

Great Evangelists and Temperance

IX.—SIR WILFRED GRENFELL, K.C.M.G., M.D., F.R.C.S.

By Victoria Grigg

"When I made up my mind that I wanted to be as perfect a citizen as I could," said Sir Wilfred Grenfell, "the first thing I did was to swear off the use of all intoxicating drinks."

This great man, better known by the title he richly earned, "Grenfell of Labrador," was born in 1865, at Parhgate, near Chester, England, where his father had a school. The sands of Dee were his playground, and most of his neighbours earned their living as fishermen. The opposite shore of the river was in Wales, where the men were miners and shopkeepers. The surroundings of his early life made him a keen student of bird life and nature.

A scholarship which he won at the age of fourteen took him as a boarder to Marlborough College. When he was eighteen, his father, who was clergyman as well as schoolmaster, accepted the chaplaincy of a large London hospital. Wilfred Grenfell was thinking on what he should take up as a career, when his examination of a pickled human brain on the shelves of an old doctor's surgery inspired him with the idea of becoming a doctor. He began his medical studies at London University, at the same time taking a leading part in the University athletic activities. He said, "A few times I played with the united hospitals team, but I found their ways were not mine, as I had been taught to despise alcohol as a beverage, and to respect all kinds of womanhood."

The turning point in his spiritual life came in 1885, when he was twenty; when returning from an out-patient case one night, he turned into a large tent where Moody and Sankey were conducting an evangelistic service. He did not make the great decision that night, but came back to a further meeting conducted by the brothers J. E. and C. T. Studd. When an appeal was made to those in the audience to stand up if they wished to follow Christ, he found it difficult, but when a sailor boy got up, he felt he could do no other than follow suit. The sailor boy's name is unknown to us, but recorded in the Book of Life. Wilfred Grenfell straightway took up Sunday School teaching, and joined a young Australian in holding services in half a dozen underground lodging houses. An open-air service was always held for sailors wandering round the docks, and he says that there were always some who had spent their money on drink, and been robbed, or were out of ships.

When they held their meetings in the lodging houses, they found that drink was the chief cause of the downfall of most of the men. Often during the



Victoria Grigg, M.A.

services, one of them would have to sit down on some drunken man to keep him from making the proceedings impossible, so with their night work in the lodging houses they combined a very aggressive total abstinence campaign. This they conducted by distributing temperance leaflets in the saloons, and sometimes the customers of a saloon would attempt to trap them and pour whiskey into their mouths. On these occasions, their athletic training stood them in good stead.

Sir Wilfred's brother and himself used to hire a fishing smack on some of their vacations, and take boys from the London slums with them. When Sir Wilfred completed his medical training, another great Christian doctor and Temperance stalwart, Sir Frederick Treves, influenced him to take up an appointment as doctor in a small fishing smack which was sent out to the deep-sea fishing fleet by a small body of Christian men. First Aid was to be provided, and services held by the crew of the smack for the deep-sea fishermen, in order to form an alternative to the grog vessels, which were a real curse when fishing was slack. "Drink," he says, "was the worst enemy of these men. The quaysides of the fishermen's quarters teemed with low saloons and grog vessels, luring the men with cheap tobacco and low literature, plied their nefarious calling with the fleets, and were the death, body and soul, of many of these fine specimens of manhood."

Other activities in which Sir Richard was interested were the Boys' Brigade and the Public School camps which he served sometimes as medical officer, but it was in 1892 that he began the work which became peculiarly his own and which gave him the title of "Grenfell of Labrador." He was asked to cross the Atlantic and investigate the possibilities of service among the fishermen of the North-west Atlantic. On arrival at St. John's, he was asked to follow the fleet of 100 schooners with some 30,000 fishermen, women and children, which had just sailed north for summer work along the coast of Labrador. He describes in detail the miserable conditions in which many of the fishermen lived ashore in Labrador; the sickness among both white people and Eskimos. He found unscrupulous traders, fleecing the inhabitants who depended on the traders for supplies of food, and did not rest till he had started co-operative stores to free both fishers and fur trappers from what had formerly been crushing loads of debt.

Sir Wilfred married in 1909, Anna MacClanahan, and some of you will have read his splendid book, "Yourself and Your Body," which he wrote for his own three children, but which has delighted many other children. In it, with other advice, he warns children of the harm alcoholic liquors can do to the body, mind and soul. He always stressed the importance of the Christian witnessing to others by his life.

The world is the poorer for the loss of such men as Grenfell of Labrador, but richer for the memories of them which remain.

MRS. PERYMAN—Continued.

readily responded to all who sought information on any department of W.C.T.U. work.

In my early days of membership I owed much to Mrs. Peryman's encouragement and advice. Her willingness to serve in any capacity impressed me greatly, and through encouragement from her and Mrs. Don I owe the service I have tried to give to the Union.

One felt in the passing of Mrs. Peryman that a giant oak had fallen, but her untiring spirit had reached the land of Peace and Rest. Her last days were full of weariness, and we rejoiced when she dropped the shackles of earth to join the redeemed throng, who sing the praises of their Redeemer.