

(April 1st, 1912.)

Labrador and its People.

BY DR. W. T. GRENFELL, C.M.G.*

AT a regular meeting of the Canadian Club held on April 1st, 1912, Dr. Grenfell said:

Mr. Chairman, and Gentlemen of the Canadian Club,—I am sure I thank you very heartily for what has been said; I only wish I deserved the half of it; but a great deal of the credit which I absorb is really due to the men and women who are working with me. There are those from this city who have been working with me, nurses and doctors and people in the mechanical departments of our work. To them, whose names are unknown, I shall hope to convey some of the kind expressions of the feeling you have expressed towards me. I thank you again very heartily.

The problem I am going to speak about should rather go to a lawyer than a doctor. I cannot claim among other functions that of lawyer, although I have been the custodian of those people and their magistrate for a number of years, but being a magistrate does not involve with us any knowledge of law (laughter), and I think we are allowed to retain our position largely because we have no lawyers to interpret the law to us. And I even think we have nearly succeeded in demonstrating that equity is at least as rapid as and less expensive than some processes of law. I still look upon the medical profession as the one which has contributed most satisfaction to my life. I am a surgeon, and like my colleagues come out to sit at the feet of your Gamaliels of learning to get the axioms they have worked out. We try them on a clinical basis. But what I want to do—it seems rather presumptuous to try to do it—is to try to defend the

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Almighty for having made Labrador. (Laughter and applause.)

I am perfectly sure that is as much in Dr. Cody's line as mine, but all I can say is, if I were to be looked upon as a person who would try to suppose that the manufacture of Labrador was not entirely a mistake, I should be on a par with others who in former times prophesied that anyone would propose to run a railway through the prairies. We all know how the author of "Looking Backward" or some such book tells of a man who stubbed his toes against a piece of wood in the prairie, the remains of a tie of a railway, and wondered that any fools should have tried to build a railway there.

A portion of Labrador has really been overcome, and is fit for human habitation. A great many people who live there would not exchange with the people who live on the prairies, or with those who live among automobiles and pink teas, long boas and ruffs; they don't wish to exchange their kind of life which they love for that of the great cities and factories, or other places, where the monotony of life is much more pronounced than it is in Labrador at present. I sent up quite a number of our people to other places who were not making good in Labrador, but quite a number of them came back. One man who was in a good job on construction work for the Canadian Pacific in Montreal told me he had to live in a cottage in a row, he worked six days a week, but never had a "spell," and if he wished to swing a cat there was not room to do it without hitting something, so he came back.

I think Labrador will always have a population, though a great many people have been watching what I have been doing in British Columbia, because they thought that if we were going to try a wholesale deportation it would be a hostile act. I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing you can try to do for anybody that is not a "hostile act" to somebody, so you have to go on record as treading on somebody's toes.

Looking at British Columbia, it is eighteen years since I was out there before. A great deal of development has taken place. The only question is the fisheries of the North Pacific, as I saw them at Tacoma, Seattle, Vancouver and Victoria, which at present are richer than those of Labrador. It seems strange that in Boston, with a high tariff on fish, people should eat fish in Boston and pay less for it after bringing it from the Pacific—three fish are caught in the Pacific and sent three thousand miles across to every one caught in the

Atlantic. It is even more so in New York, where five fish are going from the Pacific to one from the Atlantic. But all the same, even the fishing on the Pacific coast is beginning to show the same thing, the need of increasing the kinds of fisheries, just as they are scattering on the Labrador coast. The regulations are not sufficiently rigid; conservation must be applied to the fish trade. It is worthy of anybody's attention to conserve animal life as well as vegetable, both in the United States and Canada. In an experimental sense we adopt some kind of plant which does not grow in a district now, and enable it to grow there; the distribution of plants on the surface being somewhat fortuitous; just so with animals. We have left animals to be exploited and diminished, more on the sea than on land. Anyone can see we have not as many Buffalo as there used to be. We should get back to the principles of conservation. The quantities of musk-ox are being depleted. We have great lessons to learn yet in the care of reindeer. A country like the barren lands of the Mackenzie River is capable of carrying an enormous quantity of wild deer. In Labrador some years ago these deer were very numerous, but forest fires, bad treatment by Indians, and indiscriminate slaughter of them at all times, depleted their numbers greatly.

