

I produce this as evidence to show that out of such rough material we produce something of value to the primary schools. In another letter to Mr. Cohen, Mr. Owen J. Hodge writes,—

I am a frequent visitor and a great admirer of the excellent work done in an excellent manner. . . . I am thoroughly convinced it manifests itself right through their school life. . . . The children in attendance at the branch must be compared not with any other children, but only with other children similarly situated as regards their homes, their parents, their surroundings. . . . But compare those that have been to school with those that have not, and that have had little or no home school. The difference can at once be seen.

He is referring to the difference when these children come into the school after being first trained by the Kindergarten Association.

The question is largely a people's question. Of what use is free secondary education to a boy entitled to it if he is unable to take advantage of it because he has to go to work? . . . When he is a little toddler, when his services are not in demand, then the kindergarten school must be preparing him for his career.

Finally Mr. Hodge says,—

I hope I have made my opinion clear. Let me restate it shortly: The majority of our children have a very limited number of school years. It is desirable to increase that number. This can be easily done by giving them special treatment at an earlier age than that at which they enter our primary schools. The free kindergarten schools are now doing good work in that direction.

Mr. W. J. Moore, headmaster of the Kensington Public School, dwells upon the fact that owing to our work we have induced the primary schools in the Otago District to take up this method of work for teaching, and he emphasizes the value of it. These children are taught to be clean and to cultivate healthy habits, whereas if left alone they would simply be gutter-children. Then there is very valuable evidence from Mr. D. Wright, our city missionary. He writes,—

Those of us who thoroughly know the city, with its large and steadily increasing population, can unhesitatingly aver that such schools are most urgently needed; and of our own knowledge we declare that for years the work has been carried on with an enthusiasm and success by the Free Kindergarten Association and by teachers of skill and experience. Largely through personal visitation in what may be termed the slums of our city and other means, little children of the poorer struggling classes have been brought into the free kindergarten schools who would otherwise have been found in the streets and getting their first lessons in wrong-doing. It is an indisputable fact that these schools have done most excellent service to the city and for the commonwealth at large, and now it seems both equitable and reasonable that the State should in some definite and tangible form recognise the value of the work already accomplished, and, if need be, provide means whereby other schools may be opened in other localities. The doors of these schools are thrown open for all little neglected children, irrespective of colour, race, or creed, and it is also well known that boys and girls passing from the kindergarten schools to the ordinary State schools have proved to be apt and successful pupils. You will, I am sure, accept my word that in this matter I am neither a dreamer nor an unreasonable faddist, but that I write from sincere convictions and from personal knowledge and personal observation.

I do not think I need quote a letter from the High Street School, but there is a letter from the Rev. Mr. Waddell, who speaks in the highest terms of the work done. It is as follows:—

Dunedin, 14th August, 1903.—I am asked my opinion as to the value of the kindergarten in Walker Street. It has been under my observation from the very beginning. I was led to take steps in regard to it, seeing the number of little children "spilt like drops about the street." This was especially pathetic in the winter time. Their homes were small and many of them comfortless, and there was nothing for these little boys and girls save the kindergarten of this street—the very worst conceivable. The kindergarten school has gathered these waifs in. They are under the care of kind guardians; they are drilled and taught in a way that makes learning easy and knowledge a delight. No one could conceive the change that the school works on these little ones unless he had seen them in their original condition. They are saved from the contaminating influences of the street at the most impressionable age. The parents speak in the highest terms of the good it has done them and the children. The State has also saved many hundreds of pounds, for it is as certain as anything well can be that not a few of these little ones are criminals in embryo, and they owe their salvation to the kindergarten influence. It is a very noble thing to pick up the wounded on the field of battle and to care tenderly for them; but it is even a more noble thing to destroy the causes that make war a necessity. It is good to look after our prisoners in the gaol, and our grown-up criminals and incapables; but it is a more heroic thing to prevent them from being criminals and incapables at all, and I am certain that an institution such as the Walker Street kindergarten is doing just that work. It is not only inducing these young lives to law and order in a pleasant way, and preparing them to become apt pupils in the State schools: it is a most valuable addition to the economic and moral forces of the State.

You will note that the Rev. Mr. Waddell is strongly in favour of the continuance of these schools. All that we ask is a little help to encourage our voluntary efforts in getting money, because there are men and women engaged in collecting for this work who have done good and noble work, and who need encouraging. If the Committee can see its way to recommend the Government to help us by granting pound for pound I shall be glad. After all, it is a paltry sum which is being asked for, in view of the vast benefit which I am sure is being done by this Free Kindergarten Association.

1. *The Chairman.*] I just want you to emphasize the statement you made—that the kindergarten institution has been in existence for fourteen years. During the whole of that period has any fee been charged?—Not one penny. On the contrary, we have often fed and clothed these children.

2. During the period in which it has been in operation have any children over six years of age been receiving instruction in the school?—Yes, I gave you an instance of one. I could not tell you from my own knowledge whether there have been more over six, but I know there have been from time to time children over five.

3. Can you give the Committee the figures showing the number attending over the age of five years?—There are nineteen out of the 115 over five years of age.

4. *Mr. Fowlds.*] Five years and eight months is the limit in one case?—Yes; they are very exceptional cases.

5. *Mr. Alison.*] Are we to understand that the intention is to limit the age to about five, unless in exceptional cases there are strong reasons for exceeding that age?—We have not the slightest desire to keep the children after they are five years old if we can get rid of them; but there are cases where we feel justified in keeping them a little longer.

6. *Mr. Rhodes.*] The children who are mostly over five years are the children of aliens?—Yes. There is one quarter-caste Maori of 5 years and 7 months, one Syrian of 5 years and 3 months, and