

# We Nominate as Leading Woman in Ontario—Mrs. May R. Thornley

She Has Been the Power Behind Many of the Provincial Reform Movements in the Last Quarter of a Century

**B**ACK of every great movement, behind every worthy project is some one figure, some sincere soul to whom the adherents of the cause may look for direction, for advice, for material help—some central luminary, the brilliance of whose achievements is never reflected through the public press or advertised among the uninterested and the unsympathetic. That guiding spirit works silently and effectively and indefatigably towards one end—the good of the cause and the accomplishment of its aims.

Just such a hidden light is Mrs. May R. Thornley, of London, Ont. But instead of restricting her interest to *one* movement, she is, probably unconsciously, the nucleus of *many*.

Mrs. Thornley is the embodiment of Canadian feminine thought of the moment. She stands for national progress and national ideals—or what national ideals *should* be; she stands *for* them and *by* them—stands very firmly, and out of her fertile brain comes the fruit of many a Dominion-wide reform, developed by the legions of co-workers in whom she has inspired enthusiasm for success.

**N**O one asks "Who is Mrs. Thornley?" Everyone knows her either directly or indirectly.

What is Mrs. Thornley? Ah, that is different. That question emphasizes the very quality that characterizes and has characterized her whole life—humility, a desire to remain unknown.

Before satisfying curiosity as to *what* she is, it may be more appropriate to go back a little to the days when Mrs. Thornley was—well, Mrs. Thornley-in-the-making.

She was born in Drummondville, Nova Scotia, just long enough ago to provide the years of experience the force of which she brings to bear on present-day affairs. Before her, through the line of her ancestry, were influences, good strong Christian influences that were bound to make their imprint. Her father, the Rev. G. N. A. F. T. Dickson, was Principal of Madras Institute a school for the training of teachers and the partial training of theological students. The position was a good one, at least from the financial standpoint, the salary being about \$1000 per year. But there did not go with it the opportunity to minister to the need of souls that Rev. Mr. Dickson saw waiting in a more open field, so he willingly resigned the post in favor of one that brought him a salary of \$325 a year, but a wealth of opportunity to spread the gospel.

It may have been coincidence, but more likely it was Providence that was responsible for a similar attitude on the part of her mother. Mrs. Dickson was highly educated in the Old Country, and on coming to Canada was requested by many professional men, including Judge Haliburton, of "Sam Slick" fame, to take charge of the first ladies' school in Nova Scotia. She agreed, and was very successful. She too, however, relinquished her career and its attendant honors because she thought she could do more good by sharing the labors of that Methodist preacher and his salary of \$325 a year.

## At the Circus

**A**T school Mrs. Thornley was a typical *girl*. She bubbled over with happiness and the joy that comes of youth. She was the "ring-leader" in any mischief that was going. And, speaking of "ring-leaders" brings to light a little tale of Mrs. Thornley's youthful days that is worth the telling.

There developed within her at one time, a great longing to see a circus. Of course, it was forbidden. That fact in itself, may have made the experience seem more to be desired. At that time she had no conscientious scruples upon the question. Her only restraining thought was the filial desire not to bring reproach or disgrace upon her parents, upon her father, particularly as Minister of the Gospel.

But she *must* see that circus! That fact remained. When all *pros* and *cons* had been sifted, the imperative longing still stood out. She *must* see the circus. There were obstacles, oh, a million of them, but

even then one integral factor of her character was in process of formation—the overcoming of any and every obstacle.

So she dressed herself as a little old lady with poke bonnet, lace, veil, shawl and silk mitts, and thus disguised, sallied forth, all qualms of conscience left in abeyance.



Mrs. May R. Thornley

She enjoyed the menagerie and the acrobatic performance. The band, the crowds and the general spirit of good cheer had their respective effects. But gradually over her there crept a certain feeling of disgust at herself that she had allowed herself to be lured there. The suspicion of sordidness now and then came as a shock. And, to add to her discomfiture she became aware that she was being watched. The man beside her on the grandstand was holding whispered consultation with his partner. She, in turn, observed the diminutive "grandmother" with keen amusement. Jointly, they scrutinized her from head to foot, their eyes resting a trifle too long on the plump, soft white hands that fitted oddly into the silk mitts.

