

The stems of these plants rise to the height of about two feet. The seed vessels and leaves of the calyx are sharp pointed. The flowers have each five scalloped petals.

It is supposed that this plant was originally introduced into Great Britain from those parts of Egypt which are annually inundated by the Nile. Its utility is incalculable. To it we are indebted for the linen we wear, for our sheets, table-cloths, and numerous other indispensable articles; and although cotton might, in some measure, supply its place, those persons who have been accustomed to the comforts of linen would be little desirous of the exchange.

The cultivation of flax is pursued to considerable extent in some parts of the British dominions. The seed imported from Riga and Holland is generally esteemed the best, though this is believed to be mere matter of opinion. It is sown in March or April; and the plants, when nearly ripe, are pulled up by the roots. These, if flax and not seed be the object of the crop, are either placed in small parcels upon the surface of the land, for exposure to the sun, to dry; or they are immediately conveyed to the place where they are to undergo the process called watering. For this purpose they are loosely tied in small bundles, placed in pools or ponds of soft and stagnant water, and allowed to continue there several days. By the fermentation which takes place the bark or flaxy substance becomes separated. They are then taken out, and thinly spread upon the grass, in regular rows. Here they are occasionally turned until they have become so brittle that, on being rubbed between the hands, the flax easily and freely parts from the stalks. They are then taken up, and bound in sheaves to be either sent to a mill, or to be broken and scuttled, as it is called, by a machine contrived for that purpose.

The flax, by the above process, having been separated from the stalks, it subsequently undergoes various dressings, according to the purposes for which it is to be used.

When the plants have been grown for seed, they are pulled as before, and then laid together by handfuls upon the ground, with the seed ends towards the south. The next operation is to force off the seed vessels, (*rippling*.) For this purpose a large cloth is usually spread on some adjacent and convenient spot of ground, and an instrument, called a ripple, is placed in the middle

FLAX, is the produce of an annual plant, (*Linum usitatissimum*), with spear shaped leaves, and blue flowers, which is cultivated in several parts of this country, and grows wild in corn-fields and sandy pastures.

of it. This is a sort of comb, consisting of six, eight, or ten, long, triangular, upright teeth. The seed ends of the flax are pulled repeatedly through the teeth of the comb, by which the parts containing the seed are removed from the stalks. After this the pods and seeds, which have the name of *linseeds*, are spread upon a cloth in the sun to dry, and subsequently are threshed, sifted, winnowed, and cleansed. The best seed is generally preserved for sowing, and the second sort yields considerable profit in the oil called *linseed-oil*, which is obtained from it by pressure. This is equally useful in the arts and in medicine. It is occasionally used for making the soap called green soap; and, if heat be applied during the pressure of the seeds, it attains a yellowish colour and a peculiar smell, and in this state is used by painters and varnishers. An infusion of the seed, in the manner of tea, is recommended in coughs; and from the seed is also made an easy and useful poultice for external inflammations.

After the oil has been expressed, the remaining farinaceous part of the seeds is squeezed together into large masses, called *oil-cake*, which is given as food to oxen.

It must be remarked that the water in which flax has been macerated becomes thereby poisonous to cattle; and on this account the practice of steeping it in any running stream or common pond was prohibited by an act of Parliament, in the reign of Henry VIII.

The following directions for cultivating flax are given by Mr. DEANE, in his *New England Farmer*.

"Flax requires more care and nicer culture than any that we are concerned with. It should never be sown on a soil that is not rich, and well wrought.

Sandy and gravelly soils are by no means suitable for flax. It is not a plant that requires much heat; therefore it answers well in cold latitudes. The cooler kinds of soil, such as clay and loam, and the black earth of drained lands are suitable for it. But they should be well pulverised and manured. In wet seasons it commonly does better than in dry ones: So that though it may sometimes do well upon high land, it is best not to run the risk of it, but rather choose a soil that is naturally low and moist. If it be too wet, some little trenches may be made, thirty or forty feet asunder, to drain off the water. The land must be in good heart, either naturally, or by the help of ma-

nures. But new dung should not be laid on it at the time of sowing; nor any thing else that will make weeds increase; for in no crop are weeds more pernicious than in flax. It is often found that they entirely kill most of the plants; and the remaining ones will be bushy and mis-shapen, and have a weak coat on them, being too much deprived of the rays of the sun.

The manure for flax ground should rather abound with oils than otherwise, and be rather cooling than hot. The old rotten dung of black cattle and swine is most suitable, or a compost in which these dungs are the principal parts. A top-dressing of sea-weeds, after the flax is come up, is greatly recommended. But I rather choose to enrich the ground a year before, than when the flax is sowed. A crop of potatoes is good to precede one of flax. I plough up green sward, and dung it well with such manures as are suitable for flax, and plant it with potatoes. This crop does not abate the strength of the soil, but rather increases it. It makes the ground mellow, and does not encourage weeds: it is therefore in fine order for flax the year following.

