

FLANNEL, a woollen stuff of various degrees of weight and fineness, made usually from loosely spun yarn. The origin of the word is uncertain, but in the 16th century flannel was a well-known production of Wales, and a Welsh origin has been suggested. The French form *flanelle* was used late in the 17th century, and the Ger. *Flanell* early in the 18th century. Baize, a kind of coarse flannel with a long nap, is said to have been first introduced to England about the middle of the 16th century by refugees from France and the Netherlands. The manufacture of flannel has naturally undergone changes, and, in some cases, deteriorations. Flannels are frequently made with an admixture of silk or cotton, and in low varieties cotton has tended to become the predominant factor. Formerly a short staple wool of fine quality from a Southdown variety of the Sussex breed was principally in favour with the flannel manufacturers of Rochdale, who also used largely the wool from the Norfolk breed, a cross between the Southdown and Norfolk sheep. In Wales the short staple wool of the mountain sheep was used, and in Ireland that of the Wicklow variety of the Cottagh breed, but now the New Zealand, Cape and South American wools are extensively employed, and English wools are not commonly used alone. Over 2000 persons are employed in flannel manufacture in Rochdale alone, which is the historic seat of the industry, and a good deal of flannel is now made in the Spen Valley district, Yorkshire. Blankets, which constitute a special branch of the flannel trade, are largely made at Bury in Lancashire and Dewsbury in Yorkshire. Welsh flannels have a high reputation, and make an important industry in Montgomeryshire. There are also flannel manufactories in Ireland.

A moderate export trade in flannel is done by Great Britain. The following table gives the quantities exported during three years:—

	1904.	1905.	1906.
Yards . . .	9,758,300	9,220,500.	8,762,200

In 1877 the export was 9,273,429 yds., so it appears that this trade has varied comparatively little. The imports of flannel are not very large:

Many so-called flannels have been made with a large admixture of cotton, but the Merchandise Marks Act has done something to limit the indiscriminate use of names. Unquestionably the development of the flannel trade has been checked by the great increase in the production of flannelettes, the better qualities of which have become formidable competitors with flannel. There must, however, be a regular and large demand for flannel while theory and experience confirm its value as a clothing particularly suitable for immediate contact with the body.