

## Quadrennial Report of the General Sunday School and Epworth League Board.

SUNDAY SCHOOL WORK.

The past quadrennium has not been a period of growth, as far as the membership in our schools is concerned. We regret very much to be forced to report a decrease in both scholars and teachers. The following is a comparative statement:—

In 1898 there were 3,387 schools; in 1901, 3,419.

Number of teachers in 1898, 33,018; in 1901, 32,642.

Number of scholars in 1898, 270,239; in 1901, 266,423.

and culture, to train the youthful immortals in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

Many of our schools, about eight hundred in all, like hibernating animals, go into a condition of suspended animation during the winter and are with difficulty aroused in the spring. In many regions the roads may be bad, the snow may be deep, but the day schools are seldom interrupted. Why should the Sunday School be suspended. It has been suggested that in many rural regions it might be an advantage if the schools in winter, and perhaps also in summer, should be held either immediately before or after the morning service. This might have the effect of bringing the adults as well as the younger members of the households into the Sunday School, or Bible School, as some prefer to call it.

Some means should be adopted at least whereby the Lesson Helps and Sunday School papers might be distributed at the Sunday service. Thus, if the schools themselves had perforce to be suspended, the lessons might be studied in the home, and Sunday School literature distributed throughout the winter months when there is more time for religious reading and greater dearth of reading matter. The circulation of our papers reported in our statistics is that on the 31st of March at the very end of the winter. The summer circulation is, we think, nearly fifty thousand greater, taken only for a six months' term. If our schools could be kept open all the year round their efficiency and success would be very greatly increased, and a vast amount of religious reading could be kept in circulation.

We thank the faithful army of ministers, Sunday School superintendents and teachers through whose aid the circulation of these papers has increased during the last two years by over twenty-three thousand. We beg to solicit their continued help in still further extending that circulation, and especially in preventing the closing of eight hundred of our schools during the winter.

The best light to shed upon a Bible lesson is Bible light. The teacher should therefore be familiar with the history, geography, poetry, manners, and customs of the Bible.

If the falling off in numbers had occurred in our own church only, we might have been led to conclude that there was something vitally defective in our methods and management, or that our workers have been careless and unfaithful. The fact is, however, that sister denominations in Canada have suffered more serious decreases than our own. Other churches have not prospered at our expense. The same condition of affairs prevails in Great Britain, and indeed all over the world wherever the Sunday School is known. From every direction, there come reports of decreased numbers and attendance. Work of this kind seems to be subject to the same fluctuations as business affairs, and, strange to say, a period of great prosperity in the commercial life of the country is very often attended by a corresponding depression in spiritual activities.

Opinions differ so widely in regard to the cause of decrease in Sunday School membership that no very definite conclusions can be arrived at. The following are among explanations given by ministers to whom a series of questions were submitted:

1. Decrease in the child population of the country. It is said that not for many years has there been so small a number of scholars in our day schools.
2. Lack of interest on the part of parents. Their example of disinterestedness neglects the boys and girls.
3. Neglect upon the part of teachers and pastors.
4. Summer vacation, the bicycle craze, increasing tendency to Sabbath desecration.

One great evil is that the Sunday School is too generally regarded as an