

(October 16, 1934)

## My Work in Labrador

SIR WILFRED GRENFELL, K.C.M.G.

PRESIDENT WILFRED C. JAMES:—Gentlemen, at the first regular meeting of the 1934-35 series I have much pleasure to present to you Sir Wilfred Grenfell, K.C.M.G., M.D. I did not say introduce, because this I believe is the sixth occasion on which Sir Wilfred has been the guest of the Toronto Canadian Club. This, I believe, is a record for a non-resident of Toronto.

We have had many distinguished surgeons address this Club but none, I venture to say, who have had the faith which has been shown by our guest for the past forty years. As a youth, yachting was the hobby of Sir Wilfred; medicine his business. His hobby was apparently extensively developed and in his early twenties he secured a Master Mariner's certificate. However, his life-work lay before him. This he considered with a close friend, Sir Frederick Trees, also a distinguished surgeon of that day. From these conferences a suggestion was made that a real field lay in Labrador. So young Grenfell, as he was then, bought a boat, manned it with a crew of something less than twelve, set sail, and in about three weeks reached Labrador. The field was indeed wide open for this work.

It is my pleasure to call on Sir Wilfred to tell us something of what has been accomplished through his faith and labor in Labrador in the last forty years.

SIR WILFRED GRENFELL:—Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, what I am going to say is going to be, of course, only my own opinions. I am not a delegate either of the Government of Newfoundland or anyone else to give authoritative reports of the country and its future and past. I have been there long enough to have made up my own

mind about it and what I say you must take on my authority only. And you can query it just as much as you like. Nobody knows anything in these days. The great advance science has made in our time is to know it doesn't know anything.

The first question generally asked was, "what on earth made you stay there?" Well, I was attracted to stay there. I think it is a very attractive country. It seems to me an anachromism that that end of Canada, which ought to be and is, part of Canada, is still under separate government. I am being listened to by a great many people who hold different views, no doubt, with regard to the right kind of control of the affairs of that little country. It is a very large one since it won those hundreds of thousands of square miles of Canada, of your eastern Canada, under Sir John Simon's able appeals.

However, as I saw it first of all, the people were attractive. They came from Devon and Dorset, as my own people came from Cornwall, and from Scotland, and just a sufficient dash of Irish to add some of that character that makes also for ability. And altogether they were having such a terribly bad time. I had been in a good many parts of the world but I never saw thirty thousand fisher-folk in a country where there was so much to be had and who got a greater part out of it, but who got nothing for themselves.

That coast was unsurveyed. Now everybody had to cruise the coast and make their living on it every year, and you would think the first effort of a government would be to have a survey. We could not get them interested one *iota* in a survey. They were always losing vessels on rocks uncharted. The charts were useless. They offered me a boat in Montreal called the "Sir Donald", under Sir Donald Smith's guidance and I came and took it down. I took the greatest care, but before I got to Labrador I knocked the bottom out and lost a propellor, because we went on a shoal that was not marked. And four years ago I persuaded an American friend who had a couple of aeroplanes and a boat of his own to come and help me and he fitted out a yacht and the planes and we began an air

survey. I warned him when he got into the yacht not to trust any chart in Labrador, except, of course, in Hamilton Inlet, which was done for the fight, as to who owned Labrador, was done by Canada and well done, and he stuck to that until he got away off down the coast, and then he got an elaborate chart which was published by the Admiralty and he trusted it and he went ashore in the first mile, almost lost his ship. After that he always flew ahead one hundred miles and back again looking for shoals, and then he piloted his boat.

Then there was not a light house of any kind. It is not such a foggy coast. You have no difficulty in cruising it, if you know it. You hardly have to go out at all. You can go one hundred miles at a time without going into the Atlantic ocean. One of my enthusiastic friends from Philadelphia wanted to come down. He fitted his birch-bark canoe with oars and he rowed down inside and outside. I think he reached the north end. I went down in a sixteen foot boat which I brought up. I was beaten by my cousin. In London last year he made up his mind he would come and not having much money he came alone. He fitted a twenty-three foot boat out and sailed into the harbor from London. He came down the channel and into the harbor himself.

I am asked, what good is Labrador anyway? I think I have persuaded the government of Newfoundland that it is worth very much. The first year I was out they offered to sell the country and everything in it for \$9,000,000. They kept on borrowing money and a few years ago offered to sell it for \$111,000,000. But it was to pay off debts and I don't think that it was the value of the country that persuaded them. They have never been interested in Labrador. They have sold its concessions over and over again. This year a friend of mine took out some miles of timber—very good timber. He has big experience in lumbering and holds large concessions in Newfoundland. And he told me that on this one thousand and one hundred miles he considers at the end of fifty years he will have just as much timber as he wants. That timber is mostly pulp I think, spruce and fir and larch and

birch. Well, the trouble was; no sooner do you get any concessions, than you find that it has already been granted half a dozen other people. This one was granted apparently in the reign of William IV. to somebody, and Canadians have it now, because it was sold by previous governments to them. There is some gentleman (I think his name is Butler), who has a grant of land which he has fought out against the government and still holds it, holds it in fee simple, and it is worth about \$10,000,000. I only mention these cases because I know the lumber of Labrador is worth a lot of money and I know it will reforest.

