

FLAX

of New Zealand and Norfolk Island; its leaves resemble those of an Iris, are from two to six feet long and one to two or three inches broad. The flowers are produced in a tall branched panicle; are numerous, brownish yellow, not very beautiful; the fruit is a three-cornered capsule with numerous compressed jet-black seeds. The fibre of the leaves is both very fine and very strong, and was used by the New Zealanders, before their country was discovered by Europeans, for making dresses, ropes, twine, mats, cloth, &c. New Zealand Flax is



New Zealand Flax (*Phormium tenax*).

imported into Britain for making twine and ropes; and the plant is cultivated in its native country. Its cultivation has also been attempted in some parts of Europe; but the winters of Europe, except in the south, are too cold for it. To obtain the fibre, the leaves are cut when they have attained their full size, and usually macerated for a few days in water. But the New Zealanders procure the fibre in its greatest perfection, very long and slender, shining like silk, by a more laborious process, and without maceration, removing the epidermis from the leaf when newly cut, separating the fibres by the thumb-nails, and then more perfectly by a comb.

The roots are purgative, diuretic, sudorific, and expectorant; a good substitute for sarsaparilla.—The leaves, when cut near the root, exude a viscid juice, which becomes an edible gum.—The New Zealanders prepare a sweet beverage from the flowers.

FLAX, NEW ZEALAND, a valuable fibre quite different from common flax, and obtained from the leaf of an endogenous, instead of the stem of an exogenous plant. The plant yielding it is *Phormium tenax*, often called New Zealand Flax, and sometimes Flax Lily and Flax Bush. It belongs to the natural order *Liliaceae*, and is a perennial plant, a native