The little fugitive hid the hands under the shawl and as soon as she could get away, wriggled through the crowd and made good her escape.

"I had had enough of circuses," she will tell you laughingly.

**W**AY back in 1885 Mrs. Thornley first became active in the work to which she has devoted more time than to anything else—Temperance. She was then living in New Jersey. But when her husband died she came to Ontario where she plunged wholeheartedly and with all her soul into the fight for Prohibition.

There, you have one of the secrets of *what* Mrs. Thornley is. She is the alpha and the omega of the W.C.T.U. temperance endeavor in Ontario. Indeed, it would not be amiss to say that her influence has spread far beyond the limits of that province. But in nominating Mrs. Thornley as an outstanding figure in Ontario, as we do hereby, we should confine ourselves to Ontario.

For seven years she was Provincial President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and has been officially connected with the organization ever since her last term of office as president expired. She was also for a number of years president of the branch in London, Ontario, her home city.

Mrs. Thornley has worked unceasingly and untiringly in the interests of temperance and of the other moral issues for which the W.C.T.U. stands, and though few may be aware of it, many of the big

moral reforms in the past quarter of a century are directly traceable to her efforts.

## The Dry Canteen

**A**T the barracks at Carling Heights, London, investigation had exposed much drunkenness. Mrs. Thornley wrote to the then Minister of Militia, Sir Frederick Borden, and sent complaint after complaint. In the course of the correspondence she very unexpectedly found that there really *was* a dry canteen law on the statute books that was never enforced.

There were ten canteens on the Heights, and these were rented mainly to tavern keepers who brought their bar equipments with them and conducted regular business. Any money above expenses went to provide delicacies for the officers' mess. The officers themselves, openly admitted to Mrs. Thornley the charges she made, and as openly denied the presence of a dry canteen law on the statutes.

In the meantime the question was asked, in the House of Commons, if Mrs. Thornley of London was charging violation of the law. The Minister of Militia replied that she had not substantiated her charges. Immediately Mrs. Thornley wired that proof was on the way, but no further action was taken until two years later, when a Commission was formed in London which instituted three military trials, posted copies of the dry canteen law in the canteens and enforced its observance in Ontario.

Later came Sir Sam Hughes and the federal dry canteen law.

Another reform due to Mrs. Thornley's influence was that of improved conditions in public schools. She brought before the Ministerial Alliance in London facts that went to prove that moral conditions in the schools were certainly not what they should be. The disclosure brought upon Mrs. Thornley rather distressing publicity. Although she shrank from it, she accepted it in the cause of righteousness. The question did not rest in London. It spread all over the country, into the United States and even across the seas. The Teachers' Association of Toronto took it up. An Anglican clergyman appeared before that body and laid bare some of the appalling facts that had come to his notice. The *Toronto Globe* dealt with the matter editorially. In short, a resolution went to the Ontario Department of Education requesting that Mr. Beal, who had been for five years under the auspices of the Provincial W.C.T.U. as a worker among the school children, be taken over by the Department to supervise moral issues in the schools. This was done, and at the recent W.C.T.U. convention in Cornwall a resolution was passed requesting the Department to appoint also a woman for similar work among the girls.

## "The Fiddlers"

**T**O the average person the two words "The Fiddlers" have become a symbol of mysticism. There came a day when the public was informed that a certain book of that name written by one Arthur Lee, in England, had been censored—*forbidden* the mails in Canada; that a fine of \$5,000.00 would be exacted from any citizen in this free and democratic country who would hereafter be found with the book in his or her possession—in short, all the rigors of the law would be enforced for infringement of any of the thousand and one clauses that went to make up the governmental proclamation. Whether or not Mrs. Thornley was in any way responsible for the passing of that law, indirectly, will be left to conjecture. It will suffice to state her connection therewith.

In May, 1915 the W.C.T.U. in Ontario discovered that while Canada's soldiers had the dry canteen on this side of the Atlantic, such was not the case in England. The officials immediately sent protests to the War Office in London, even to Lord Kitchener himself. These may have been the reason for dry canteen having been brought in for a month—a month *only*. With her genius for organizing, Mrs. Thornley unfolded a plan whereby the authorities here would be made cognizant of the facts, though indeed no one supposed they did not already know

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 13)