

# Elements of Spiritual Autobiography in Sir Wilfred Grenfell's *A Labrador Doctor*

Ronald Rompkey

Volume 1, numéro 1, spring 1985

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds1\\_1art02](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds1_1art02)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1198-8614 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Rompkey, R. (1985). Elements of Spiritual Autobiography in Sir Wilfred Grenfell's *A Labrador Doctor*. *Newfoundland Studies*, 1(1), 17–28.

# Elements of Spiritual Autobiography in Sir Wilfred Grenfell's *A Labrador Doctor*

RONALD ROMPKEY

THE PROSPECTIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHER, unlike the biographer or the historian, is faced with special problems of composition. Unable to distance himself completely from the events under discussion, he must convey to the reader an impression of his own life while it is still going on, while it is incomplete, and thus he forces himself into imaginative choices about how to reveal himself satisfactorily. He must literally invent himself in retrospect as he shuffles, selects, and discards the accumulation of a lifetime. For this reason, Northrop Frye, in erecting his theory of genres, likens autobiography to the novel. Whereas the novelist dissolves theoretical statements into personal relationships, he asserts, the autobiographer often emphasizes a theoretical or intellectual pattern larger than himself or seeks the coherence of his own character and attitudes (Frye 307-08). Other critics have drawn attention to further similarities between autobiography and the novel, particularly the common use of repeated narrative structures. We find that some autobiographers, particularly writers of the last century, have chosen a metaphor of the self and developed it in a narrative sequence so as to create a kind of personal "myth" (Fleishman 215-34), and that others, especially politicians, have viewed their lives in heroic terms, granting themselves special qualities for overcoming obstacles in the service of some Great Cause. Still others, usually religious writers, have cast their lives as journeys of the soul. Such strategies require the autobiographer to structure events, not merely report them. His purpose is often tendentious. He may be an individual of stature or reputation taking advantage of an unwonted period of leisure or retirement to celebrate his years of service to society at large, or he may be an apologist for his cause, his profession or his life.

While Sir Wilfred Grenfell's autobiography, *A Labrador Doctor*,<sup>1</sup> will not

be read today as a faithful record of Grenfell's life, it remains an interesting case of the way the problems of composition may be faced by a man of great reputation. To begin with, it holds no surprises, nothing to arrest the curious or awaken the bored—none of the startling episodes we are now used to finding among the confessions of professional athletes, movie stars, explorers, and politicians. This is autobiography of a different order, the life of a physician conscious of the world's attention but accustomed to viewing his own actions in spiritual terms. The title suggests a report about Grenfell's medical achievements in Labrador among seasonal fishermen, settlers, trappers, Indians, and Inuit. We might therefore expect something comparable to British medical autobiographies like Sir Herbert Barker's *Leaves from My Life* (1927), Sir John Bland-Sutton's *The Story of a Surgeon* (1930), or Greville MacDonald's *Reminiscences of a Specialist* (1932). It is not like any of these.

It is not even like Dr. Albert Schweitzer's *Out of My Life and Thought* ([1931] 1933), which invites comparison because the lives of the two medical missionaries sometimes appear similar. Schweitzer's autobiography is the work of an intellectual Christian. Schweitzer appears before the reader not as a pastor or even as a doctor of medicine but as a professor equally at ease with linguistic matters, Christian thought, or music. As he casts his life in retrospect, he never lets an opportunity to lecture go by, whether he is talking about the difference between French and German, the history of the early Church, or the mechanics of organ building. He seems equally comfortable with the arts or the sciences. Barred from working in his own hospital while he was interned during the First World War, he tells us, he filled up his time writing a book about the philosophy of civilization so as to illustrate what he perceived to be its decline. Elsewhere, he informs us that his ethical catch phrase "reverence for life" flashed involuntarily upon his mind one day while he was steaming off to the aid of another missionary's wife. Schweitzer in person must have maintained his intellectual manner. When Grenfell met him in Edinburgh in 1934 (see Figure) and amiably invited him to a football match, he declined. "Saw Loretto win their football match on Sat<sup>y</sup>. but I couldn't induce Dr Schweitzer to come," he reported to his wife. "He has never seen or played games." Later, during his tour of Scotland, he added, "He has now given many lectures on Abstract thought. I abstracted one report and read it. Then I abstracted myself" (Grenfell Papers: two letters dated November 1934).

