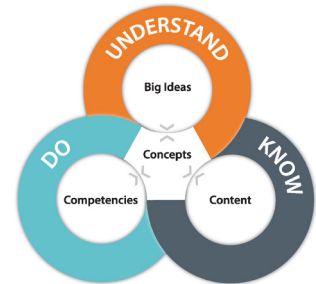


How much land does a man need?

By Leo Tolstoy

How much land does a man need? is a short story written by Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). In the story, Tolstoy reflects critically on the hierarchy of 19th century Russian society where the poor were deprived and the rich stayed wealthy. Personal belongings, property, and other forms of material wealth were measures of an individual's worth and determined social class.

Land shortage was a major issue in 19th century Russia, and in his story, Tolstoy associates the Devil with the main character's greed for land. *How much land does a man need?* inspires discussion about the concepts of how greed and both socio-economic inequalities and injustices can contribute to our desire to "have more," even if it means taking risks. The story also calls into question additional topics that students can apply to their own lives such as how we anticipate and justify the consequences of our actions when fueled by greed or other motivations. Many of these themes serve a double purpose as they are also relevant to building gambling literacy and competencies. After all, being able to identify our own tendencies toward greed can help us pause and perhaps rethink our decisions. And being mindful that we are more than our wealth can release us of the burden of comparing our and others' financial value.



Brief summary

In *How much land does a man need?* Pahom is a peasant determined to rise to the upper class by purchasing as much land as he possibly can. He boasts that if he had enough land, he would not even fear the Devil. Over time, Pahom becomes very possessive of his newly acquired land and hostile with his neighbours. He moves from place to place, always dissatisfied with what he has, and always in search of more and more land. When a stranger comes to him and tells him that a clan in a distant community is selling their excellent land at extremely cheap prices, Pahom is moved by his greed and goes to investigate. The chief of the clan agrees to sell Pahom as much land as he can walk around in one day – the caveat is that he must return to the exact point he started, or the land and money will be forfeited.

Pahom sets out to encircle so much land that by the afternoon he realizes he has created too big of a circuit. Panicked, he begins to run and is ultimately driven to exhaustion. As the sun is setting Pahom falls down and dies. His servant buries him, noting that all he ever really needed was six feet of land for his grave.

Instructional strategies

1. As a class, read *How much land does a man need?* available at <https://www.online-literature.com/tolstoy/2738/> (or use the [handout](#) found at the end of this document) and facilitate a class discussion using some or all of the questions below.



- a. Pahom buys many parcels of land. Did he need them all? Why is he never satisfied with the land he acquires?
 - b. Describe the difference between a “want” and a “need.” How do you know when you have enough of something? How much wealth do you think is “enough”?
 - c. Pahom’s behavior changes throughout the story as he acquires more land. How would you describe the change(s)? Do you think ownership and wealth can affect a person’s personality? Discuss.
 - d. At the end of the story, Pahom’s servant picks up the spade with which Pahom has been marking his land and digs a grave in which to bury him: *“Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.”* What do you think the servant means by this?
 - e. Can you think of any modern parallels/ examples of this story?
2. Divide the class into small groups and have them discuss some or all of the themes and questions below. If desired, have each group share their ideas with the class.
- Motivation**
- a. What do you think motivates Pahom to buy so much land? What makes you say that?
 - b. Pahom at first thinks of land as a source of comfort and security. However, this changes over time. Why? Why do you think Pahom wants to have more than he can actually use?
 - c. Pahom is fined for letting his horses and cows stray onto the woman’s estate, despite his careful attempts to stop his animals. Later, when the situation is reversed and he sees his neighbours’ animals on his land, he goes to court against his neighbours. Do you think Pahom deserves to be fined by his neighbours? Why do you think Pahom does the same to his neighbours when he becomes a land owner? What different factors (at the individual, community and/or social level) might lead him to act this way? How would you describe his actions? (Cruel? Reasonable? Self-centred? Justifiable? Greedy? Other?) Explain your answer.
 - d. In the story, we see that Pahom and other characters talk about the Devil and the Devil’s role in indulging them in worldly pursuits.
 - i. Tolstoy’s Devil is present in some of the pivotal moments in the story. Do you think the Devil has any role in Pahom’s desire for more land? Explain.
 - ii. Some say that Tolstoy’s reference to the Devil represents the constant presence of evil in life. What do *you* think the Devil represents in the story? What might Tolstoy want us to understand by depicting the Devil?
 - iii. Pahom seeks contentment from buying more land. Do you think Pahom is a victim of his own greed? What might have been obscuring Pahom’s judgment? What could he have done differently?
 - iv. Have you (or someone you know) ever fallen victim to the force of greed? If so, describe the experience and how it turned out.
 - e. Pahom dies rather than celebrates his land at the end of the story. What factors do you think contributed to Pahom’s death?



