

THE RETURN TO THE LAND

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The return to the land by Jules Méline & Justin McCarthy

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JULES MÉLINE & JUSTIN MCCARTHY

**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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PREFACE

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,

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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

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change, or rather new development, in a series of descriptions which are no less vivid than careful and accurate. The reader who begins this volume with nothing more than a creditable desire to learn something about the development of manufacturing industry here, there, and everywhere, soon finds himself absorbed in M. Méline's exposition as much as if he were reading a story of magic from the "Thousand and One Nights." Before the recent stage of manufacturing development which belongs to our own time, England, well supplied as she was by nature with iron and with coal, should have become the foremost industrial country in the world, and by far the largest exporter of manufactured products.

I may, perhaps, become so much of a critic just here as to find some fault with M. Méline. I think that he is not quite fair to England and her governments in his manner of dealing with the effects of the famous Treaty of Commerce between this country and France. "For a moment," M. Méline says, "it seemed as though England were disposed to let France have a share in her prosperity; but we soon discovered that we had been merely the cat's-paws of our more powerful neighbour, and that, instead of finding our way into her field, it was she who

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was finding her way more and more into ours." But surely it is evident that the sole reason for this result is found in the fact that England produced manufactured goods which France desired to have, and that she allowed France to have them on the easiest terms. Richard Cobden, who with Michel Chevalier, the great French economist, began and conducted the negotiations for the Treaty of Commerce, was a sincere friend of France as well as of his own country, and as the writer of this review personally knows, had the interests of France deeply at heart while he was pressing the treaty on the attention of his own government. Then with the growth of scientific machinery, came the desire among all nations, as M. Méline puts it, "to defend themselves against foreign competition" by the effort to manufacture for themselves all the goods which they most wanted, and, by import duties, to protect themselves against foreign competition. M. Méline naturally shows himself all through his volume a genuine Protectionist, but I feel well assured that the most convinced Free Trader among his readers will not feel any grudge against him merely because he stands by his own economical principles, inasmuch as through the whole of his work his evident resolve is to state with absolute fairness the facts on which

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he rests his case. The universal passion for the development of native industries, and its successful working almost everywhere, led naturally and inevitably to a rivalry in exportations. The countries which were successful in this work of production soon found that they could make more goods than were needed at home, and became therefore inspired with the desire to find purchasers in foreign markets.

In this new movement the United States led the way. The States fortified themselves with prohibitory duties against other nations, while at the same time making it clear, according to my judgment, that no such protective ramparts were needed. The United States have lately become by far the largest exporters among all the countries of the world; and not only that, but their exports approach very nearly in amount, and in some industries actually exceed, the combined products of all other parts of our globe. A remarkable fact about this immense increase in American productions is that the United States have not sought out new and unoccupied markets, but have "resolutely attacked the markets of Europe—those which were already being best worked—those of France and Germany and England herself."

M. Méline also attaches much importance to