Grenfell, the muscular Christian, wrote within a different autobiographical tradition. When he began to think about autobiography in 1911, however, he was not sure how to proceed. At that stage of his career, he had already published ten books or booklets about his medical work, including pseudofictional moral tales of "fisherfolk," natural descriptions of Labrador, devotional tracts, and the sensational *Adrift on an Ice-Pan* (1909), the famous account of how he had survived a night alone at sea. That adventure had attracted an international readership and turned a remote missionary doctor into a Christian folk hero. Now it was time to get the whole story into print, as

Houghton Mifflin suggested in the spring of 1911 with an offer to publish (Grenfell Papers: to WTG, 22 March 1911). But Grenfell was not yet ready for the task. Still settling into his late marriage to Anne MacClanahan, a young woman he had met and impressed in 1908 while crossing the Atlantic aboard the *Mauretania*, he now had the added care of two infant children. Not until 1916 do we find him talking about it seriously again, this time in a letter to his mother:

... someday I am going to do my "autobiography." I wonder how it will be writing "all about oneself." I must read some autobiographies first. Do you know any good *autobiographies*? Tell me one or two you like best and better still buy for me two of the best you know. Mind *not* biographies but *autobiographies*. Written by the man himself—or woman herself.

(Grenfell Papers: to Mrs. Jane Grenfell, 8 June 1916)

Clearly, Grenfell was still not sure how to begin. As usual, he consulted his brother Algernon, a schoolteacher who according to family tradition had acted as his literary advisor to that point.

For reasons unknown to us, Algernon disliked the idea of revealing so much about the family history, and he openly expressed his discouragement. Undeterred, Grenfell responded half jokingly,

To begin with it will pay financially. It is sure to have a sale, & I have v. special terms with the publishers. Secondly it gives me occupation, when not otherwise employed—and I am not able to burden my memory with a new task like language—the huge range of sciences I am obliged to keep up with, & ahead of (if possible) the average man, do not now find space in the grey matter of a brain my size—& being a Grenfell I must work or worry. I want to be producing or die.

(Grenfell Family Papers: to AGG, 30 March ?1918)

By this time, stronger literary advice was coming from his wife, a woman of some sophistication who, as he put it later in his preface, had left "all that the civilized world can offer" to share his unusual existence. Not bred to wealth, she nevertheless had grown up in the Chicago suburb of Lake Forest in genteel comfort. At length, she received a small inheritance and graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1906 with a degree in economics, politics and philosophy. "Truth forces me to own that it would never have come into being without her," Grenfell confessed in his preface. Thus, even though *A Labrador Doctor* ostensibly maintained a single point of view, there were two writers involved in its production. Anne Grenfell contributed to it substantially. Together, the two contrived an "autobiography" that would reinforce the popular conception of the missionary doctor without revealing too much about him personally.

Mrs. Grenfell assumed the management of Grenfell's writing just as she managed so much else in his life. (Among the International Grenfell Associa-

tion staff, she was known affectionately as “QM”—the Queen Mother.) As early as 1911, she was taking credit for the success of Grenfell’s “Suzanne,” the pathetic tale of a girl’s loss of virtue aboard a fishing-schooner, after Houghton Mifflin had praised it as an effort worthy of Tolstoy. “I did all the polishing and worked for days over it,” she declared to her mother (Grenfell Papers: to Mrs. Rosamond MacClanahan, 1911). Similarly, the manuscripts of *A Labrador Doctor* preserved at Yale University show that after Grenfell had composed the first draft by hand, she would then transform the text into a typed copy, at the same time eliminating anecdotes, softening judgements, and curbing Grenfell’s dilations on religious subjects. “I know from the work I did in 1918 on ‘The Labrador Doctor,’” the Rev. Theodore Ainsworth Greene wrote Grenfell at her death, “just how much of your literary efforts were produced through her love and wise editing and collecting” (Grenfell Papers: to WTG, 22 December 1938). As *A Labrador Doctor* was taking shape, Grenfell wrote Dorothy Stirling, Mrs. Grenfell’s childhood friend, to announce its approaching publication. At the same time, he revealed that she was the author of another book due the same year. “The autobiography, shameless product of egotism, bursts on a suffering world next Xmas—& a little book of stories really written by Anne, but called mine, comes out at Easter,” he said (Dorothy Stirling Papers: WTG to Stirling, 19 January 1918). The little book that emerged was *Labrador Days: Tales of the Sea Toilers*, a collection of sensitive, moral narratives about the lives of plain folk written from a doctor’s point of view. It was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1919.