- f. Like Pahom, we all hear voices in our heads that tell us different things. Depending on what they are or how we feel, we sometimes listen to them and other times do not.
 - i. How can we identify and better understand the voices we hear in our heads?
 - ii. How can we make a sound judgment about what we hear in our head before acting on it?
 - iii. Have you ever felt the power of a particular voice in your head? Did you find that voice saying something irrational or reasonable? What did you do with that message?

Distribution of wealth

- a. The story begins with an argument between the older and younger sisters who are comparing life in town with life in the country. The elder sister finds value in material objects and boasts about the superiority of town life. Pahom's wife, on the other hand, is content with simpler things and finds her rural life a much safer alternative to city living.
 - i. What exactly is wealth? How much wealth is "enough"?
 - ii. Is wealth important? Why or why not? Do you think being wealthy makes people better than those who are poor or have a low income? Discuss.
 - iii. What do you think about the sisters' ideas about different ways to live life? Where might their ideas and preferences come from?
 - iv. What do you think creates or contributes to high levels of wealth inequality (rich versus poor) in a society?
- v. Gambling is one of the ways people try to become rich. What are the chances of getting rich by gambling or playing the lottery? How do you know?
- vi. What are some of the impacts of wealth inequality on individuals, communities and society?
- vii. Who or what do you think is responsible for social inequality? Discuss.
- b. According to Pahom's wife, material wealth only leads to complications. The more we have, the more we stand to lose:

"One day you are rich and the next you might find yourself out in the streets. Here in the country we don't have those ups and downs!"

 - i. What do you think about this quote? Do you agree with Pahom's wife? Explain.
 - ii. In your opinion, how important are material objects and money in life? Do you think it is possible to live without them?
- c. The merchant's wife thinks her sister's poverty is a personal failing that will inevitably be passed down from one generation to the next:

"However hard your good husband slaves away you'll spend your lives in the muck and that's where you'll die. And the same goes for your children."

 - i. Do you agree or disagree with the merchant's wife? Why?
 - ii. Do you think poverty is a personal issue/problem? What do you think contributes to someone's poverty?



- iii. What are some of the signs of a successful and fulfilled life?
- iv. How might the story have turned out differently if Pahom were from a higher social class?

Consequences

- a. Pahom is increasingly dissatisfied with what he has and, as time goes on, is more and more willing to step over other people to get better and more land for himself. He takes advantage of others in financial difficulty, he tries to punish another landowner, and he fines those who were once his friends. How do you feel about the consequences Pahom experiences as a result of his choices? What can we do to assess the short-term and/or long-term consequences of our actions before we make decisions?
- b. Pahom's behaviour not only isolates him from his community but also from his own family. How do Pahom's actions affect other peasants' lives? What could he have done differently?
- c. Although Pahom begins to have more and more land for himself and his family, his place in the commune's society becomes worse and worse. Why is this?

Risk/Uncertainty

- a. What are some of the risks Pahom takes throughout the story?
- b. Some of the risks Pahom takes are harmful to himself and others. Why do you think he takes those risks? Could he have done anything to reduce those risks?
- c. Consider your own risky behaviours. Are there ways to reduce the risks? Give some examples.

- d. Risk is ubiquitous in life. Many activities involve high levels of risk yet we engage in them anyway (e.g. engaging in 'extreme' sports, speeding on the highway, using alcohol or other drugs, and gambling). How can we explain this?

- e. Do you think Pahom knew from the beginning that his desire for more land might lead to his death? What influences your opinion?
- f. What can we do to assess and address the risk of activities we decide to engage in?

3. For **lower grades**, invite students to:

- Write a page or two explaining three purchases they or their family have made and what they value most. If desired, use the assignment description below.

Describe the function and purpose of the purchases and give your opinion as to their value. Are they wants or needs? What are the things you value the most (money, family, culture, faith, etc.)? How do you know you value these the most? How do these things contribute to your life or the lives of others?

- List a few things, besides wealth, that may become sources of greedy behaviour, and explain your reasoning. Share your thoughts with others in small groups or with the class.

