

KINDERGARTENS.

From the Outpost Kindergarten at Pymont comes the story of the sun disappearing behind a cloud, and one small infant instantly remarking, "Gawd muster forgot to put 'is penny in the gas." For it is amongst the poorer and congested areas of Sydney, where the life of children is limited in homes symbolised by the penny slot gas meter, that the Free Kindergartens are doing their splendid work. This week has been held as Kindergarten Week, and a fine effort has been made to tell the general public what the work of the Kindergarten Union means, and to secure that further assistance without which the work will have to be curtailed. Commencing last Saturday with the official opening by the Governor at Castle Hill, the week has been celebrated by various activities, including visits to the Kindergartens, the "Manoora Manoeuvres" Ball, the Christmas shop, and the auction sale by Mr. Lawson this morning. The Children's Fancy Dress Ball, which was to have been held to-night, has been postponed to April on account of the prevalence of children's ailments, but the week will conclude with the reception to Miss Helen Twelvetrees, the American film star, next Monday, when prominent Gilbert and Sullivan artists are generously giving their services. Indeed it is pleasing to find how leading citizens and social workers have responded to the call, led by his Excellency and Lady

Hore-Ruthven, whose donation of hair-ribbons to some Kindergarten children has resulted in their coining the affectionate designation of "Lady Hair-Ribbon." As she herself has phrased it in her special appeal on behalf of these small children whose lives are brightened and characters trained by the Kindergarten Union, "they are the "future citizens and possible leaders of "this wonderful country, and as such "need all our care and help."

There has never before been such a widespread interest in child welfare as there is to-day, and amongst all the movements which concern children, such as baby centres, clinics, nursery schools, and the activities promoting mothercraft and child training, the Kindergarten Union is outstanding. Its growth is a tribute to the value of its work. Thirty-nine years ago the first Free Kindergarten was opened at Sussex-street with three pupils. To-day, in the most congested areas of our city, there are 16 Free Kindergartens with over 1500 children in daily attendance. It is interesting, too, to find that each one has a waiting list of from 20 to 80 children, and in many instances parents enrol the child for the Free Kindergarten as soon as it is born—just as parents in England put down the names of their children for Eton and Harrow. The recent increase in the number of private Kindergartens which are springing up in almost every suburb is due in no small measure to the example set by the Free Kinder-

gartens. The latter are helped materially by the voluntary work of the clubs for mothers, fathers, boys, and girls, attached to them. Attendance at the Moore Park recreation centre rose to 39,843 last year, showing the popularity of the playgrounds. Not only are the children given outings, which are both enjoyable and educational, to such places as the Zoo, Botanic Gardens, and Koala Park, but children from every Kindergarten have been given three weeks at the Holiday Home at Thirroul, with excellent results in health promotion.

As Mrs. Hubert Fairfax said yesterday, quoting the Archbishop of Brisbane on the teaching work of the Free Kindergartens, "education no longer means instruction but an exciting adventure in search of knowledge." The ABC has become a delight instead of a terror or anxiety. Punishment is almost entirely unknown. Modern toys and equipment give the child opportunities for constructive play, and learning is made pleasurable and often unconscious. We realise to-day that, as Wordsworth put it, "the child is father of the man." Psychology has proved how important is the education of the pre-school child. In the Free Kindergartens, apart from the educational teaching and the influence of the libraries, the children are given domestic duties; they set their little tables, serve out meals, attend to the plants, and feed the birds. Fresh food and

milk and a hot midday meal are provided, and each child has his or her own special toothbrush, towel, stretcher, and blanket. In areas where the only playgrounds are dirty streets, and where families are still large—in several cases the Free Kindergarten has been attended by the twenty-fourth

child of the same parents, and families of 16 and 17 are not uncommon—it is difficult to realise what a boon the Kindergarten is for both children and harassed parents. And all this is done at a cost of about fourpence a day for each child.