Well, I have been in the Northwest, and seen many splendid positions for people to go to from Labrador, and they have gone, in spite of the fact that there are laws which I believe deal with contract labor—and there are many lawyers probably in this meeting—still we got a good many offers of contract labor for our people, for fishing, for whaling and other purposes. A number of families got good situations, and I think it was well for them to go out and have a chance before they were dead.

While Labrador is very backward, nobody has the right to say it is a land of Cain and fit only for the refuse of the earth. There is absolutely no way of getting anything out of Labrador or in there, there is no railroad anywhere, there is no railroad farther than Mingan and Seven Islands, eight hundred miles away. Even the steamboat in the summer is very uncertain, one comes from Quebec, we never know when she is coming. There was none for several years, and last year the service was practically nil. The east side is just as bad. No man reads. You can't travel by motor. There are no bridges, and there is no way of getting about at all. The difficulty is that we are cut off except for six months in the summer time. It is almost impossible for prospectors or anybody to go in or give any attention to that country.

We are not ashamed of that. For my own part I believe that a railroad will yet run there, and it will not be long, I think, before mineral wealth will be discovered in Labrador. There were people all over the Northwest before they supposed it was of any great value. When Selkirk discovered Alaska the British thought so little of it, that they easily gave it away; they did not realize its value, or the map would not look so queer; and now Alaska is giving its gold.

The lessons have been well rubbed into every Canadian of the value of his own Northwest. We call attention to the area of wheat, and the shortening time of growth. When I was in Seattle the other day they were selling reindeer meat at twenty cents a pound; it is a luxury; but it is being exported from the domestic herds of Alaska, which were planted in that country only seventeen or eighteen years ago, and they were taken there under great opposition. You will remember what a cry was raised about "alienating" money from missions when that man of foresight, Dr. Sheldon Jackson, introduced the reindeer into Alaska; yet I fancy he will be remembered not only for what good he has done as caretaker of men's souls, but probably more for his reindeer-ology than his theology—though no doubt that was good. (Laughter.) One thing certain—he was a Presbyterian and he ought to be orthodox. But the natives that are living there have been saved altogether from going down to the mining camps, and into sin and vice, by that simple device. They are tending well over thirty thousand deer, for a number have been brought over regularly every year for ten years. The deer are prolific; those fawned in May will fawn the next May. I have twenty thousand at a minimum in Labrador. You can't "alienate" funds from your hospitals to put into experiments of that kind. But when you come to talk of modern missionary work, I think people look at it in the light of an interpretation of foreign missions which needs a little adjustment.

The other day I was at dinner in a house—and there were ladies on both sides of me who had enough jewels on them to run a hospital—one of them asked me if I was a missionary; she did it in such a tone as if that were a sort of stuffed monkey. She seemed to think that life is given us to be a sort of peripatetic carrier of ornaments!

Some people think Labrador is absolutely useless. Well, that "alienation" of \$15,000 brought in three hundred reindeer. I had to sell fifty to help me out on the venture. The two hundred and fifty multiplied regularly, and this year I

