

Correspondence.

LETTER FROM ENGLAND.

DEAR EDITOR AND BROTHER,—Though (D.V.) I shall be home and at work again ere this can be before your readers, yet written now, my thoughts to me at least are fresher, and impressions more vivid. Besides, it will not be possible in this letter to say all I may have to say : and there is no opportunity like to the present for beginning.

It has been my privilege to meet several of our leading churches within the circuit of mighty London ; to feel some of the pulses of London life, and to form some opinions—which you may have for what they are worth. Comparing my observations to-day, with those of my two former visits, which bridge over the past thirteen years—and the recollections of my boyhood, which will cover twenty-seven more—my first thought is this : Britain in its own great centre shows no signs of decadence. Commercially, socially and religiously, her progress has been most marked. Each of these subjects opens up material for at least a small volume. Let me just give a sample illustration for each : Let one step into any one of the many railway trains leaving the centre for, say, a ten-mile trip ; as he looks out of the window he will soon be bewildered at the tangled network of tracks. Trains whizzing past him like a rocket ; trains apparently racing with his own ; trains thundering above him, trains whizzing below him. I am credibly told that at one of the junction-stations, twelve-hundred trains pass every twenty-four hours ; yet so perfect is the management, that not a single serious accident has occurred within the past ten years. Think what that means, commercially and practically ! And still the cry is for greater accommodation. This does not speak of commercial decay.

Socially ; I am prepared to accept statistics which declare that pauperism and crime are decreasing. There is, heaven knows, squalour and vice enough to make one weep ; and the cursed gin-palaces still dazzle with their brightness, as they blast with their traffic ; but the old filthy haunts of the poor are disappearing ; sanitary measures are being vigorously carried out ; and where filth cannot remain, the tendency is to les-

sen crime. Cleanliness may not be godliness, but it does not encourage either drunkenness or crime ; “ *clean hands* and a pure heart ” are bracketed together in the scriptures of truth.

The social condition however, is inseparable from the religious. And here I know it is hard to speak without bias. My reader must therefore eliminate the personal equation from my remarks. Speaking generally, I would say that a large proportion of the working class, having painful recollection of the fox-hunting parsons, and compulsory tithes, is alienated from church-life. The constantly recurring scandals of high life, moreover, within the supposed circle of the Established Church, makes wider the alienation. Again, the manifest tendency in that church to sacerdotalism and ritualism, so inseparably associated with the Papacy, in the popular mind—intensifies the dislike, and Christianity by the people has been for the most part read through the national church. But of late, the Nonconforming bodies have made themselves felt in the community, as never before : the Salvation Army has preached a gospel to the people whose centre is Christ, Methodism has its forward movement, and our Independent Churches—the London Union most markedly—are rising to the occasion ; so that the masses are beginning to realize that there is a Christianity which is no sham. That “ Bitter cry of Outcast London,” voiced by the indefatigable Secretary of the London Congregational Union, Rev. A. Mearns, has been heard, and the churches are responding thereunto.

But what of the “ Down Grade ” controversy ? As far as I can see—*dying* ! There has been most certainly a casting down of some former walls, and a neglect of some dogmatic statements once deemed essential ; but there is activity in the churches ; and an activity that owns Jesus as its guide and life. I do not say that the millenium, either of faith or of works has come, but I do say that the spirit of the churches I have seen, is evangelical and practical : they are not asleep.

And the deacons *work*. I know, this time, I have been in pleasant places, but is it not a cause for gratitude that there *are* pleasant places ? And because they work, there is little fault-finding. The work progresses.

It was my privilege, through the kindness of