

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 337.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## TEN ACRES ENOUGH.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**T**HE above is the title of a 273-page book<sup>1</sup> that has been kindly furnished this office for review.

The book is a great book, it is a valuable book. Though it makes no pretence thereto, it is a contribution to nothing less than to history. Mrs. Alice Mabel Bacon wrote a neat little, unpretentious book on *Japanese Girls and Women*.<sup>2</sup> More so than many a current work on the history of Japan, does Mrs. Bacon's book impart a grasp upon the Japanese and their development. Of this nature is *Ten Acres Enough*.

The author, unfortunately anonymous, remains a secret. He gives his experience in the country fifty years ago. Smoked out of the city of Philadelphia as an industrialist, he dropped upon some land in New Jersey, about eleven acres, ten of which he cultivated with the aid of about \$1,000, another \$1,000 having been spent in the purchase of the place. There he raised enough to keep himself and six children in independent competence—"independent of money sharks and other devourers of man's substance."

The picture is perfect—of things fifty years ago when it all happened. It reveals exactly the possibilities of then. One can see the undeveloped form of things as yet to come, but not yet in shape. It is also a true picture of the then general lack of economic intelligence even among people above mediocrity of information, such as the author surely was. As much of a wilderness of weeds as he describes his ten acres to have been when he first took possession, is his own mind a wilderness of economic and sociologic superstitions as to the perpetuity of things and

---

<sup>1</sup> [Presumably Isaac Phillips Roberts' *Ten Acres Enough*, originally published 1864.]

<sup>2</sup> [Alice Mable Bacon, *Japanese Girls and Women*. Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1891.]

opportunities as he found them—a very natural state of mind fifty years nearer than to the time when the American Constitution, a product of changing man, consequently itself bound to change, was fatuously surmounted with motto: “Esto Perpetua”—“For all Eternity.”

Nor is the book of interest only in the photography it makes of the economic conditions of the country half a century ago. It is also of lasting interest as a bit of candid self-photography on the then standard of morality. The author, a prayerful, God-fearing man, candidly describes himself as taking advantage of the distress of one of his fellows, aggravating the fellow’s mental anxiety for much needed money, and, having attuned his prey to the desired key, buying from him for \$1,000 what was worth \$1,800, and afterwards feeling sorry he did not squeeze his dupe still tighter. This standard of morality still exists to-day. That is true. At the same time, to-day people know such conduct is immoral, and would not publicly boast of it. Moreover, to-day, people know that it is with cheating as with “Protection.” If everybody is “Protected” none is. If everybody succeeds in cheating everybody, none is the richer.

From whichever side *Ten Acres Enough* is contemplated it is a mine of information on things a half century ago. By knowing the past we understand ourselves all the better. *Ten Acres Enough* should be read extensively. No student should be without it.

Unfortunately the chances of *Ten Acres Enough* being read extensively are slim. Isaac Phillips Roberts, “Emiritus Professor of Agriculture; Late Dean and Director of the College of Agriculture of Cornell University; Author of *The Farmstead*,<sup>3</sup> *The Farmer’s Business Handbook*,<sup>4</sup> etc.,” as the gentleman announces himself, has thrown himself square across the threshold of the book. He has done so in the shape of a preface.<sup>5</sup> The preface is intended to recommend the book. It accomplishes the opposite. While the book itself limits itself to describing things as the author saw them fifty years ago with his fifty-year-ago eyes, and only by implication theorizes upon the future, the preface, written in 1906, speaks of to-day. While the book itself,

---

<sup>3</sup> [Macmillan Co., New York, 1900?]

<sup>4</sup> [Macmillan Co., New York, 1903?]

<sup>5</sup> [This seems to all wrong. See: <http://www.co.seneca.ny.us/history/Isaac%20Phillips%20Roberts.pdf>]

singing the praises of fifty-year-ago possibilities, was eminently seasonable, the preface, which glorifies the then conditions as modern ones, is as eminently an anachronism. Even if the two witnesses whom the prefacer brings to the stand be truthful, they are no more typical of the modern conditions of the land than are the semi-cave dwellers, whom travelers in the mountains of the Carolinas and Tennessee are uncovering, typical of the modern population of the country.

Nor is the preface censurable only for its lack of scientific grasp. The prefacer does not seem to understand the import even of the language of his own witnesses. One of them, who had a 10-acre farm, is reported to answer the question, Does it pay? as follows: “Well, we have three children, my wife and I have worked hard except in the six weeks harvesting time, we have a comfortable living.” What! Hard work—EXCEPT IN THE SIX WEEKS HARVESTING TIME? The farmer who works hard EXCEPT IN HARVESTING TIME—in harvesting time, when work is hardest having to be done quickly,—the farmer who has it easy in harvesting time—that farmer must have farm hands whom to exploit. And that overthrows the prefacer’s theory.

Pity about the preface. It should be torn out to give the book itself a chance. With such a preface for vestibule, many a reader will take the preface as a sample of the book itself, and throw it aside with “Fudge!”

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

Uploaded September 2010

[slpns@slp.org](mailto:slpns@slp.org)