

Me-ri'no. (*Fabric.*) A fine, French, woolen goods, so named as being made of the wool of the merino sheep. It is a lady's dress goods, all wool, and twilled on both sides.

The Merino variety of sheep is a native of Spain, which country was celebrated for its wool in the time of Pliny.

The greater number of the sheep of Spain belong to the *mesta*, or merino corporation, which has about 5,000,000 sheep in flocks of 10,000 each. Each flock has an officer, 50 shepherds, and 50 dogs.

In summer, the sheep feed upon the elevated lands of Biscay, Navarre, and Arragon, and toward winter are driven southward to the fertile plains of New Castile, Andalusia, and Estramadura. The lambs come in January, and shearing commences the 1st of May, being carried on in houses where the flocks of sheep are folded on their northern march. 125 men shear 1,000 ewes per day, 50 weathers per man being considered a day's work. The ewes yield from 4 to 5 pounds of wool, the weathers from 7 to 8. The wool of each sheep is sorted into four varieties.

The carcass is but little esteemed.

The institution of the *mesta* dates from the time of the plague in 1350, when whole provinces were nearly depopulated and vast estates became ownerless. The proprietors of neighboring estates combined to throw the unoccupied tracts into a common pasture on which they herded sheep according to an agreed ratio.

Free passage is allowed to the flocks through the cultivated territories, and great hardship results. The power of this tyrannical corporation was somewhat reduced by the French, during their temporary occupancy of the country, 1808 - 12; a better legacy than any left by the succeeding English occupation, which was all in the interest of aristocracy and monopoly.

The merinos are now kept in immense numbers in Australia and Van Dieman's Land.

Turdetania, the country of the Guadalquivir, was famous for the quality of its wool in the time of Strabo, about the Christian era. A buck of fine quality was worth a talent (? Attic), equal to 1,180 dollars.

They were introduced into England in 1788.