

(March 4, 1907.)

## The Fisher Folk of Labrador.

BY DR. WILFRED GRENFELL, C.M.G.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club, Dr. Wilfred Grenfell, C.M.G., of Labrador, said:

*Mr. President and Gentlemen,*—I am going to begin by thanking you for the very warm and kindly reception you have given me. It is sincerely appreciated and will, I hope, encourage me to do my best.

Now I haven't any doubt that perhaps the first thing many of you feel like saying is: "Why on earth do people live, or care to live in Labrador?" I don't think I shall attempt to argue that point. Very probably the Californian at this time of year might take somewhat similar grounds. "Why," he would ask, "are people content to live in Toronto when they might live in California?" Such questions—and such questions are often indiscriminately and thoughtlessly propounded—lose sight of the fact that persons born and bred in a certain environment naturally cling to it. It is home—and home is home the world over. Yet there is hardly any other part of our wide world that can exactly be compared to Labrador. When we think of Labrador we have in our minds a land of snow and ice, little more, where a few hardy fishermen ply their perilous calling. Yet I remember that here in Toronto, where the British Medical Association met last summer in the sweltering days of August, the visitors sent their specimens along marked to be isolated from frost, and brought along their furs for wear. As a result a friend of mine was called upon to borrow a suit of light ducks—and he had to wear them well turned up at the bottom, too.

Well, I presume you don't know the Labrador coast. Perhaps it will be as well, should you desire to get a true conception of it, that you should dispel from your minds much of what you have read concerning it. Particularly is this the case if you have read it in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. That is about as fierce as any man could imagine. I am sure justice has not yet been done to Labrador from a scenic point of view. The scenery is magnificent along the north-eastern part particularly, the fiords of Norway don't approach it. Three-thousand-foot cliffs rear their heads in rugged splendor and there



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are mountains possibly 10,000 feet high. But you have to be satisfied with estimating from the bottom. There is a legend that a mythical animal lives at the top which probably eats people. After all, this is a very comfortable theory, as no one intends to climb to the top. They go round. From geological and scenic standpoints I have often wondered why no effort has been made to bring tourists to Labrador. A tourist boat, the *Eleanor*, once the property of the Prince of Monaco, was once talked of to bring people to the north-east coast. The geology of the coast offers a field of great interest. It consists mostly of crystalline rocks. It has apparently been below the water and come up with the sedimentary rocks—gone down and been scrubbed off. Dr. Daly, of Ottawa, says that the story of the earth is more easily read there than at any other point. In botany, ethnology, ornathology, there are problems offered freely for solution. There is a field there for you, problems to solve by which you may attach your name to some mountain or animal which crawls around. There is the southern dogtooth or the Kilapites; the northern snow region, the Shiney Top or Carmetes; and the northern portion that the Esquimaux class as Devil-land or Tonas.

The people are divided into three classes, the native of the soil, or Esquimo; the settler, and the English and Scotch descendants. So if you travel along the eastern coast you will find Antoine Perrot, and he will speak to you in English, while you will later meet Angus McNabb, who can only speak French. So you see we have in Labrador a cosmopolitan population. Labrador has, moreover, evolved a willing, virile, self-reliant people. The Esquimo population numbers about 1,300 folk.

In the past trade was carried on with these people in no altruistic or Christian influence. The Moravian Brethren came, however, and they preached the Gospel with a reasonable price for flour and molasses and helped to develop industrial work. We must remember that we can only reach the souls of men often through their bodies. So these good men determined to allow the population where they labored south of Hamilton Inlet to develop into a good and useful people rather than let them die off. Our cousins in Alaska (which undoubtedly they should never have owned) have put us to shame in the development of the population of that country. The inrush of mining men was looked upon as desirable, but the rush for gold brought the most undesirable class. As a result there aggregated around the mining camps the things that destroy, strong liquor and the like. The natives were

prevailed upon to part with their furs and fats for silly trinkets, and vice developed sadly, enormously. Then came Jackson, that splendid Presbyterian missionary, a man who loved his people not only in theory. The mission of this modern missionary was not only to get the better world hereafter, but primarily to get a better world here. There is no reason to apologize for the modern missionary. He looked abroad on the material condition of the people and he applied to the Government for the one thing most needed, domesticated deer. So he brought a few deer and the Government brought some and applied a regular appropriation for continuing the work. In fifteen years 1,200 deer were killed for food and a number were lost by travel. There are 13,000 there at the present moment. The Government recognized Dr. Jackson. He has long been Minister of Education for the entire country. He was warmly supported in his great work by Governor Brady, of New York. Those who had been wont to carry on a nefarious trade with the natives then made charges. They talked sneeringly about "Brady, Jackson, Jesus Christ & Co." But this is only one of the lies that recoils on the men who can make it. I am a humble copier of these men.