We had quite a number of planes. I persuaded the government that we must have planes, if we were ever going to see our own government. They know it now. These Commissioners know it takes us a long time to get down. The most you can see of a governor in a year is a few hours probably. That is all we saw of him this year. And we have never had a prime minister of our own country interested enough to come north to see us at all—only one in forty years. And then all he said was he thought no one ought to be allowed to live there.

Last Winter when the question of changing our government from a popular government to a dictatorship was up, we went to London; because I wanted to see that someone was there who knew something about it. I was telling the chairman, they asked whether I would speak after the debate to a committee of members of the House in one of the big rooms in Westminster but, honestly, after listening to the debates, I bought a large map and took it with me and hung it up, so the members could see where the country was. They had not displayed any knowledge that showed me they knew anything about it. In fact I had sent photographs down to those who were going to speak, to show we could grow all we wanted of vegetables. I am certain you could not answer the question, (on the earth's surface where) Labrador is? I was speaking to a university not long ago and I said to the President, do the graduates of this university know where Labrador is? He said, Oh yes. May I ask them? He said, No, for God's sake don't do that. Well, three of the five hospitals we

have got, are south of London, and well south of London. Labrador is not a northern country. It is only in the polar current, and there is a certain satisfaction that when the Summer ends Winter is going to begin. Take St. John in the South; it is almost difficult to know when Winter comes because it rains one day, freezes the next and snows the next, but you can pack up your Summer kit in the north and get into serviceable Winter clothing, and you can be just as warm and comfortable there as you can in an English bedroom. Indeed all you want in the world, as far as I can see, to live anywhere is to adapt the things in the country and your conditions to the right type of clothing. We invented some clothing and in order to sell it I had to lend it my name. We manufacture in Lancashire in a mill that had failed, owing to the loss of their sales of cotton goods in India and Japan. It does nothing but manufacture this cloth; and when the last expedition was climbing Mount Everest, we fitted them out entirely with our Labrador cloth and the highest climber of Mount Everest told me he spent one night, I think twenty-three thousand feet up, and in that cloth he was perfectly comfortable and it saved his life. All Byrd's men are clad in it in Little America at present. And the Mollisons flew in it; and in order to popularize it; I asked the Prince of Wales if he would not let me give him a suit, and he did, and he wore it, so I got a photograph of him playing golf in it, and the other fellows have umbrellas up. The whole thing is you have this waterproof smooth-surfaced stuff which just keeps the heat in. After all a marble statue does not get hot in a fur coat, but a man gets hot in a fur coat and damp, and it freezes, like in the trenches. It is being used for ladies' bathing dresses because it does not absorb water. They can have it any color and it does not cling to the form. I only mention that as a side issue.

As we began looking at it, from my point of view, especially as a young man, one thought of lack of doctors and any amount of arrears of surgery, neglected genital deformities and all kinds of twisted paralysis. That was the first thing to begin to think about seriously. Then I began to think about other parts of life. Thinking of

Leacock, I remember him saying one time, looking at a patient, he was not quite sure whether he ought to undo the collar-button and let the patient breathe, or do it up tight and let him choke. It comes to that question, if you cannot improve the conditions of life better than they were when we went to Labrador. I think there is a good deal to say on both sides. But it can be improved so easily. The majority of the early cases shown in our reports were nearly all food deficiencies, not altogether because they cannot get the bulk of food but because they could not get the right kind. They got no vegetables. The people were affected with Black Leg, such as Cartier's men died like dogs of in Quebec, until an Indian showed Cartier how to eat a spruce tree. They ate an entire spruce tree in eight days. And then later they were shown by Tonaconda how to do it. Well, we could do that, stew the ends of spruce trees. And then gradually we adapted agriculture. We asked garden clubs to help us get a couple of green houses; and they were put down, and used for germinating places in the Spring. We began to plant in the month of March and by the time the snow had gone in April you would have fine plants. People were allowed to do a day's work for one hundred cabbage plants. And when it came to sowing them you got twenty pound cabbages. I was showing pictures last night from the air looking down on a modern fisherman's house on the Labrador coast and instead of having nothing for the Winter he can have as much as he likes because he catches a great deal more protein foods than he needs. Of course salmon breed in the rivers and rock cod.

In fact our rock cod led to the discovery of the freezing of food. A man was feeding his foxes in the Winter, forty below zero, and when he got his cod to the surface they froze. When he chucked them on the kitchen floor they began to jump up and it frightened him and he thought, perhaps it was not coffee in the cup after all. He experimented and sold his invention for over a million dollars; and the whole thing was bought by a company for thirty-two millions, and has become one of the best things in the frozen meat trade. They are putting out canned

herring and cod and canned wild celery and they learned to use quite a number of the wild plants. Incidentally, if you do not know wild celery you ought to try it; it is good stuff.

