

SUNDAY SCHOOL EXTENSION

A MEMORIAL TO THE GENERAL CONFERENCE AND ITS
SUNDAY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

BY W. H. WITHROW,
Editor of the Sunday School Periodicals.

At a meeting of Methodist ministers and laymen held at the residence of Mr. A. E. Ames, Toronto, on the evening of August 22nd, Mr. J. W. Flavelle in the chair, the following resolution was adopted:

Moved by the Rev. Dr. Withrow, seconded by Mr. Chester D. Massey.

"In view of the vital relations of our Sunday School work to the growth of Methodism, resolved that this meeting endorses the idea of a strong advance movement in Sunday School extension, especially in the North-West."

Dr. Withrow was requested to send with this resolution a communication to the General Conference for reference to the Sunday School Committee on the need of such advance movement, with a statement of the grounds on which it was urged.

In compliance with this request, and in harmony with my own convictions, I take the liberty of asking the attention of the Conference and Sunday School Committee to a subject in which we are all profoundly interested, and to which I have given much and earnest consideration. I have put my thoughts in print that the members of the Conference and Sunday School Committee may the better examine them.

We all thank God for the great success he has given our Sunday School work in the past, for its remarkable development, and for the hallowed results of the labors of our great army of over 30,000 (33,296) faithful officers and teachers in conjunction with the still larger army of 272,566 Sunday School scholars. The spiritual results of this work cannot be weighed or tabulated, but we rejoice in the fact that nearly forty thousand of the scholars in our schools (39,374) have on profession of faith united with the church during the quadrennium—a more than ample compensation for all the labor of the workers in this most fruitful

garden of the Lord. To this must be added the moulding of so many thousands of lives in Christian culture and service.

THE PROBLEM TO BE FACED.

Through conditions which seem common to all the churches in the Old World and the New, there has been a relative decline in our Sunday School progress. In some other churches it is even more pronounced than in our own. No single factor can account for this result, but many causes conspire to bring it about. The lessened reverence for God's day and his house, the prevailing love of pleasure, the allurements of the trolley car and trolley park, of Sunday bicycling and pleasure driving, of sailing and rowing, the frequency of military and society parades on the Lord's day, the increase of summer vacation travel—all these have made sad inroads upon our Sunday Schools, and seriously menace their future.

AN EBB OF THE TIDE.

As a matter of fact, our Sunday School growth has not kept pace with the increase of our preaching appointments. That increase in the last two quadrenniums was 202, while that of our schools was only 174. During the two previous quadrenniums, however, when the adverse influences to which I have referred were not so largely operative, while the increase in the number of preaching places was 268, the increase in the number of our schools was more than twice as great, namely, 576.

The rate of increase in the number of scholars has also declined, the increases for the quadrennial periods since the first union of 1874 being as follows:

1878	19,754
1882	9,657
1883 (Year of 2nd Union)	44,423
1886 (Three-year period)	16,133
1890	35,765
1894	25,596
1898	17,783
1902	2,237