Not until 1920, when Houghton Mifflin listed her as co-author, with Katie Spalding, of *Le Petit Nord or Annals of a Labrador Harbour*, did she receive public recognition. Otherwise, she laboured at maintaining a favourable reputation for her husband. And so, in 1935, Grenfell wrote his daughter, “The Royal British Empire Society has presented me with another gold medal—for service & for the ‘Romance of Labrador book’ which mother wrote” (Grenfell Papers: to Rosamond Grenfell, 23 April 1935). *The Romance of Labrador*, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1934, was a “pageant” of Labrador history and natural description composed in Mrs. Grenfell’s self-consciously “literary” style. The same year, the firm also published *Deeds of Daring*, combining selections from Grenfell’s *Northern Neighbours* (1923) and from her own *Labrador Days*. But she was especially proud of *A Labrador Logbook* (1938), a popular anthology of inspirational readings attributed to her husband. “As to the compilation,” she wrote him from her hospital bed, “which was too detailed and too fussy and too long drawn out and involved three years of hard work on my part, I don’t think you could have done it, as it would have been too nervously fatiguing and an unjustifiable strain” (Grenfell Papers: to WTG, 28 July 1938). During these last years of his life, while he remained weakened by a heart condition and often shut away from the public, she assumed his literary voice.<sup>2</sup>

These efforts did not simply provide an outlet for her to write. They formed

part of the I.G.A.'s fund-raising strategy, the titles widely advertised in the Association's pamphlets and brochures and on the back pages of its quarterly, *Among the Deep-Sea Fishers*. Thus, *A Labrador Doctor* was written with an audience in mind. It was the kind of "wholesome" and "instructive" literature marketed by missionary organizations throughout the world: the Bible commentaries, devotional tracts, and lives of great and noble personages that might serve as examples to believers and non-believers alike. Indeed, in his preface, Grenfell offers his autobiography as a work of practical benefit, as Christian experience that "may be helpful to others." On receiving the completed typescript, Hodder and Stoughton rejoiced in the result and in a letter to Mrs. Grenfell predicted it would be "a very successful book, and will give pleasure to Dr. Grenfell's friends, and increase the number of them" (Grenfell Papers: to Anne Grenfell, 18 February 1919). And it did. In subsequent years, it went through numerous reprints in Britain and the United States. In 1921, one of its best years, it sold four thousand copies in Britain alone for the six months ending 31 March at a price of fifteen shillings, bringing in royalties of over five hundred pounds. Early in 1922, Grenfell's London literary agent, Leonard P. Moore, congratulated his client on its success and urged him to forward any further manuscripts in progress before they were sent to an American publisher "so that I may have time to arrange simultaneous publication in England and get the best possible financial result for you" (Grenfell Papers: Leonard Moore to WTG, 2 January 1922, and attached royalty statement).

*A LABRADOR DOCTOR* IS WRITTEN in the tradition of spiritual autobiography, a literary form established by numerous Puritan autobiographies of the seventeenth century and best exemplified by John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). In the introduction to his edition of Bunyan's work, Roger Sharrock has shown that the conventions were acknowledged even before the Civil War. Spiritual autobiographies would begin with an account of early providential mercies and opportunities for virtue and then continue by describing a period of sin and resistance to the Gospel or at most mere adherence to the externals of religion. The central, pivotal episode was an unforeseen act of conversion, which was often induced by an "awakening" sermon. There followed a call to preach and an outline of the writer's "ministry," accompanied by anecdotes illustrating the nature of his pastoral work. Significant events in the convert's life were then recounted as direct consequences of his conversion. Finally, the book would end on a note of spiritual self-satisfaction as the writer oriented himself to the future (xxix).