sold another fifty, which have gone to Athabaska with three of our own herders—for we have sent the Lapps back. We have killed off the superfluous stags, and we still have eight hundred and fifty left. Perhaps the beginning has been simple; but the text of a sermon is often simple; and I believe the experiment is justifying itself completely. If some other people would take up the enterprise, I believe that the export of meat would be made profitable. My own impression is that Labrador would carry three or four million reindeer. The skin of the reindeer in the fall when the coat is just coming off is worth three or four dollars, and if tanned it makes valuable and excellent material for motor coats and other things. At present the skins mostly go to Germany. With us, the skins are used first as mats, and then when the hair is worn off they are taken up and used as clothes. A gentleman told me he had made a fortune by discovering a machine to take the hair off the hides. I do not know any reason why a country which is now not known for anything else than its mosses and lichens, why Labrador could not add to the meat-producing areas of Canada. The meat of the reindeer is just as good as that of other *bovida*, it is nourishing, and bland to the taste. There is no question that our Lapps have developed the business without scientific attention. The milk is rich, creamy and excellent, and can be used, as we have proved, though we have used it only in a small way, for we want to make the deer multiply. We are sterilizing the milk and putting it up in cans, and this is helping to prove the value of the experiment.

This is only one way in which Labrador can be used. About ten years ago the only way in which it was thought the country could be developed was as one of the few reserves of the more valuable furs. Already hundreds of trappers are pressing north after the fox, sable, mink, ermine and other fur-bearing animals. There is not less, but more demand for them, and with the greater demand a lessening supply. Quite recently we had heard of nobody breeding foxes, except in the Aleutian Islands. We have not tried to breed foxes. But lately we began to raise them, and I sold the last of my silvers to a man from Prince Edward Island. He has written to me since, and now I am sure of offers from twenty farmers, if I may judge from the number of letters which I have had demanding answers about the raising of foxes. As if one carried foxes about with one! One would suppose everybody in Prince Edward Island had gone into fox-breeding. It may become one of the most valuable industries of Prince Edward Island.

They are beginning to learn more about the raising of fur-bearing animals in the United States. I have been over to see some of them, but I am not going to divulge any of our secrets in a public meeting. I took the trouble to go down to Cos Cobb, New York, where Dr. Seton-Thompson, or Thompson-Seton (laughter), is doing experiments with animals. He thought it well to start on unpromising animals, so he began with skunks. He said he had evolved them so far already that they are house-broken (laughter), but he is looking to the future to eliminate those white marks down the back, and may yet breed a silver skunk equal to the silver fox. I am also beginning, and he is hoping to see me down this year to report the progress of my experiments.

The buffalo is most easily destroyed. At present we have a law which conserves these animals in the most ludicrous way. Only the good men in the country don't kill buffaloes, and the bad ones do! I am in constant trouble; I am the magistrate, and sometimes men come and offer to sell me buffalo skins; but I am not a policeman, so I do not arrest them, and I know that the buffalo stand between them and hunger. Among the things we know would conserve the buffalo is the restriction of their slaughter by foxes. The best way to breed a fox is to breed him in a place like what you would keep a dog in, and to feed him on a low protein diet, so he will not be carnivorous; just as that man at Santa Rosa, Luther Burbank, does with plants.

I don't feel like going into all the things possible for the development of Labrador. I am not a geologist, but I took the trouble to get a geologist to come down, and Professor A. P. Lowe, a well-known Canadian, is a reliable witness—he made a geological survey and reports that the country's geological formation offers a field for mineral returns with similar strata to other parts of the continent, giving promise of rich mineral wealth that Labrador may hold in her womb. So that this new railway, which I hear is being discussed seriously, and which I have heard has almost received official sanction, may find a business somewhat more remunerative than that of carrying passengers to Labrador.

With regard to its scenic attractions, there is no question that its northern fjords, its beautiful flowing sea, its bracing atmosphere, and many other features make it have a claim to more respect than it has received in the past. And when the natural resources in the West have been depleted, either by over-population or by reciprocity (Laughter), the tide will come back again, and we may get further development of Labrador.

