

That night he was called ashore to a dank shanty where a man lay dying of pneumonia and tuberculosis while his wife and six ragged children looked on, helpless. "I could only pray for him," Grenfell said later, "when what he needed was a hospital and a trained nurse."

Within two months he learned the harsh facts of life and death among Labrador's year-round inhabitants: the inland Indians, the Eskimos of the north and the wretched white "Liveyeres" (from "live here") who had clung to the coast for a century. In a land offering little food but fish and berries, scurvy and rickets were rife. TB killed one adult in three; one of three infants died within a year. And for a population that grew to 30,000 in summer, there wasn't one doctor. Before leaving that fall Grenfell stopped again at Domino Run. The man he'd visited there was dead, his family destitute. He gave them food, clothing and a promise: "I'll be back."

In St. John's, capital of Newfoundland, Grenfell roused citizens with harrowing tales: of a crippled child whose only dress was her father's cut-down trouser leg; of a Liveyere who'd killed his three youngest children and himself so that his wife and two eldest might have food enough to survive until spring. He told them he wanted to open two cottage hospitals on Starvation Coast. They donated the buildings, and a winter of lecturing in England brought gifts of medical supplies, clothing and money.

When he returned in 1893, he had two other doctors and two nurses in tow. They opened a 16-bed summer hospital at Battle Harbour, and another hospital 200 miles up the coast. Then Grenfell sailed to the far North, where no doctor had gone before.

Everywhere he met age-old superstitions. Both whites and Eskimos treated diphtheria by tying split herring around the victim's neck. Fishermen conducted weird potions by boiling pulley-block scrappings in water, and women tried to cure diseases of children's eyes by blowing sugar into them. Gradually they came to accept Grenfell's strange medicine. For he seemed like a miracle worker: simple cataract operations made the blind see again; after ten minutes of surgery on an ingrown toenail the lame could walk erect. He delivered babies, yanked teeth, broke and reset crooked legs, treated everything from chickenpox to cancer.

That summer, when the three doctors helped 2500 patients, Grenfell began dreaming of a chain

of hospitals and nursing stations to serve the coast all year. So he went "begging." In Montreal he met Lord Strathcona, then Sir Donald Smith, a Canadian railroad tycoon who'd once worked in Labrador, and talked him into donating a sturdy hospital ship. Then Grenfell made a speaking tour across Canada, collecting cash and new followers. Slowly his dream began to come true. In 1899, after winter closed his two Labrador hospitals, he crossed over to St. Anthony in northern Newfoundland. Isolated, beset by hunger and disease, it was Labrador all over again. There, at his urging, villagers cut wood and built a roomy hospital that became his Mission's permanent headquarters.

"When someone needs help," he often said, "nothing else counts." More than once he risked his life. On Easter Sunday of 1908, two men brought word that a boy was gravely ill at Brent Island. They wanted to rest their sled-dogs, then take Grenfell back with them. But he wouldn't wait. Fearing the boy might die, he set off alone. While short-cutting across frozen Hare Bay, his Eskimo **komatik** sank through rotted ice. Half paralyzed by the frigid water, he managed to cut his huskies free, then swam to a small ice pan.

To stay alive, Grenfell killed and skinned three dogs, wrapping their bloody fur around him. At night, drifting out to sea, he made a windbreak of the carcasses and curled up beside his biggest dog to sleep. Next day, with the legs of the dead animals bound together into a grotesque flag-staff, he waved his shirt at the fading shore.

Luckily, he was seen by a fisherman who'd climbed a cliff with a telescope to look for seals. When rescuers finally reached him, Grenfell's hands and feet were frozen. Yet his first words were, "I'm sorry to put you to all this bother."

A year later, aboard a transatlantic liner, Grenfell met Anne MacClanahan, a beautiful American socialite who had once turned down an invitation to hear him speak because she imagined he'd be "too dull." Before the ship docked in New York, they were engaged. Married in Chicago, they went north to St. Anthony, where Grenfell's young bride quickly busied herself with Mission projects.

And there were many. For Grenfell couldn't confine himself to medicine and religion. "How can one preach the gospel of love to hungry people by sermons?" he asked.