The conversion episode itself was usually preceded by despondency and dissatisfaction. When it occurred, conversion came abruptly, to be followed by a sense of casting off the "old" man and putting on the "new." But as Bunyan teaches us in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), conversion provides no defence against continuing spiritual trials, only a new means of dealing with

them. Thus, in early spiritual autobiographies, the convert faces up to continuing trials with his new-found strength, whether he acquires it at the beginning of his life or towards the end. As G. A. Starr has observed in *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography*, the placing of the conversion episode determined the shape of the rest of the narrative:

It can be stated almost as a law of spiritual autobiographies that the greater the attention paid to events before conversion, the less emphasis given to what happens afterwards, and vice versa. A work that traces in detail the progress of sin, with conversion finally snatching the author from the very jaws of hell, will rarely have much to say about subsequent relapses. But where the author's fortunate environment or precocious piety has preserved him from great wickedness before conversion, the trials to which he is later exposed usually furnish the required exemplary matter. (46-47)

*The Puritan Experience*, by Owen C. Watkins, makes a similar point. Whichever course was followed, the final portion of the spiritual autobiography was given over to consolidation, to reflection upon the meaning of the writer's new orientation to the world. The writers of *A Labrador Doctor*, whether consciously or not, followed a similar pattern.

The book begins in a "fortunate environment." Grenfell, the son of a Church of England clergyman-schoolmaster and a pious mother, acknowledges that his family upbringing shielded him from a life of profligacy. He presents himself as one who gave due attention to the forms and ceremonies of the Church of England without taking the practice of religion seriously. From his schoolboy days, we learn how the wearisome sermons delivered in the village church failed to awaken in him the respect due the occasion and how, in his imagination, he would conjure up strange orgies in progress in the nonconformist chapel down the road. Soon he is chalking slogans on the back of the next pew or cooking chocolate on the steam pipes. As his life unfolds at Marlborough, a boarding school founded principally for children of the Church of England clergy, his career as a prankster continues. In the school chapel, where attendance is compulsory and pupils incur penalties ranging from writing lines to losing a holiday, he seeks escape. "Many were the subterfuges employed to get excused," Grenfell recalls, "and naturally some form masters were themselves less regular than others, though you never could absolutely count on any particular one being absent" (*A Labrador Doctor* 23). Before leaving home for medical school, he admits, he lacked a strongly developed moral sense and ignored the poverty that existed around him.

Next, in the manner of early spiritual autobiography, he suddenly discloses the following information as he is surveying the many athletic activities he engaged in during his second year of medical training:

It was in my second year, 1885, that returning from an out-patient case one night, I turned into a large tent erected in a purlieu of Shadwell, the district to which I happened to have been called. It proved to be an evangelistic meeting of the then famous Moody and Sankey. It was so new to me that when a tedious prayer-bore began with a long oration, I started to leave. Suddenly the leader, whom I learned afterwards was D. L. Moody, called out to the audience. "Let us sing a hymn while our brother finishes his prayer." His practicality interested me, and I stayed the service out. When eventually I left, it was with a determination either to make religion a real effort to do as I thought Christ would do in my place as a doctor, or frankly abandon it. That could only have one issue while I still lived with a mother like mine. For she had always been my ideal of unselfish love. So I decided to make the attempt, and later went down to hear the brothers J. E. and C. T. Studd speak at some subsidiary meeting of the Moody campaign. They were natural athletes, and I felt that I could listen to them. I could not have listened to a sensuous-looking man, a man who was not a master of his own body, any more than I could to a precentor, who coming to sing the prayers at college chapel dedication, I saw get drunk on sherry which he abstracted from the banquet table just before the service. Never shall I forget, at the meeting of the Studd brothers, the audience being asked to stand up if they intended to try and follow Christ. It appeared a very sensible question to me, but I was amazed how hard I found it to stand up. At last one boy, out of a hundred or more in sailor rig, from an industrial or reformatory ship on the Thames, suddenly rose. It seemed to me such a wonderfully courageous act—for I knew perfectly what it would mean to him—that I immediately found myself on my feet, and went out feeling that I had crossed the Rubicon, and must do something to prove it.

(44-45)

The selection of detail here is important. We may note familiar elements of conversion narrative: the suddenness, the sense of a response to an "awakening," and the convert's assurance that he has "crossed the Rubicon." Moreover, Grenfell displays his religious taste: he admires the active, athletic man and abhors the sensual. He himself is revealed not as a reformed sinner but as someone who has found a way of satisfying certain religious instincts outside the clericalism and ritual of the established church. Now, with the conversion episode out of the way early, *A Labrador Doctor* proceeds with Grenfell's "ministry," his activities in Labrador forming only a part of it.

