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The use of linen for clothing passed from Egypt to Greece, and from thence to Italy. It was little known at Rome under the Republic, but was in general use in the time of the Empire, at which period linen of great fineness and whiteness was manufactured. Pliny describes the different qualities of flax respectively produced by each country, with a peculiarity which argues that the manufacture of linen had already become an important branch of commerce to many nations.

At this date, also, the use of flax as a textile material was established among all the nations of Northern Europe. M. Theis, of France, who has made very complete historical investigations, is of the opinion that the art of preparing flax had not been communicated to these people by commercial intercourse with other nations, and considers it as a matter of no little interest, that these almost savage nations, were able to attain to a great perfection in the use of a material, the complicated preparation of which seems to imply an advanced stage of civilization.

All the barbarous tribes that came from the remote parts of Scandinavia, or Eastern Germany, were clothed in linen fabrics at the time of their migration into Southern Europe, and it is to those emigrating about three centuries before the Christian Era, that the introduction of flax into Flanders and the low countries is attributed.

At the time of the extension of the Roman power to the Rhine, the article of clothing manufactured from flax, which is still worn and designated as the *sarran*, or blouse, formed part of the national costume, soon after the whole of Italy became dependent on this country for its supply of linen, which was famous for its fineness of texture, and whiteness. If Rapsset, a French antiquary, is to be credited the introduction of the flax culture and manufacture into Flanders, dates back even to the period when the tribes dwelling on the Black Sea emigrated to Western Europe. But, however, this may be, it is certain that the want of any organization of the people into towns or villages under municipal laws, does not enable us to obtain any positive information concerning this branch of industry before the 13th century, at which period social organization of the people became general in Belgium. Since this epoch the manufacture of flax has become fixed and constant, and has been considered as a part of the necessary occupation of each rural family, equally with its cultivation. The first notice in the Government Records occurs during the 14th century, but Mathew Westminster cites a chronicle of the 13th century, which quaintly states that "about these times all the world came to Flanders to buy clothing."

During the 13th and 14th centuries, however, Nivelles enjoyed a greater reputation for linens than Flanders; it afterwards lost this reputation, and together with it, its population, which became reduced from thirty thousand to eight thousand inhabitants. From Flanders the linen industry extended to the neighboring provinces, to Brabant, Hainault, and especially to Tournay. The number of edicts and ordinances issued during the 15th and 16th centuries show how great an interest had already been excited in relation to the business. An order in 1565 prescribes the method of bleaching the yarn; another in 1619 relates to frauds which had been introduced in the manufacture of the cloth. Different edicts, the first dated in 1591, prohibited the importation of flax; another in 1667 prohibited the introduction of cloth prepared from the fiber of cotton or nettles, as likely to affect the use of the fiber of flax. Towards the close of the 17th century a commission was appointed to inquire into the condition of the various branches of industry followed in Belgium and Holland, in which the flax manufacture was especially noticed as worthy of protection and attention.

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