

DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANT.

Flax or lint, known botanically as *Linum usitatissimum* L.—the Latin name means common or ordinary flax—is an annual, that is, it completes its whole life-history in a single season. It has delicate roots, a slender wiry stem about 2 to 3 feet high, narrow leaves, and blue, sometimes white, flowers. The fibre, to which it owes its strength and its chief value, is situated near the outside of the stem. If a fully grown flax stem is cut across the middle with a sharp knife or razor and examined with a small magnifying glass, it will be seen to consist of three regions. In the centre is

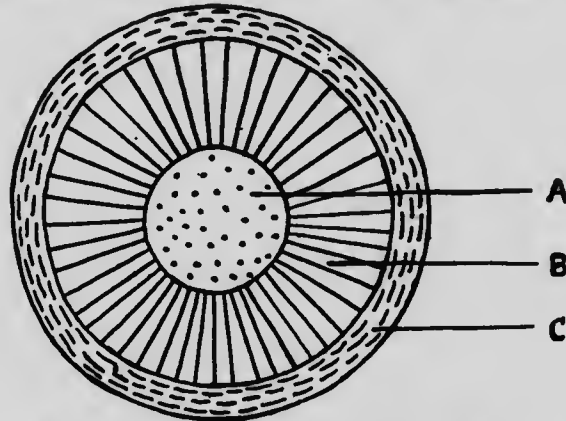


FIG. 1.—Diagram of the transverse section of a flax stem.
A. Pith. B. Woody zone. C. External layer.

a soft region known as the pith, which is sometimes hollow (fig. 1A). Surrounding the pith and nearly equal to it in width is a much harder and denser region known as the woody zone (fig. 1B). The pith and the woody zone together make up what is known as the "shive," or "shove." Outside the woody zone is a much narrower region, the external layer (fig. 1C), in which the fibre-bundles are situated. These fibre-bundles, two of which are shown in fig. 2, are frequently separate from each other, but it often happens that they run into each other at the edges. The number of individual

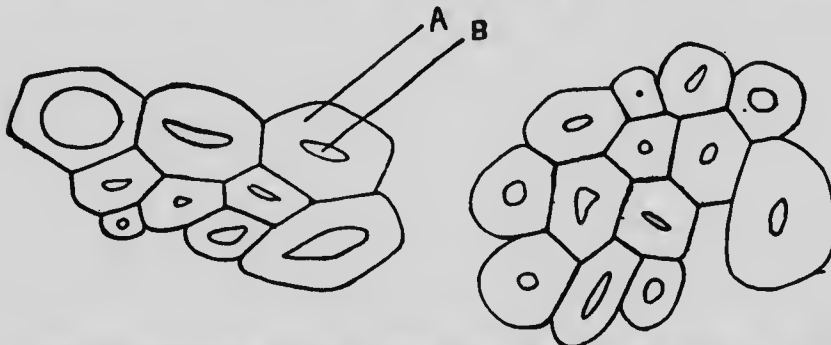


FIG. 2.—Two fibre-bundles. A. Thick wall of fibre-cell. B. Cavity in the centre of fibre-cell (highly magnified).

fibre-cells in the bundle also varies; those in the figure contain thirteen and nine, respectively. The fibre-cells shown in the figure can only be seen when magnified by a microscope.