He takes on Sunday school classes at the suggestion of his mother. When this does not satisfy his desire for action, he joins forces with another medical student to hold services of worship in underground lodging houses along the Radcliffe Highway. Together, the two combine boxing with scriptural exegesis, teaching their boys the graces of fair play. Next, Grenfell organizes a camp for the underprivileged on the Anglesea coast. Then, having passed the medical examinations in 1886, he signs on for medical work among fishermen of the North Sea under the guidance of his patron, Sir Frederick Treves. But while serving full-time as a medical officer for the non-denominational Royal National Mission to Deep-Sea Fishermen, he agrees to undertake a cruise to the Labrador coast to investigate health conditions on the Mission's behalf. In



the rest of the book, he identifies his life with Labrador—its weather, its geography, its people, its history—and concentrates on his missionary activities there. The man of action has found a place that will satisfy his urge to do good.

We learn of his attempts to start a co-operative movement so as to circumvent the barter system of trade along the Coast and put cash in the pockets of poor fishermen. We also learn of his schemes for diversifying the economy of the region, which was exclusively dependent on the cod fishery and seasonal trapping, by building a sawmill and a fox farm. Soon, he finds the means to build a children's home and a school and, in his famous reindeer "experiment," imports three hundred animals and three families of herders from Lapland. The most engaging episode is the so-called "ice-pan adventure," the story of how he survived a night adrift on a pan of ice during the spring break-up of 1908 while dashing off to the aid of a patient down the Coast. The survival narrative is another convention of spiritual autobiography. Faithful to the tradition, Grenfell restrains himself from sensationalizing the experience, which he survived by chance, and emphasizes instead the way it strengthened his faith in the mystery of immortality. As a consequence, he proceeds to take on even greater ventures, such as building the seamen's institute in St. John's, lecturing in the United States to raise funds, and serving in Europe with the Harvard Surgical Unit during the First World War.

Like the writers of early spiritual autobiography, Grenfell comments on the religious significance of these events as they occur. His apologies and pronouncements are scattered throughout. Here he is defending his enthusiasm for sport and fitness against the charge of worldliness: "The Church of Christ that is coming will be interested in the forces that make for peace and righteousness in this world rather than in academic theories as to how to get rewards in another" (104). When funds for establishing his lumber mill fall short, he complains about the difficulty of finding investors. The day has not arrived, he laments, when giving money to provide work for people is "as effective work for the Master" as patching up bodies (234). He defends his interdenominational school, a contravention of Newfoundland's school legislation, and looks forward to the day when "peace on earth shall be permitted in our community, and the true loyalty of efficient service to our brothers will, it is to be hoped, become actually the paramount object of our Christian religion" (258). Praising his many volunteers, he offers the opinion that "the tough jobs are the very ones which appeal to real men. It would be well if the churches realized this fact and that therein lies the real secret of Christianity" (276).

Further religious *sententiae* appear towards the end of the book. While relating the story of his surprising marriage at an advanced age, Grenfell begins by defining religion as the life of one's divine spirit on earth in relation to "our Father" in heaven. "I am convinced from experience of the supreme value to [religion] of a happy marriage," he adds, "and that 'team work' is

God's plan for us on this earth" (343). Although he had already spent forty-three years of his life as a bachelor, he allows this statement to stand with no trace of irony. When he reaches the penultimate chapter, he speculates about the future of the mission, turning autobiography into promotion. Solid progress has been made, he reports, but the plates of the *Strathcona*, his hospital ship, are getting thin, and the Newfoundland government's allowance for orphans is meagre. The future may not be foreseen, he concedes, but love builds for that future when "Christ's Kingdom comes on earth" (423). In the last chapter, Grenfell reviews his religious development in the manner of early spiritual autobiographers, taking care to give credit to Moody for showing him that "under all the shams and externals of religion" (427) there is a vital call for action. He regrets he did not decide sooner to follow the example of Christ and, in the final line, affirms his continuing faith as he asks, "Why should I blame myself because more and more my mind emphasizes the fact that it is because He lives, and only so far as He lives in me, that I shall live also?" (434).

Together with its traditional structure and its tendency to pious asides, *A Labrador Doctor* also exhibits stylistic properties of spiritual autobiography. The general tone is genial, restrained, and dignified, except for the occasional amusing digression or patch of dialect illustrating the untutored ways of the Newfoundlander. Through quotation, allusion, paraphrase, metaphor, and analogy, it calls up the language of the Old and New Testaments (much as habitual Bible readers are apt to echo the Bible unselfconsciously in their speech). This way, it fostered a certain fellow-feeling in its audience, many of whom had already met the Grenfells in person and found themselves attracted to their work.