This can be said: there is a contribution to human life which every hard country has to give. No man with British blood in his veins, with the genius of the men of this great Empire which has extended and kept itself in the forefront of humanity, would like it if his forebears came from the Coral Islands, where they had nothing to do to get a living but bask in the sun and ate nothing but yams. We like the Viking blood, the resourceful strain. And yet we hear people say, "You are an illiterate people"! I venture to say you will hear infinitely less interesting and instructive conversation in many a parlor than you will in hundreds of fishermen's cabins on the Labrador coast. (Applause.)

There is a value that comes from doing things! There was a time when I thought that every missionary was a fool; and now that I have gone out into that work myself I begin to think it is true! there are so many things you find you don't know. If it is thought that Labrador owes something to me, I am sure I owe much to Labrador. I consider it is one of the greatest things that can happen to a young man or a young woman, to have the opportunity of such work as I have there.

Having made this very feeble defence of the right of Labrador to existence, and of people to live there, let me add that I believe, had our forefathers had the intuition to know the value of this part of the continent, many of the troubles in the matter of having a winter seaport might have been avoided by the securing of a port there.

With regard to the work I am doing:—I am really ashamed, it seems as if I am always going about blowing my own horn; I have spoken three times already in this city on this visit, and each time told about our work there in Labrador. The work is possible only through the devotion and loyalty and help of so many men and women. Of the doctors—there are seven on the staff—four are doing the work for no returns whatever in money, they are giving me their lives. (Applause.) Three are graduates of Cambridge, England; two are graduates of Harvard University, and both of them like other men have done their internships and held high positions, and are now doing their best work. We are a devoted body of men who discuss intellectually our attitude towards things which no man can really hope ever to have absolute knowledge about. There is, as Kant says, a "thing in itself," beyond which men differ. Some of us say our prayers in Latin, some don't want to say any, and some of us say them in English, but when it comes to a question of interpreting medicine or surgery, we want to take

out the appendix in the orthodox way without septicaemia. We can't do that in a Catholic way or a Protestant way or a Methodist way, but we do it in the way you adopt—I will say for the benefit of Dr. Primrose and others—in the University of Toronto. (Laughter.)

There are other things that come in my way to do as magistrate. As a magistrate a large part of my work is to settle the estates of the people who die, and often the only real estate they leave is in the form of children that are hungry. That is a matter that offers some difficulty, as I think the lawyers here will agree, and I am so often the residuary legatee in this way, that a couple of ladies have undertaken to run a building if I would erect it. The proposal was very satisfactory and it was accepted. We want to complete the education of our men by sending them to Polytechnics where they can take special work. We are just now wanting to complete one building, and then we shall have five hospitals, a hundred to a hundred and fifty miles apart. And we want to be correct in diagnosis, for we are looked upon as consulting physicians, and are sixty miles from St. John's because rightly or wrongly our missionary friends appreciate our work. When we wanted to give them a thing like X-rays, the first thing to arrange was how to get electricity; we have to generate it; so we had to get a good man to do it; and we must get our men educated, but we can't do that in Labrador. Through the kindness of British friends and institutions who have sent out a man here and there we have been aided in this matter; and they greatly help us in another line, these men stick to Labrador and stay there. Men who just learned late in life the rudiments of academic education compete with these college-trained men in primaries and secondaries, and come out second or third in the class, showing the capacity of the men on the coast. While many of our people are poor and ignorant, and there are many things they ought to know, yet they have many admirable traits, which justify a man spending his life among them. But I would like to see a railroad in there before I die!

Any man who says he does not believe in alcohol and in liquor, is like a man who speaks of taking people out of the country opposite ways. To the sailor and fisherman there is no question that the rocks and shoals, the fogs and storms, do not present a corresponding danger to that danger which the seaports offer. When a strange fisherman's vessel comes in with a crew aboard a man runs into the place, and provision not being made for him he must have a good time. With his strong physical nature—largely good nature—one

does not like to see him do it, but he often will seek that "good time" in an unconventional way; and there are those who seek him, the crimp the runner for the saloon, and so on. But in Labrador prohibition closes the saloons; there is not one there. There is no question but that you can maintain it. Liquor is absolutely non-essential. Both when travelling with sledges and in hard times at sea, I would always rather have a man who is not weakened by the use of any drug, prussic acid or alcohol, I don't care which it is. (Applause.)

