

SCIENCE

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SPHAGNUM AS A SURGICAL DRESSING¹

THE world war has produced a "world emergency" which has stimulated to an extraordinary extent the inventive genius of this and practically all nations. This is observed not only in the great development of destructive agents as seen in certain lines of chemistry, aeronautics, submarines and gunnery, but also in the marvelous skill that has developed and the appliances used in surgery. War had been declared only a few months when it was seen that there was likely to be a shortage of absorbent cotton, and in an effort to avert such a calamity experiments were begun with sphagnum, or peat moss, as a substitute. At the present time surgical and non-surgical dressings made from sphagnum are being used in the war hospitals, not only in Great Britain, but in France, Malta, Alexandria, Salonika, Italy and Palestine—practically on all the allied fronts. Doubtless it is also used extensively in Germany, as certain returned prisoners state that part of their work was to gather sphagnum from bogs. How it was used, however, we do not know.

DISTRIBUTION OF SPHAGNUM

Sphagnum is widely distributed throughout the world, especially in the damp humid climate of the colder parts of the temperate zone of Europe, Asia and America. The British supply comes from the moors of Scotland and Ireland, and from Canada. The Germans obtain it from extensive bogs around the Baltic.

In North America it occurs most commonly along the northeastern coast from New England to Labrador, and along the northwestern coast from Oregon to Alaska. In the interior large bogs occur, especially in the region

¹ A fuller account of "Sphagnum as a Surgical Dressing" is given by the writer in a pamphlet published by the Northwest Division of the American Red Cross, Seattle, Washington.