
The return to the land

Meline Jules

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THE RETURN TO THE LAND

THE RETURN TO THE LAND

BY

SENATOR JULES MÉLINE

LEADER OF THE MODERATE REPUBLICANS IN FRANCE ; FORMER MINISTER
OF AGRICULTURE ; MINISTER OF COMMERCE ; PREMIER

WITH A PREFACE BY

JUSTIN McCARTHY

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P R E F A C E

THIS book seems to me destined to make a deep mark upon the age. Senator Jules Méline, leader of the Moderate Republicans in France, was Minister of Agriculture in the Cabinet of Jules Ferry from 1883 to 1885; was elected President of the representative chamber of France in 1889; and in 1896 became Prime Minister—an office which he resigned not long after, having found probably that his political views were not radical enough for the public opinion of the country. The book is remarkable in every sense. With all its practical teaching, with its minute and careful instruction on manufacturing and industrial questions, there is not a dull page in it from first to last. M. Méline has much of the feeling of the poet as well as the reasoning power of the practical and the scientific teacher. Even where the reader may not accept all the principles of political economy on which M. Méline founds many parts of his case, that reader, if he have an appreciative mind, cannot fail to admire the sincerity, the power,

Preface

and the persuasiveness of the author. The great object of the book is to convince the world that the return to the land, and to the work which the land still offers in all or most countries, is now the nearest and the surest means for the mitigation or the removal of the troubles which have come on the working populations everywhere, and that the present is the appropriate time for the beginning of such a movement.

In his opening chapter the author tells us that the most remarkable feature of the nineteenth century is the immense development of the manufacturing industries. "Manufacture to-day," M. Méline justly declares, "is as different from what it was a hundred years ago as are our social institutions from those of the Middle Ages." Within less than half a century this great change has taken place, and M. Méline says that the change was inevitable "from the moment when science made its way upon the stage of primitive industry, ever turning until then in the same circle, ever running in the same grooves." The limits of production were naturally and inevitably fixed according to the number of men and women able to give manual labour enough in each particular region for the supply of the products which it required. The author follows out the course of this world-wide