I started to write for the papers. As a missionary I confined myself to the religious papers. A few took it and a few read it, and later on didn't pay for it. So I gave up the religious papers. I sold my manuscript to the *English Standard*, whose circulation reaches the outposts of the Empire, and left the religious papers to copy it if they liked. I also got one in the *Boston Transcript*. If you have a mission to perform and write for the papers, I would advise you to go to the secular press first.

We wanted deer, but we couldn't nourish deer where there were no trees. There were hundreds of thousands of acres of barren land. We wanted moss, for moss will nourish cariboo and deer. The value of deer has never yet been fully realized. One square mile will support thirty reindeer in perpetuity. You have a country there in which one deer will give a rich pint of milk, good for cheese. They are valuable meat. Fat stag is just as good as beefsteak, and it may yet become one of the meat supplies of the world. The skins make the best of clothing. Of course it isn't the broadcloth of the civilized centres, but you can cure the skin and wear it over a woollen garment. There is nothing better to keep out the cold.

We are going to begin this year with the question of transportation. We are negotiating with Harmsworth, who

went to school with me. We don't want a fiasco on the start and are anxious to enlist all our influential friends.

Then we have a welcome waiting for the modern medical missionary. The tendency in medicine is towards the rational treatment of disease. A number of patients have been lost to Christian Science, so called, when they might have had a chance had a diagnosis been made. One rich woman I have in mind who suffered from cancer of the stomach. With her the moments of waiting recommended by Christian Science were the fatal moments. If you have a sliver in the hand or a foreign substance in the body, or tooth, where does the Christian Science come in? A schooner from Quebec brought a patient with malignant smallpox. Any amount of psychological treatment wouldn't make me sleep in that patient's bed. The best psychological treatment is to burn the bed. And the most rational treatment of maladies is the preventive and the hygienic treatment.

I think of a case in Labrador where a father was stricken with pneumonia in the fishing season. The time of earning was passing away while he was stretched upon his back. Winter was coming, and what could be done for the poor wife and children? I came back next spring; came to the same patient. Those early spring trips were often sad ones. How much misery and suffering and disease were sometimes found, the sailors' scurvy, the bleeding gum, the swelling joint—and the vacant chair. Is it any wonder I plead to introduce the deer industry and its attendant lumber mills to give them winter work?

Let me again condemn the truck system of trade. I wouldn't live under it. The people cry, "Sell me salt; sell me fish." You couldn't buy salt if you had money; you could only give it to those who give their fish. It is a system of everlasting exchange that robs the natives. I want to see the end of the truck system. It is the quest of the everlasting dollar without the sense of responsibility to the God who gives the dollar. And it is done by men who are praying men who do not—or will not—see that it is damaging the Great Cause to which they are supposedly allied. In one place where the Government was giving out the largest amount of pauper relief I heard a man call it his Government. Poor fellow! It was all the government he got. During a starvation winter the widow is obliged under the truck system to pay \$6 for a barrel of flour when she might get it from another for \$3.

At first the chief traders were friendly to our work, but when we sought to establish a cash trading system of doing

legitimate business for the poor people, they became enemies. They dropped out from prayer meeting. If they held it they held it for themselves.

Going home last fall, I met a good local preacher whose work had been blessed. He wanted to enter the Labrador work. I said, "All right; go to this district, go to the store and teach the people how to keep store." This would have been a sermon which would have rung over the whole Labrador coast. He went down. How long did he stay in the store? Three days. He thought that in the midst of such an unfortunate and neglected people he should give his entire time to going up and down and preaching the Gospel. But to reach the people of Labrador you must preach the Gospel in practical and undeniable ways. There is a better incentive than precept and there are now men there who do their own business—and do it well—have their homes independently established, and a knowledge and material necessary to provide for their old age. And we are, I trust, no less orthodox Christians because we take this effective plan to better the people of Labrador.