At St. John's where all our "lame ducks" used to have to have to go for repairs, this temptation was very strong. But now our people have a dock and a steam lathe, and do all their own repairing. And I have arranged, by the way, with an English firm to establish a cash fur-buying establishment right on our coast. But as our men had to go down there we were glad to know that the saloon keeper has been closed out. When men went in there I used to ask them, "Why do you ever go in? Why don't you bring back your money? You ought to be good down there." There is a kind of religion which makes a man wax strong as a lion as long as temptation in the concrete is presented. But as the concrete temptation is there the man will say to me, "It is so lonesome being good down in St. John's!" But you can be good on the coast.

Well, you have to meet problems as they come along, and we started in with a meeting at Government House there to discuss the problem of a Seaman's House at St. John, and having no vision—which many of us didn't have—I thought we could put up a building for \$10,000. I raised the \$10,000, but found it would not buy the site! Finally we raised some \$90,000. Already I had a splendid vision of the work done by a big Young Men's Christian Association, for I had seen what that organization is doing in a good and simple brotherly way in the west, making the ideals of those growing communities better by the simple, manly, unpretending, inter-denominational character of the organization. But you could not put up a building of that kind without paying for it, and I was not willing to carry it on my shoulders, nor do I believe in putting up a big building and expecting the Lord to find the money to pay for it. So I undertook to send all that \$90,000 back to the donors if I could not raise another \$50,000 as a minimum for other buildings. That was the position it stood in a little over twelve months ago, when I came up here. The people of Toronto helped me out to the extent of \$25,000, and we were able to go on with the enterprise.

People say something is a good investment if it brings money back. But for the man who has money enough, I think the best investment is to put some of it into that which does not bring back returns in dollars.

As a big start-off for our enterprise, as it was nearly Coronation Day, we wanted to lay the foundation stone on that day. I asked the Governor to make it a Coronation celebration, and to ask the King to lay the stone. He thought it would not be right to bother the King on Coronation Day, he did not want to bother him, but we asked the King ourselves. Sir Edward Morris, the Prime Minister, who was over there at the time, saw him personally, and the King graciously consented to lay the stone for us. The Anglo-American Telegraph Company looped up with Buckingham Palace, and we had the stone hung up in such a way, with a clutch, that the telegraphic connection when made would break a single string and release the stone. There is about three hours and thirty-one minutes' difference in time between us and London, so we timed it for the King at 4 o'clock, which made it 29 minutes past 12 with us. We had all the arrangements made, got the platform built and the clutches arranged; the Bishop offered the official prayer, the others spoke, the Governor read his speech, but nobody thought that the King, three thousand miles away was really going to open the building for us; indeed, I was accused of having a man under the platform ready to cut the string at the proper moment! (Laughter.) That was in the newspapers. But just as the Governor had done speaking, in fact he had hardly done speaking, before—bang! went the gun, and the stone went down—the King was really pressing the button at the other end! (Applause.) I wrote later to Sir Francis Hopeway, telling him that the effect was great of the personal presence of royalty. He told it to the King, who laughed a great deal.

I have just received a letter from the Institute, asking help to finish the laundry. We need \$500 to finish the laundry and another \$500 to finish the dining room. We are not going to pass a collection plate here, but I would like to say that Mr. Hamilton Cassels and Mr. Strachan Johnston have been my strong helpers ever since the work began. They organized a Men's Committee; it has gone back a little this last year, but has kept up the subscriptions. Now if I have exceeded the rights of a speaker at the Canadian Club in even mentioning our wants, it is only on a par with the way we do things—if we want to get a thing, we go after it and we get there; I really had a man under that platform to cut that string! (Great laughter and long applause.)