Moss Gathering on Block Island

WAY out fifteen miles from other land, like an emerald in a crystal setting, lies Block Island, a green strip of soil made fertile by the seaweed commonly called varic, which is tossed upon its shores by the tireless breakers. These vegetable growths of the salt water have for many years furnished the basis of a curious industry for the islanders, who harvest the crop and by its sale realize a fair income for their labor, which differs from any other in the United States.

Irish moss, as it is pretty generally known, is highly prized both for its medicinal value and also as a food. For the latter it is used principally as a jelly, or as a thickening substance for soups. With boiling in water for thirty minutes it dissolves into a perfectly clear jelly,

strewn sand and the shaggy appearing rocks, rich with the dripping harvest. The moss when freshly gathered is a deep purplish color, flecked with lavender and white. The leaves are semi-transparent and grow in small clusters. The men and boys often wade out waist deep with their baskets and knives in order to reach a particularly well covered rock or reef. Quickly they fill their baskets, holding fast, as every seventh wave splashes high and covers them with a dash of foam; then with their humid prize they make for the shore, where

wheelbarrows and other receptacles await. If the bank is steep and difficult to reach, large sacks are filled, slung over stalwart shoulders and carried to the top of the bluff, where ox carts convey them to the bleaching field. To

HOMeward BOUND WITH A GOODLY LOAD OF MOSS.

WAITING FOR THE TIDE TO RECEDE.

GATHERING IRISH MOSS ON THE SOUTH BEACH.

which, having no flavor of its own, takes easily any that is given it. Being delicate, yet nutritious, it is especially valuable in the regimen of an invalid. One pound of moss will make four pounds of firm, transparent jelly, which keeps equally well in all weather, and in that regard is superior to jelly containing animal substance. Partly boiled and served with a dressing of oil, vinegar, a dash of onion juice and red pepper, the sea moss makes an agreeable salad. In medicines it is largely used in emulsions and soothing draughts, as it is both cooling and healing. The poorer quality is dried and used in making mattresses, and also as a packing for steam pipes.

The gathering of this moss is largely subject to the tide, as the better grade comes from the huge rocks which are under cover when the water is high, so eagerly the time is watched when the tide recedes, leaving clear the moss-

bleach the moss and prepare it for market it is first washed in fresh water and spread on the grass to dry. Every half hour it is turned with a rake in order that the sun may reach each leaf. The washing and drying is continued for

three days; then, if the weather is favorable, the moss will by that time be ready for the sorters. When entirely cured the moss is of a creamy white color.

A fairly industrious moss gatherer realizes all the way from \$1.50 to \$2.50 per day in return for his labor, according to the season. The best months for gathering are June, July and August, although the industry is followed more or less the year around. The supply of moss is inexhaustible, as that pulled or reaped from the rocks is replaced by a more luxuriant growth the following year. Another variety of seaweed, known as kelp, is also gathered on the island, where it is used to fertilize the soil.

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SPREADING OUT THE MOSS TO BE BLEACHED IN THE SUN.

Photographs by Helen Denton Van Eaton.