In the Vicinity of the Big German Drive—Allies Steadfast

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 1

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 2

(1) On British Western Front in France—Repairing shells at a dump. (2) On the British Western Front in France—View of a square in Arras, showing the wrecked buildings and a band playing. (3) On the British Western Front in France—One of the entrances to Arras. (4) Men of the Wilts returning from the trenches wearing captured German trophies. (5) On the British Western Front in France—Watching the Germans—a British lookout man at the end of a small trench in front of the British front line—The periscope through which the soldier is watching the enemy's movements is covered with rough canvas to disguise it. (6) On the British Western Front in France—Moving up the guns and an idea of the ground conditions at the front. (7) Fusing stokes trench mortar shells before going into the line.

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 3

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 4

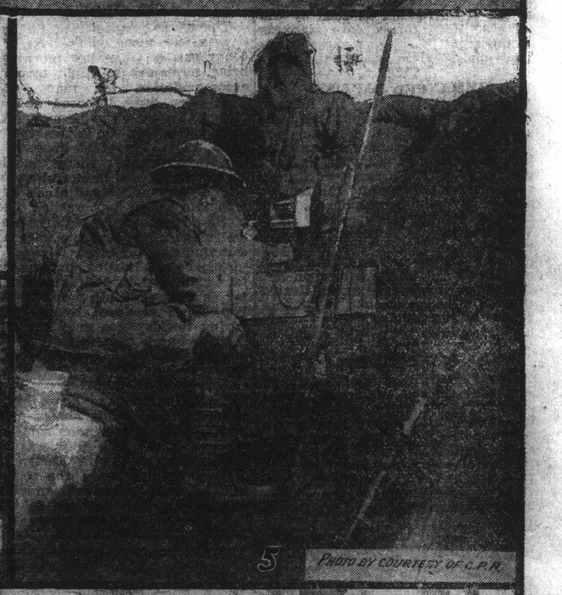
PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 5

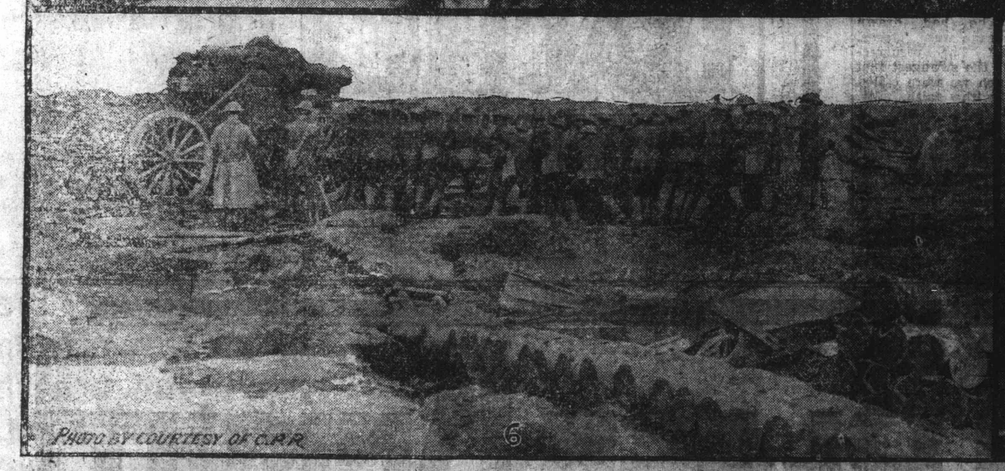
PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 6

PHOTO BY COURTESY OF C.P.R. 7

SPHAGNUM MOSS DRESSINGS FOR WAR PURPOSES

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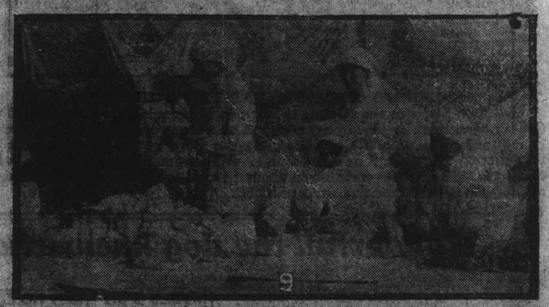
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SPHAGNUM Moss, to which attention has been drawn by the fatal accident to Mr. Harry James Smith, the American Sphagnum Moss expert, is one of Canada's natural resources, one great value of which has been brought to light by the war. The use of mosses in surgical dressings dates at least as far back as the Napoleonic wars, but the demand for and extensive use of Sphagnum Moss did not materialize until 1915, and even in the Spring of 1916 its use was in the experimental stage. So great has become the demand that Great Britain is no longer able to fill it, and Canada and the United States are now being actively exploited for this highly absorbent dressing.