There are physical difficulties for Labrador in all kinds of business that must be met. We need haste and we need communication. You have extended the wire sixty miles nearer the mouth of the Straits of Belle Isle. We got lights because you couldn't do without them in your navigation. We are glad you wanted them. And the Newfoundland Government has connected us with Marconi stations, from the northern hospital, connecting us with civilization. But the system of hospitals is not yet as complete as we would like it. In 1892 we began and in 1893 we built a small hospital, and next year followed with another 100 miles north. Then I went up to Battle Harbor, where there was a Church of England and a Presbyterian Church side by side. But there was no medical help for any of them. A number of cases had been treated as best we could under the circumstances. We interviewed Sir Charles Tupper and then Hon. Mr. Fielding, of Nova Scotia. It is a great work, and a paltry few dollars from the income of this great country would place some medical aid in that region. I was able to interest some earnest people in Toronto and later in Montreal, and was thus enabled to build a large hospital.

I am beginning to apply to the Government over again. We want more still. There is a doctor there now—a Canadian doctor and a good one. We have spent already \$17,000 in one place near Cape Wittle. The Montreal *Witness* is sup-

plying us with a motor boat, the *Northern Messenger*. We have a volunteer electrician from McGill University. We are doing all that can be done, I hope, to do good, to take the Gospel in a practical way to the hearts of Roman Catholic and Protestant alike. Ours is an undenominational work. We can't make denominational poultices and plasters if we wanted to.

We are badly in need of steam communication and better mail service. The educational grants on the coast are doing great work and we are hoping to erect some small schools.

The possibilities of Labrador in the supplying of fish have not yet been realized. It is now, however, attracting much attention. Professor Howey, a celebrated engineer from Chicago, has, I understand, plans partly surveyed for a big undertaking—the building of a railway up to James' Bay with a view to handling the fish that are taken out of Hudson's Bay. It is a most profitable calling. I have in mind a friend who now lives in Victoria, British Columbia. With his brother, residing at St. John, Newfoundland, they embarked in the fish trade on the Canadian Labrador. He told me they cleared \$20,000 in their fishery in a year. The brothers made \$8,000 in one three months of work. There is a future for this great fish market of the world.

So in our work in Labrador we feel that there are big things ahead. And we are seeking to teach lessons of love for God and man in the hearts of a people who will yet take a part in the country's history. We minister to them, but we don't give them anything if they can't pay for it. We charge every ailing man 25 cents for diagnosis and treatment, and if he gets well at that price it is surely not extortionate. I do not believe in encouraging pauperism. There is no need for it.

And there is a fine spirit in these deep-sea fishermen. Many, many times have I been called upon to witness to their large gifts and thoughtful acts of courtesy. I remember on one occasion visiting a Roman Catholic village. I had to go on further, to journey about 25 miles. The fisher-folk gathered around and counselled against the attempt. "The snow is deep," they urged, "and the dogs won't be able to struggle through." I told them I must go, that a human life was at stake. And when I got up to start in the morning I found that twenty of these men had gone on ahead of me to beat down a path with their foot-tracks.

It is from those deeds that we get our reward. The gift of gold is a thing that perishes. Oh, that we all thought more of the great opportunities for usefulness. To dignify us is to

use us. There is the opportunity to preach the Gospel of love to the children. I remember I was called to see a boy on the side of a high cliff who, by the accidental explosion of his gun had shot his knee-cap off. It was my opportunity to aid him in escaping a miserable death. There was the opportunity to pick the child up, to spend the Christmas—for it was Christmas and cold—in bringing back and tending for that child. Only a child! Yes, but of all the Christmas presents I ever received there were none I would exchange for the privilege of sending that boy back to his mother healed and well. Christ says, you remember, that the life is more than meat and the body than raiment.

Let us all live lives of perpetual self-sacrifice. There is no need for the conventional long face. That is not real, but pictured. We can enjoy ourselves just as much if we are to end them there in the bleak country away from the land we call home. We are just as well if we are laid to rest in the arms of those everlasting hills as if we contributed to the dividend of six per cent. of some cemetery company. We shall sleep as comfortably and wake as surely. God has given us the valuable gift of life. Let us realize what it means by availing ourselves of its great opportunities and making some return to Him for giving it to us.

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