They can grow all the potatoes they need. I was talking to a man from the Straits of Belle Isle. I know you always feel what a terribly lonesome place this is. It is not. Instead of losing men to the south they are coming back. He said he believed Belle Isle to be the easiest place in the world in which to live. Last year a man grew a field of Durham wheat, cleared five acres of land, got several tons of cabbages, and so on. In order that we might not be telling fairy stories or fish yarns we tried to get a Canadian firm to bring people down to see us, and St. John's did not want him to do it. The authorities said, we do not want them going down there; let them come to St. John's. But the people do not want to go to St. John's; they want to go and see something worth looking at. So it started with the Clarke line. They advertised and could not get them in. Next year we are going to get a steamer direct from Montreal to four of our stations, once a week. It is going to leave Montreal every Monday, and we have communication with our people in the north. These things do not interest you but they interest us.

Immediately we began to get Canadian flour. St. John's had agencies for all the Canadian flours and whether they sold it or not we had to pay them fifty cents a barrel. Now this boat is loaded when she comes down partly for us and partly for Cornerbrook and so on. There must be some in the room who have been on that trip. This year when I came back I was bringing back fourteen of our "wops." They call them *wops*, these young people who come in the Summer and take Summer classes and do public health work and a great many things of that kind. Quite a number come from Newfoundland, some from the States, and not so many from Canada. But there were fourteen, too many to go into the beds on board, so we got the ship to fit up the hold and divided them. They had not been a day out before two more wanted to give up their cabins and join them, they were having so much fun.

Of course we have a fine Commission. We feel like everybody else that freedom is a great thing to have, but it is not the freedom of the wild ass we want, which we have had for a long while. It is a freedom which makes us able wisely to look after our own affairs in the north and not be told up or rubbed down by some place miles and miles to the south of us which we never see. The Commission of course is paid by England and England dealt most generously with us. It paid off our last two loans and sent out commissioners at their expense and has chosen a good commission. They are rather diffuse, but that is only our point of view. We would rather have had one or two than seven. One I saw outside just now whom I tried to get. He is in Toronto at present.

I know Labrador is a rich country, that there is lots in it. I sent this year an expedition of Princeton boys from Princeton university with a mining friend. They brought back fifty tons of the finest of blue Sodalite. It was landed in Montreal and a Montreal firm are working on it. I was asked if I could not sell bright blue pillars to stick up in front of houses. We cannot get it that way but we have it in layers. It is only a plain island and there is no method of loading it.

The gold expeditions that have been down have been very spasmodic and they have not been actuated by the right motives. They have been mostly vague affairs, as far as I can see. But I do not see why we should not have all the wealth that is found exactly in the same geological strain further west and this Canadian complex, which has given you all your rich mines, comes to our sea-board, and there is only one little place that isn't so, and that is in the region of the mountains on the coast.

I think we shall have good tourist traffic when the survey is done. We managed to get His Majesty's ship "Challenger" to help us out for three Summers but I could not get an aeroplane to survey a coast that you could not possibly survey without it. An Admiral said, "Do you mean to tell me you went to the United States to get aeroplanes and put them alongside a British man-of-war." I said, "We certainly did, because I could not get them any

other way." Mr. Macdonald said, "Why didn't you ask me?" I said, "Imagine me expecting the British Prime Minister even to know where it was, much less to be interested." That was only last Winter, and I suddenly got a message this year to say that the Prime Minister of England was going to come to Labrador to see us. He stayed four days and went along the coast. His daughter came and everybody fell in love with him. He is a sort of self-effacing man. We liked him very much.

I told a story last night that I think will interest you. When he lived in the "Scarborough," a small cruiser, he wanted to go and see some of the places in the north. On the second night he struck a thick fog and ran the Scarborough in. And they sheltered for the night in some Island. On these islands there was a volunteer nurse. She has been a volunteer for three Summers. And that day she had had a call from the mainland and had gone off in a motor boat across open water on a rough day and attended a Newfoundland fisherman with what doctors well know as acute abdomen. The man was in agony. She manages to ease him down. About nine o'clock at night she wanted to get back so she started and when she landed about ten o'clock she climbed the island up to her little shack and saw some lights on a ship lying in the islands. So she sent out an S.O.S., got some fisherman and went off and came alongside a little later and climbed on. The skipper said, "Where do you come from and what do you want?" "I want a doctor and I have come from some islands and I am a volunteer nurse." She said, "Will the doctor come?" And they had a doctor and he said certainly he would come, and so he went. They had to go out in the dark around a light house to go into a place called Black Tickle, very difficult to get into, woke up the household, brought a stretcher, tied him on, and got back to the boat, the man was operated on in the cockpit, where in the hospital they took out his appendix, and the little nurse left the "Scarborough," with the gratitude of the skipper, for having been allowed to give a hand.

I am an optimist with regard to the youth of today of Canada and England. I have yet to find a man who

doesn't want to answer a call for help. A man or a girl today, a society girl, if she hears an S.O.S. call, she does not want to be a quitter. And I do not think we need be pessimistic with regard to the future of the Empire or of the world.

PRESIDENT JAMES:—Sir Wilfred, in expressing to you our keen appreciation of your attendance and your address today, may I also say we are believers in odd numbers and hope the time will not be far distant when you return and give us your seventh address.