Its most obvious link with the Bible comes through quotation. Contemplating the future of the mission, Grenfell pauses a moment to dwell upon the impermanency of things and observes with Matthew that man is like "the grass that to-morrow is cast into the oven." The decks of the *Strathcona* remind him of the Psalmist's appeal to the Lord: "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not." And as he prepares to battle the sellers of intoxicants in St. Anthony, again with the Psalmist he thanks the Lord for His mercy, "which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." But at other times, he will simply paraphrase. If we do not possess Christ's spirit, he suggests, "ourselves we cannot save"; or he points to the seal as a creature "bringing forth but one young a year." Who does not hear a murmur of Isaiah 53:3 when Grenfell recalls that "having no acquaintance with the ways of trade" he did not immediately perceive the benefits of the co-operative movement? More frequent still are the innumerable isolated words and phrases calling forth a striking biblical image. In his boys' camp, there are no "shibboleths." Watching a steamer unload its cargo, he sees a sewing machine emerge "*de profundis*." Early ophthalmic successes thrill the people of the Coast with the tale of "a blind man made to see," and when the truck system

of exchange prevails, "the sin of Ananias" (lying) is all too common.

In addition to these direct references to the Bible, Grenfell engages the reader on a figurative level. In Europe during the war, he inspects a series of furnaces built of clay and old cans, "a second Valley of Hinnom." (The first was a scene of destruction.) As a boy, he rejoices when "a Good Samaritan" presents his family with a horse. He takes issue with those who would view Labrador as "a land of plenty" and remembers how, after a particularly stormy co-operative meeting, "Babel was let loose." Small game, which he was accustomed to shooting on his komatik journeys, are relished for their protein, "Like Jonathan's wild Honey." Grenfell also extends the metaphor to analogy. In disclaiming any lofty motives for establishing himself in Labrador, he reminds his readers that the Good Samaritan crossed the road simply because he wanted to, not as a sacrifice. He remembers watching in terror the oncoming navigational lights of an unexpected schooner after suffering engine failure at sea: "Like Saul and his asses, we no longer cared about our craft so long as we escaped." After a meeting at Government House in St. John's, where a group of citizens had resolved to support his plan for a seamen's institute, he is relieved to find that his cherished project would no longer be regarded as a private hobby. "Enemies, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, knew better than to tackle a crowd," he remarks. Soon, with substantial donations from the principal merchant families in his pocket, he watches the building grow "like Jonah's gourd."

The final chapter, "My Religious Life," concludes the book on a conventional note of certainty. First, Grenfell reviews his spiritual development and divides it into three stages: boyhood and young manhood, early religious enthusiasm following a call to action from Moody, and a more temperate later period. Then, to fix his religious position at that moment, he mentions two tenets of belief: he is convinced, he says, that following Christ is "the only real adventure of life" and also that it is possible for a "real and close relationship" to exist between man and God. Although he perceives changes in himself over the years, he argues, these changes have made him no less certain of his faith or of the existence of an afterlife.

WITH BOTH GRENFELLS working so closely together, it is difficult to distinguish their respective contributions to *A Labrador Doctor*. But *Forty Years for Labrador* (1932) was different. An up-to-date version of its predecessor, it was issued as a new autobiography to mark the fortieth anniversary of Grenfell's arrival in the north. This new volume, almost exclusively the work of Lady Grenfell, altered few details of Grenfell's life but expanded its discussion of the Association's work. Grenfell sent out copies to friends and supporters or autographed them at sales of Labrador handicrafts (*Boston Herald*, 15 November 1932). A new generation of book reviewers received it warmly. "There is no more knightly figure in the world today than that of Sir Wilfred Grenfell," trumpeted a Scots newspaper (*Glasgow Herald*, 23 March

1933). According to his secretary, Grenfell had been half-hearted about writing the new version, and during the previous winter in Alassio, Italy, where he had been lent a villa, he would often return from the bottom of the garden at the end of the day with an article on religion or science rather than the promised revisions. Without Lady Grenfell's assistance, he probably would not have met the deadline. So successful was she in the art of revision that the *New York Times* reviewer wrote, "Not merely is this book a stirring record of hardships met and human suffering alleviated. It is an addition to literature that is other than biography [*sic*]. How Conrad would have liked—and would all but have envied—this!" (*New York Times Book Review*, 4 December 1932: 5). Lady Grenfell, who had once had her work compared to Tolstoy's, must have taken particular pleasure from this.

