



WILFRED GRENFELL 1865 – 1940

Dr. Wilfred Grenfell went to the frigid wasteland of Labrador with a ministry that melted frozen hearts. Born in 1865 in England near the Welsh border, Dr. Grenfell received his medical training at the London Hospital and M.D. from Oxford University in 1889. He was an unmotivated medical student until inspired by an American tent evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, to devote his restless energies to helping the less fortunate. He was further guided by the great surgeon, Sir Frederick Treves, who persuaded him to join the National Mission to Deep Sea Fisherman in the North Sea. Wilfred grew up living for adventure so the challenge of the Mission appealed to him. In 1890 he became its superintendent. Wilfred tended the sick, shared sailor yarns, invented games, toiled over the catch, and preached on the decks. In this way he won many to Christ. The fishermen adored him and saw he lived his faith.

During the next five years he served as surgeon on the first hospital ship dispatched to the North Sea fisheries, and in 1892, Dr. Grenfell first visited Newfoundland and Labrador and found himself drawn to the serious medical, as well as economic, social and spiritual needs of the fishermen of the area, especially those who stayed year-round. They lived in the most terrible conditions imaginable, ignored by government and exploited by fish merchants. Poverty, ignorance, semi-starvation, and tuberculosis were rife. They had never seen a doctor before and in their eyes Dr. Grenfell was an angel from another world. From the deck of his ship he gave out pills, clothes, friendship, and God's word. He soon became absorbed in improving the living conditions of the inhabitants of the Labrador coast, and he undertook to raise funds from numerous speaking tours and popular books, such as *Vikings of Today* (1895).

In 1893 Grenfell made a heroic journey of over 600 miles through largely uncharted waters, treating two thousand patients and saving many lives. He convinced the fishermen of St. Anthony to donate time to build their own hospital on the tip of Newfoundland's Northern peninsula. It was completed by 1900 and the mission staffed it.

After withdrawal of the Mission's support in 1912, he founded the International Grenfell Association, with branches in England, the United States, Newfoundland, and other parts of Canada. Largely because of this organization's efforts, there existed in Labrador when Grenfell retired (1932) 6 hospitals, 4 hospital ships, 7 nursing stations, 2 orphanages, 2 large schools, 14 industrial centers, and a cooperative lumber mill. He was knighted in 1927. At age 70, Grenfell's robust mind began to fail. He retired but by then the mission had become self-perpetuating. Sir Wilfred Grenfell died in 1940 in Vermont. He had exceptional empathy for his patients, and left a dramatic and indelible imprint on the medical and social history of Newfoundland and Canada. His name also lives on in the Grenfell Regional Health Services, which is based at Dr. Grenfell's original St. Anthony headquarters.