been deluded by false leaders, was deeply moved, because he knew well the hard lot of these poor people. Luther, as a true friend both of the higher and lower classes, addressed the princes, and more especially the bishops, in the following words: "It is you who are the cause of this revolt; it is your clamors against the Gospel, your guilty oppressions of the poor, that have driven the people to despair. It is not the peasants, my dear Lords, that rise up against you, it is God Himself who opposes your madness. The peasants are but the instruments He employs to humble you. Do not imagine you can escape the punishment he is preparing for you. Even should you have succeeded in destroying all these peasants, God is able from the very stones to raise up others to chastise your pride. If I desired revenge, I might laugh in my sleeve, and look on while the peasants were carrying on their work, or even increase their fury, but may God preserve me from such thoughts! My dear Lords, put away your indignation, treat these poor peasants as a man of sense treats people who are drunk or insane. Quiet these commotions by mildness, lest a conflagration should arise and burn all Germany." The peasants had presented some articles for the consideration of the authorities. With regard to these articles Luther said to the princes and bishops: "Among these twelve articles there are certain demands which are just and equitable." This address did conciliate the peasants' confidence in Luther. But Luther told them, also, that to revolt was to act like heathens; that the duty of Christians is to be patient and not to fight; that if they persisted in revolting against the Gospel, he should look upon them as more dangerous enemies than the Pope. "The Pope and the Emperor," said he, "combined against me, but the more they blustered the more did the Gospel gain ground." Now, what happened? The peasants, alas, did not follow this excellent advice of Luther, but commenced, as is well known from the history of that time, to perpetrate the most horrible crimes and cruelties. Luther saw all this with the deepest sorrow, and he now felt it his sad duty to tell the princes and civil authorities that this rebellion of the peasants ought not to be tolerated; that it was the duty of the rulers of the people to interfere and repress the rebellion. When we consider the awful crimes committed by the peasants, can we wonder that Luther's language was strong against them? If the Roman ecclesiastics had acted in the same Christian spirit and as faithfully, both to the civil authorities and the poor peasants, as Luther did, perhaps the awful catastrophe of the revolt would have been prevented.'

The remainder of the Rev. Mr. Gaustad's letter is beside the present issue, dealing, as it does, with sundry personalities, with Luther's idea of salvation and his warfare against what our correspondent calls 'superstition and unbelief,' and with our remarks on the slave trade, which the writer finds 'partial and unsatisfactory' and 'in contradiction to well-established historical facts,' but on which, however, he says he cannot at present enter.

### OUR COMMENT.

The Rev. Mr. Gaustad's case against us falls naturally into three chief points: (1) In the first place he distinctly implies that our references to the subject of Luther and slavery were uncalled-for, unprovoked, in bad taste, and against true charity. (2) He professes to give the 'full truth' of the matter in that part of his letter which we have quoted in extenso. (3) He positively affirms that neither Luther nor any other Reformer ever recommended or defended slavery as 'generally defined and understood by all.'

1. We are at least as desirous as our reverend correspondent for the coming of the day of perfect peace and union among people of all Christian creeds. For other men's opinions we have perfect toleration. We use no harsh words against any man merely because he differs with us in religious or political faith. We are ever ready to deal in a friendly and inoffensive spirit with opinions and beliefs which we do not share, and are always prepared to give the hospitality of our columns to those who differ from us, so long as they treat us and our readers with common courtesy and consideration. But we have no space for long-drawn irrelevancies in discussion or for strong and needless personalities in communications intended for publication. In the case under consideration the 'Tablet,' as the Catholic organ, was exercising its right and duty by repelling a wholly unprovoked and unjustifiable attack by the juvenile senior Member for Dunedin, who so far forgot the common courtesies of debate as to fling at the members of our Ancient Faith