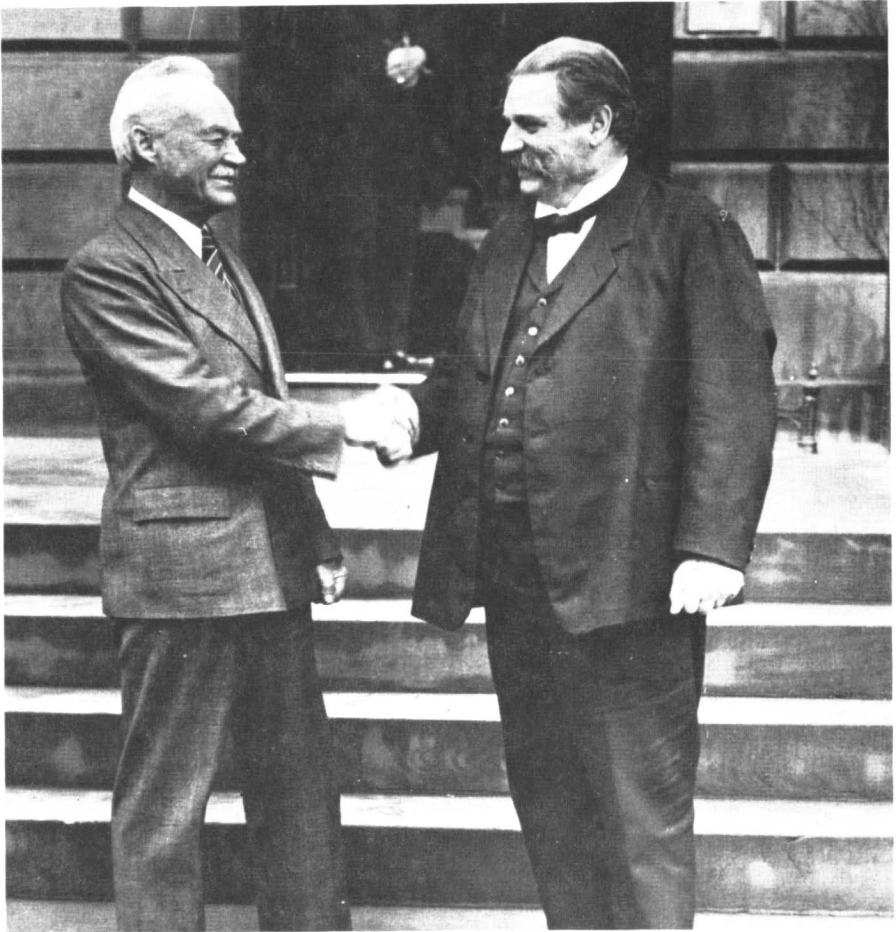


Figure: The first meeting between Grenfell (left) and Schweitzer. Photo, *The Scotsman*, November 19, 1934. (Sterling Library, Yale University)

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The first edition was printed at the Riverside Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and issued under separate American and British imprints.

<sup>2</sup>For information about Sir Wilfred's writing habits and those of his wife, I am grateful to Mrs. Eleanor (Cushman) Wescott of Winter Haven, Florida, Sir Wilfred's former secretary.

## References

- Fleishman, Avrom. "Personal Myth: Three Victorian Autobiographers." In *Approaches to Victorian Autobiography*. Ed. George P. Landow. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1979, 215-34.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957.
- Grenfell Family Papers, Mostyn House, Parkgate, Cheshire, England.
- Grenfell, Wilfred T. Grenfell Papers. Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.
- . *A Labrador Doctor: The Autobiography of Wilfred Thomason Grenfell, M.D. (Oxon.)*. C.M.G. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1919; London: Hodder and Stoughton [1920?].
- . "Suzanne." *Atlantic Monthly* 108 (1911):347-52.
- Schweitzer, Albert. *Out of My Life & Thought: An Autobiography* [1931]. Trans. C. T. Campion. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1933.
- Sharrock, Roger, ed. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. By John Bunyan. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- Starr, G. A. *Defoe & Spiritual Autobiography*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1965.
- Stirling, Dorothy. Stirling Papers. Public Archives of Canada.
- Watkins, Owen C. *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.