4. For **upper grades**, invite students to discuss the following questions, and if interested, write an essay on modern temptations and their impact on society and/or one's life:

- In the story, Pahom's wife says that temptations surround everyone in the towns and that these temptations, such as playing cards, will lead to ruin. Why do you think Pahom's wife says that?



- In reality, many people have temptations in their life that do not ruin their life. How might playing cards, or any type of gambling, be a temptation? Do you think it could ruin someone's life? (Keep in mind that gambling disproportionately affects people with lower socio-economic status.)

5. Read "I want to be rich" on the [Choices and Chances](#) website. Think about the concepts of having and being that are talked about in the article and then discuss in small groups the follow-up questions. As a class, discuss the question in the very last sentence of the article: "What sense does it make to have more than we can actually use?"

- ✓ Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like gambling
- ✓ Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour
- ✓ Develop personal and social skills to reflect on and manage personal behaviour and choices related to gambling

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, see: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf>

Gambling literacy

Big ideas

- ✓ Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- ✓ As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- ✓ We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

Competencies

- ✓ Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- ✓ Assess the ways in which material goods are distributed in society, how those goods are valued and how this is related to gambling policies and behaviours

Links to curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- ✓ Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- ✓ Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- ✓ Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- ✓ Learning requires exploration of one's identity
- ✓ Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story



English Language Arts 6/7/8/9/10/11/12

Big ideas

- ✓ Exploring stories helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)
- ✓ Texts are socially, culturally, geographically, and historically constructed (Grade 8/9/10/11/12)

Competencies

- ✓ Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend written, oral, and visual texts, guide inquiry, and extend thinking (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)
- ✓ Recognize and appreciate how different features, forms, and genres of texts reflect various purposes, audiences, and messages (Grade 6)
- ✓ Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts (Grade 7/8/9)
- ✓ Recognize personal, social, and cultural contexts, as well as values and perspectives in texts, including race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, place (Grade 10/11/12)
- ✓ Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)
- ✓ Respond to text in personal, creative and critical ways (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)
- ✓ Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)
- ✓ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create engaging and meaningful literary and informational texts for a variety of purposes and audiences (Grade 6/7/8/9/10/11/12)

This resource was developed by the **Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research** with funding provided by the **BC Responsible & Problem Gambling Program**. Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the BC Responsible & Problem Gambling Program or the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research.



How much land does a man need?

By Leo Tolstoy

An elder sister came to visit her younger sister in the country. The elder was married to a tradesman in town, the younger to a peasant in the village. As the sisters sat over their tea talking, the elder began to boast of the advantages of town life: saying how comfortably they lived there, how well they dressed, what fine clothes her children wore, what good things they ate and drank, and how she went to the theatre, promenades, and entertainments.

The younger sister was piqued, and in turn disparaged the life of a tradesman, and stood up for that of a peasant.

"I would not change my way of life for yours," said she. "We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety. You live in better style than we do, but though you often earn more than you need, you are very likely to lose all you have. You know the proverb, 'Loss and gain are brothers twain.' It often happens that people who are wealthy one day are begging their bread the next. Our way is safer. Though a peasant's life is not a fat one, it is a long one. We shall never grow rich, but we shall always have enough to eat."

The elder sister said sneeringly:

"Enough? Yes, if you like to share with the pigs and calves! What do you know of elegance or manners! However much your goodman may slave, you will die as you are living - on a dung heap - and your children the same."

"Well, what of that?" replied the younger. "Of course our work is rough and coarse. But, on the other hand, it is sure, and we need not bow to anyone. But you, in your towns, are surrounded by temptations; today all may be right, but tomorrow the Evil One may tempt your husband with card, wine, or women, and all will go to ruin. Don't such things happen often enough?"

Pahom, the master of the house, was lying on the top of the stove and he listened to the women's chatter.

"It is perfectly true," thought he. "Busy as we are from childhood tilling mother earth, we peasants have no time to let any nonsense settle in our heads. Our only trouble is that we haven't land enough. If I had plenty of land, I shouldn't fear the Devil himself!"

The women finished their tea, chatted a while about dress, and then cleared away the tea-things and lay down to sleep.



But the Devil had been sitting behind the stove, and had heard all that was said. He was pleased that the peasant's wife had led her husband into boasting, and that he had said that if he had plenty of land he would not fear the Devil himself.

"All right," thought the Devil. "We will have a tussle. I'll give you land enough; and by means of that land I will get you into my power."

II.

Close to the village there lived a lady, a small landowner who had an estate of about three hundred acres. She had always lived on good terms with the peasants until she engaged as her steward an old soldier, who took to burdening the people with fines. However careful Pahom tried to be, it happened again and again that now a horse of his got among the lady's oats, or a cow strayed into her garden, or his calves found their way into her meadows - and he always had to pay a fine.

