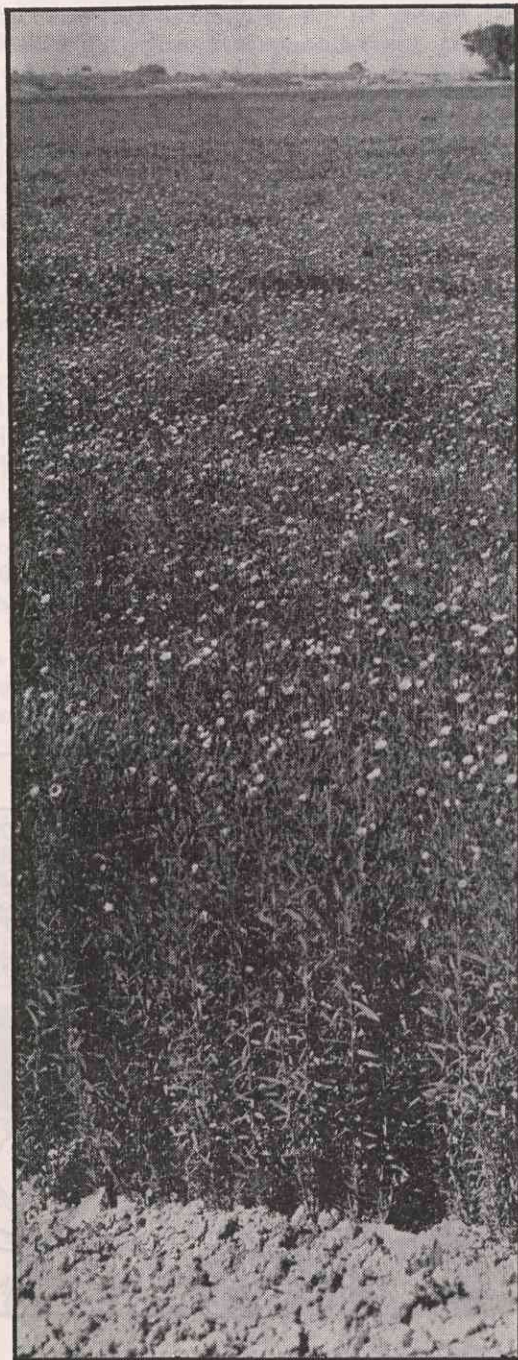


STORY OF FLAX



What plant yielding a fibre used by man in the stone age gives us a valuable ingredient of ink and paint and food for cattle; and a plant to which American cigarette smokers are indebted? The flax plant of course.

Flax is one of the oldest commercial plants known to man. The Book of Exodus tells us that Pharaoh arrayed Joseph in vestures of linen; and this product of flax fibre, which enveloped Egyptian mummies is evidence of its use in that ancient day. In Europe there is evidence of much earlier use, reaching back into prehistoric times. It was a common practice during those by-gone days for people to build their huts over lake waters on platforms supported by piles, as protection against their enemies and wild animals. This custom was most evident in Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland. In these huts was found unworked flax, pure and clean, ready for use. The fibre of this plant was used for clothing, in building their huts, nets to catch fish and wild animals, and in making cord and rope.

If all other knowledge of the culture, preparation, and use of flax should be lost the art could be easily studied from the walls of caves and tombs of ancient Egypt. These carvings show the retting process which is essentially unchanged to this day. They show the straw being emersed in water, warmed in the sun, and weighted down until the fibres were separated from the woody core; the drying, beating and combing; the making of yarn, cord and rope; the weaving of cloth.

The flax seed was used as food by the Greeks and Romans—linseed oil is still used in food to some extent in Russia, Poland and Hungary. But the real use is in making paints, varnish, printing ink, and linoleum.

In Western Nations flax fibre was the most important vegetable fibre until cotton took the lead in the 18th century. The cloth made from the flax fibre was the chief source of raw material for cigarette paper until Ecusta began using the fibre of the American seed flax plant in 1939. This new use of home-grown flax replaced the use of the French linen-rag paper. It did away with the dependency upon foreign markets for cigarette paper, and has provided new livelihoods for thousands of Americans.

The flax plant has played a major role in the life of man almost since the beginning of time, and with new uses being found every year it will continue to take its place in history as one of the most valuable plants which Mother Nature has given us.