

me that his ancestors, living about Otago Heads, used annually to make expeditions to Cape Saunders to catch young seals after the breeding season. I also find seals' bones in ancient Maori middens in sufficient numbers to indicate that the animal was once a staple of food here. The natives had neither methods nor motives which could result in the extermination of seals; indeed the parts of the coast where these were and still are most plentiful, were and yet remain uninhabited.

Such records as we have of the transactions on the coasts of South Island in the early part of the century tell us that sealing was the first industry; the sealers preceded the whalers, as the whalers preceded the "flax"¹ traders, and these in turn were succeeded by the colonists. Of the sealers and their doings we have little actual record in the colony which has since sprung up, but what we know we learn mainly from the older colony of New South Wales and from the books of travellers. More may doubtless be learned from England and North America, whence came a large number of the sealing vessels. As it is, the information has to be sought from scattered sources. It will be readily understood how slight is the acquaintance of the colonists with seals and their history, when it is considered that in the South Island, which the seals formerly inhabited, the west coast is almost unoccupied along a great part of its extent; while on the east coast, which is fairly populated, the seals became almost extinct prior to the permanent settlement of the country. The west coast is only inhabited as far north as lat. 44°.

As early as 1846, *i. e.*, six years after the foundation of the colony, when Major Heaphy and Mr. Brunner, the explorers sent by the New Zealand Company, passed down the coast by land, they found a few seals, which were regarded with curiosity, on the Steeples at Cape Foulwind. Local tradition referred to the already almost mythical times of the sealers and their doings here. The explorers,

¹ *Phormium tenax*.