

STORIES  
POETRY

## The Inglenook

SKETCHES  
TRAVEL

## A STORY OF LABRADOR.

By Wilfred T. Grenfell.

Communications had been addressed to Dr. Grenfell at Labrador, via St. John's, Newfoundland.

The mission steamer had just arrived off the post of the Honorable the Hudson's Bay Company, half-way down the coast of Labrador.

According to custom, the broad blue flag of the mission was floating aloft and the shrill steam whistle had just sounded her arrival.

The order to "let go" had been given to the men at the anchor, and I was preparing to go below after the excitement of bringing the ship to her moorings. The chain indeed was still running out through the hawse pipes, when a man, evidently in great anxiety and haste, pulled alongside and jumped in over our rail.

"Oh, Doctor! Thank God you're here at last. Poor Alice has passed away yesterday, and John is lying terrible ill, and there's the five little ones—maybe, please God, you're just in time."

"Come, come, Harry, what's the matter? Is it a cough?"

"It never stops, Doctor, night nor day, and he spits terrible with it."

Now, we had seen some cases of pneumonia coming up the bay, so "I'll be with you in two minutes, Harry," was all I stopped to say as I hurried below to get my emergency case of drugs. Without further conversation we pulled swiftly to a little wooded cove, and drew up the boat. Following Harry by a long, winding path through the stunted trees, I came soon to a little house where only a month before I had seen one of the happiest little families in the world.

Ay good guide's watchful young wife, a baby in her arms, opened the door as we reached it.

"He's sleeping, Doctor, thank God. Maybe he'll take a turn now," she said. "I've put the children to bed lest their noise should awaken him."

I knelt down in the darkened little room by the sick man, and put my finger on his pulse. The almost painful stillness was broken at length by the young mother, who was evidently watching my face.

"Don't say it's too late, Doctor! Please God, he'll get well now, won't he?" and then a stifled sob as she read no hope in my face.

"All things are possible with Him, Annie," I answered, "but surely He knows what will be best for us all."

For even as the moments ticked on my watch, the forefinger on the telltale pulse kept time, saying plainly, "Too late, too late, too late."

There are times when the call for immediate action leaves no opportunity for even one spoken word of prayer. But it was prayer alone that could save this man now. So we three tried that remedy, first together, not unmindful that where two or three are, there He is. Well we knew it then, even as we could hear in that deathlike silence the breathing of the unconscious children in the next room. Well has it been said that "Christian Science" is the reaction against our forgetting that Christ comes into the room with the physician as well as with the priest.

But the issue was not long in the balance. Our effort to aid nature in her last struggle awakened no response in the wearied body, and slowly the life we wanted so much ebbd away before our eyes.

When I returned in the morning the door was open, and the house was silent and deserted.

Husband and wife in their rough spruce coffins were lying side by side in the lit-

tle outer room. The children had gone with the humble but kindly neighbors to their little home across the cove. Silence reigned supreme, except for two jays fluttering about the chopping bench. It seemed as if death's victory was complete.

I was engaged with other patients during the day. But at sundown I heard Harry's voice again on deck.

"Doctor," he said hesitatingly, "would you bury the dead. 'Tis ten miles to where we—our graves is—but we thought perhaps—"

"Indeed I will, and you may tell the people I shall be starting in the mission steamer at ten in the morning."

"Us'll never forget your kindness, Doctor," he said. But just as he was leaving the ship he came back once more, the painter in his hand.

"Doctor," he said, "there isn't a bit of black for the children in the whole cove. Poor John has fallen behind a bit of late at the post, and anyhow us never looked for this."

"They shall have all there is aboard, Harry. But it will take the women all night to make anything out of it." With that we dived below, and soon found coats and black stuff enough for the emergency.

It was a sad cortege that next morning steamed with flags half-mast up the fjord. It was a poor, ill-clad crowd that gathered on deck. The very care that had been so evidently bestowed upon garments that had seen better days, and yes, other generations, spoke most eloquently of the continual struggle with a hard environment. The bald, unornamented coffins, sawed from our gnarled and knotted trees, and blackened over with the meanest coat of paint, were evidences of the little that stood to help humanity in its fight for existence here, beyond their own stout hearts and good right hands.