Green sward will sometimes do well the first year; but it must be a fat deep soil, such as some *intervales* are, and should have a dressing of old dung, well pulverised, and mixed with the soil by harrowing: for if it be not well mixed, the crop will be of various lengths, which is inconvenient, and occasions loss.

In England they sow two bushels of imported seed on an acre. When they sow seed of their own growing they allow more. In this country some afford but one bushel. The best quantity may be about six or seven pecks, or a little more or less, according to the strength of the soil. For it is not with this crop as some say it is with grain. Of grain, rich land requires, they say, less seed; because what is wanting in seed, is made up in stooling. But however this may be, it is most certain that the stooling of flax will be hurtful. That is the best flax, where a root bears but one spire, or stalk. It will be straighter and taller, as well as more soft and pliant. The ground should be ploughed in the fall, and again in the spring, the clods broken, and the stones taken out.

Flax should be sowed early, unless the soil be too wet. A small degree of frost, happening after it is up, will not kill it. That which is sowed early,

has the strongest coat, as it is slower in its growth.

A calm time should be taken to sow the seeds: otherwise it cannot be sowed even, it being more difficult to sow than most other seeds.

Flax-seed should be changed once in two or three years, or it will so degenerate, as to be unfit for sowing. It is worth while to change it every year. It is certain, that seed from less than a hundred miles distance, has been known to make a crop more than double. It has done so in this country. After the seed is sown, it should be covered, either by bush-harrowing or by rolling, or both.

When flax comes to be about four inches high, if weeds appear among it, they should be pulled up by careful hands: And to prevent wounding the flax, the weeders should be bare-footed. If they should tread it down at this age, it will soon rise up again. The weed commonly known by the name of false flax, is not in blossom till the flax is nine inches, or a foot high. At this time the weed is easily found by its blossoms; and what escaped at the first weeding, should at this time be carefully eradicated.

The next operation in the culture of flax, is pulling it: in doing which, care should be taken not to mix long and short together in the same hands, but to keep all of the same length by itself. The reason of which caution is so obvious, that I need not mention it.

The time of pulling flax depends upon its growth and ripeness, and upon the proposed method of managing it afterwards.

That which is to be watered, should be pulled as soon as the blossoms are generally fallen off. Some think the harl is stronger at this time than afterwards, as none of the oily particles are yet passed up into the seed. It is undoubtedly better for the soil, that it be pulled at this time, than when the seed is ripe. The longer it stands to ripen, the more oily particles it will draw from the earth.

Being pulled, and tied up in hands, the flax should be put into the water without delay. A pond is preferable to running water, both as it is warmer, and not so apt to deprive the flax of its oily and glutinous substance. In four or five days, according to the warmth of the water, it will be time to take it out. But that the true time may not be missed, it must be carefully watched, and trials made by drying and break-

ing a little of it, that so the harl may not get too much weakened.

After it is taken out, and has lain dripping a few hours, it must be spread on a grassy spot, and dried. If it should happen to be not watered enough, the want may be made up by letting it lie in the dews for a few nights; and if a gentle rain happen to fall on it, it will be the whiter and cleaner.

The flax that goes to seed should not stand till it appears brown, nor till the seed be quite ripe. It is not necessary on account of the seed; because it will ripen after pulling. When the leaves are falling from the stalks, and the stalks begin to have a bright yellow colour, the bolls just beginning to have a brownish cast, is the right time for pulling.

The rind is to be loosened from the stalks, not by watering, lest it be too harsh, but by spreading it on the grass to receive the nightly dews. When it is done enough, the rind will appear separated from the stalk at the slender branching parts near the top ends. When it is almost done enough, it should be turned over once or twice.

It was formerly the practice, after drying the flax in the field, to house it till some time in September; and then to beat off the seed and spread the flax. But this often interfered with fall feeding: And it was necessary it should lie the longer, the weather being cool. Sometimes it has been overtaken by snows.

I prefer the method I have lately gone into, as it saves labour; which is to spread the flax as soon as it is pulled. I do it on a spot where the grass is not very short, which prevents sun-burning. As the weather is hot, it will be done in about ten days or a fortnight. I then bundle and beat the seed off, and lay it up in a dry place till winter. While it lies, most of the seed will shell out.

In the most frosty weather it will dress easily without warming before a fire, or baking it in an oven. The *Complete Farmer* describes and represents machines for breaking and scutching flax.

To prevent the ill effect of so severe a crop as flax is to the soil, it should be ploughed without delay after the crop is taken off. As flax is pulled early, the ground thus gets a kind of summer fallow, which will do much towards recruiting it, and weeds are prevented from going to seed."