The first effective work on this side of the Atlantic was initiated by Prof. Porter of McGill University, who secured samples of various qualities of moss from the British authorities early in 1916 and then explored the bogs of Eastern Nova Scotia until he was able to locate supplies of material which the same authorities accepted as "perfect." The first sphagnum dressings sent overseas were made up from this moss in the autumn of 1916 by the Junior Red Cross of Guysboro, Nova Scotia.

Since then the industry has developed steadily. The McGill University Women's Union established a sphagnum department in a large laboratory very generously placed at their disposal by the University Medical School in the autumn of 1916, and from that date until this has been preparing moss and shipping dressings. Another important function of this organization has been to make up experimental sphagnum dressings of many sorts to try out the different grades of Canadian material under varying conditions.

During the winter of 1917 another work room was started at Dalhousie University, Halifax, and the Canadian Red Cross definitely adopted sphagnum for hospital dressings and prepared to open working centres on a large scale. Unfortunately the changes in the Atlantic shipping situation which resulted from unrestricted submarine warfare necessitated a temporary check; but the work of exploration and development was continued.

The late Mr. Harry James Smith of New York became interested in the possibilities of sphagnum last spring, and after spending some time with Dr. Porter to familiarize himself with the technology of the subject, established a sphagnum organization at his own expense at Arichat, Cape Breton, and collected and prepared a large amount of moss. Success in the use of this material led to the adoption of sphagnum by the American Red Cross and to the formation of a department which was placed under the control of Mr. Smith as organizer and Dr. J. A. Hartwell of New York as technical advisor.

During the last two or three months developments have been very rapid. The demand for dressings has increased to such an extent that the Canadian Red Cross has decided to start production on a large scale, and the Americans are organizing for an immense output for the use of their own and the French hospitals.

No moss can of course be procured in the east until the snow melts, and the bogs thaw out; but excellent sphagnum is also found on the Pacific coast. Mr. Smith, with the help of the Canadian Sphagnum Committee, procured a car of Vancouver Island moss early in the winter, and this carload (which Mr. Smith paid for out of his own pocket) proved so satisfactory that he went to Seattle early in March to organize the industry in the north-western States, and incidentally to look into the situation in British Columbia for Professor Porter, who was unable to go west at the time. As a matter of fact Mr. Smith met his death while searching for moss for the Canadian Red Cross, and thus set the seal to a life of exceptional generosity and nobility.

Sphagnum grows in moist and boggy places, and can be found in almost all parts of the country; but the moss to be useful must have exceptionally full and soft foliage, and the stems while tough and elastic must be flexible, as otherwise the dressing would be liable to cause irritation.

First class material has been found in boggy districts close to the Atlantic coast, and equally good moss grows plentifully in the far West — as, for example, on the west coast of Vancouver Island—but little or no first class surgical material has been found far from the sea, although there are immense areas of Sphagnum bog in the interior both of Canada and the United States. The best qualities of moss are likely to be found close to the margins of the ponds, and sometimes considerable areas of clean high-grade material fill what was once a small pond. Before any attempt is made to collect moss in quantities all of the bogs in the district should be examined with a view to locating the largest supplies of good material, and this preliminary examination should be made by persons who have had previous experience in collecting Sphagnum.

Owing to the great variations in usefulness of different kinds of Sphagnum, and the fact that different species grow very much intermixed, the material has to be collected by people who have been trained to know good moss from bad, and even an experienced collector will often have difficulty in deciding just what to take and what to leave when he first visits a new locality.

The accompanying photographs show the work of the McGill Women's Union. No. 8 illustrates the preparation and drying of sphagnum and the manufacture of dressings. No. 9, the general soldiers' comforts work. The Union was organized during the first weeks of the war from among the families of the Governors and staff of the University. Its original purpose was to help provide "soldiers' comforts" for McGill graduates and students on active service, and as these now number over 2,200, the possibilities of its work may be imagined. During the three and a half years of its existence the Union has expended nearly $8,000 on the purchase of high grade materials, which have been made up by its members into socks, caps, mufflers, pyjamas, shirts, etc., to a total of about 9,000 articles of clothing alone, to say nothing of an immense number of sphagnum dressings, etc.

The organizer and first president of the Union was Mrs. H. Walter; since then the chair has been filled successively by Mrs. E. E. Howard, Mrs. J. B. Porter and Mrs. J. W. Ross, the present President. The Sphagnum Committee of the Union was organized in 1916 under the chairmanship of Lady Gordon, and its present Chairman is Mrs. Porter. The Treasurer of the Union is Mrs. A. McGoun and the Secretary Mrs. A. Willey. Any correspondence regarding the work of the Union should be addressed to the latter; but questions relating to the technology of Sphagnum and Sphagnum dressings should be addressed to Miss S. M. Bainbridge, Hon. Sec. Committee on Sphagnum Dressings, Canadian Red Cross Society, care McGill University, Montreal.