The real pathos, however, lay in the overwhelming sense of vanquished aspirations. The whole entourage seemed to whisper uncannily to our poor friends standing round:

"It's only a matter of time. You must succumb soon. You can't keep the light up long."

The very weather added to the harmony of desolation. A cold, bleak wind was chasing, across a cheerless leaden sky, clouds burdened with snow from the unknown north. The first frost of winter had hardened the little soil there was on those relentless rocks, as if anxious to proclaim that it had no share in lending aid or offering welcome, even when death had done its work. Even two ducks, sole occupants of the tiny bay, fled shrieking as, bearing our toilsome burden, we landed on the sandy beach.

At length the grave was dug, the last look taken, the sand filled in, and around were left only the few pitiful, half-clad mourners, shivering in the bitter blasts of wind that swept the point, and weeping for what never could be undone. But in my mind were still ringing the words of triumph: "Thanks be unto God, which giveth us—us—the victory," while before my eyes were five little children in black, standing hand in hand by a lonely heap of sand, marking the place where lay all that had been their protection from the cruel world outside.

How would our "reasonable" Master, who at the cost of his own life had purchased our victory for us, have us translate the message of that love of these his children? How should we best serve him both now and always?

By orthodoxy or by action? By theory or by practice? By faith or love?

"May here his servants serve him,  
May the cost not come between

The service that they render  
And the service that they mean."

I fancied I could hear him whispering now, as he did of old: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

"Will, take the children aboard and let them go down into the cabin, and see that Peter gets them some tea. God bless them, they shan't want the things that perish, anyhow, till they can fend for themselves."

And so we took our first orphans. A long letter to friends at home asking them to help me with my children, brought me only a few answers. One was poorly written, but it bore a better recommendation. It was evidently the loving letter of a good, motherly woman, and came from a heart in which dwelt the mind of the Master. She said:

"Dear Doctor:—Me and my husband would like to keep a boy and a girl for the dear Lord's sake."

She gave me references to men I knew. So when we left the coast at the approach of winter, and went south to put the mission ship into winter quarters, Edna and Jessie went with us to a new home in New England.

Twelve months later I was able to take a trip by rail and pay a long-promised visit to the children. The train dropped me where the platform ought to have been, in the dark about four o'clock on a winter's morning. Everywhere the snow was deep on the ground. There were no houses to be seen, and the prospect was not encouraging. But soon I heard a cheery voice calling: "Doctor, is it you?" and a moment later I was climbing into an old farm sleigh, drawn by a patient old farm horse. It was the new mother of the children, whose characteristic energy had brought her all these times in the night to meet me.

A long and wearisome drive it would have been, for the roads were only caked so from courtesy, and were not materially improved by the stupendous snowdrifts. Nor were the—well, springs of our carriage as resilient as—but there, never mind, the company of so simple, so earnest a friend of the Master's would make any journey short.

The waid reception that the happy children gave me set my mind at rest at once as to whether or not they were in the right place.

Soon, however, I was to be puzzled again. For when morning came and I looked round the house I found only a small group of new buildings. They were roughly put together, and by the hands of this young couple themselves. The reclaimed land was only small, and was being worn out of the backwoods by their own indomitable pick. But beyond that, at breakfast I thought I heard a stranger's voice, and sure enough I was soon introduced to "our own baby."

As I drove back to the station, my cheerful companion chatting away as before, my thoughts would materialize into words, and when I asked her: "What made you take two great, growing children from far-off Labrador? Surely your struggle is hard enough without adding to it?"

"Well, Doctor, you see, Fred and me has been two years away out here, and besides what everyone else does we couldn't do anything for the Lord. There is no Sabbath school to teach, and the church is so far away we seldom can go. So we thought the farm would feed two more for His sake. No, no. I wouldn't like you to take them back."

Surely they were entering into the "joy of their Lord."