Pahom paid up, but grumbled and, going home in a temper, was rough with his family. All through that summer, Pahom had much trouble because of this steward, and he was even glad when winter came and the cattle had to be stabled. Though he grudged the fodder when they could no longer graze on the pasture-land, at least he was free from anxiety about them.

In the winter the news got about that the lady was going to sell her land and that the keeper of the inn on the high road was bargaining for it. When the peasants heard this they were very much alarmed.

"Well," thought they, "if the innkeeper gets the land, he will worry us with fines worse than the lady's steward. We all depend on that estate."

So the peasants went on behalf of their Commune, and asked the lady not to sell the land to the innkeeper, offering her a better price for it themselves. The lady agreed to let them have it. Then the peasants tried to arrange for the Commune to buy the whole estate, so that it might be held by them all in common. They met twice to discuss it, but could not settle the matter; the Evil One sowed discord among them and they could not agree. So they decided to buy the land individually, each according to his means; and the lady agreed to this plan as she had to the other.

Presently Pahom heard that a neighbor of his was buying fifty acres, and that the lady had consented to accept one half in cash and to wait a year for the other half. Pahom felt envious.



“Look at that,” thought he, “the land is all being sold, and I shall get none of it.” So he spoke to his wife.

“Other people are buying, said he, “and we must also buy twenty acres or so. Life is becoming impossible. That steward is simply crushing us with his fines.”

So they put their heads together and considered how they could manage to buy it. They had one hundred rubles laid by. They sold a colt and one half of their bees, hired out one of their sons as a laborer and took his wages in advance; borrowed the rest from a brother-in-law, and so scraped together half the purchase money.

Having done this, Pahom chose out a farm of forty acres, some of it wooded, and went to the lady to bargain for it. They came to an agreement, and he shook hands with her upon it and paid her a deposit in advance. Then they went to town and signed the deeds; he paying half the price down, and undertaking to pay the remainder within two years.

So now Pahom had land of his own. He borrowed seed, and sowed it on the land he had bought. The harvest was a good one, and within a year he had managed to pay off his debts both to the lady and to his brother-in-law. So he became a landowner, ploughing and sowing his own land, making hay on his own land, cutting his own trees, and feeding his cattle on his own pasture. When he went out to plough his fields, or to look at his growing corn, or at his grass-meadows, his heart would fill with joy. The grass that grew and the flowers that bloomed there seemed to him unlike any that grew elsewhere. Formerly, when he had passed by that land, it had appeared the same as any other land, but now it seemed quite different.

III.

So Pahom was well-contented, and everything would have been right if the neighboring peasants would only not have trespassed on his cornfields and meadows. He appealed to them most civilly, but they still went on: now the Communal herdsmen would let the village cows stray into his meadows, then horses from the night pasture would get among his corn. Pahom turned them out again and again, and forgave their owners, and for a long time he forbore to prosecute any one. But at last he lost patience and complained to the District Court. He knew it was the peasants’ want of land, and no evil intent on their part, that caused the trouble, but he thought:

“I cannot go on overlooking it or they will destroy all I have. They must be taught a lesson.”

So he had them up, gave them one lesson, and then another, and two or three of the peasants were fined. After a time Pahom’s neighbors began to bear him a grudge for this, and would now and then let their cattle on to



his land on purpose. One peasant even got into Pahom's wood at night and cut down five young lime trees for their bark. Pahom passing through the wood one day noticed something white. He came nearer and saw the stripped trunks lying on the ground, and close by stood the stumps where the trees had been. Pahom was furious.

"If he had only cut one here and there it would have been bad enough," thought Pahom, "but the rascal has actually cut down a whole clump. If I could only find out who did this, I would pay him out."

He racked his brain as to who it could be. Finally he decided: "It must be Simon - no one else could have done it." So he went to Simon's homestead to have a look round, but he found nothing, and only had an angry scene. However, he now felt more certain than ever that Simon had done it, and he lodged a complaint. Simon was summoned. The case was tried, and retried, and at the end of it all Simon was acquitted, there being no evidence against him. Pahom felt still more aggrieved, and let his anger loose upon the Elder and the Judges.

"You let thieves grease your palms," said he. "If you were honest folk yourselves you would not let a thief go free."

So Pahom quarreled with the Judges and with his neighbors. Threats to burn his building began to be uttered. So though Pahom had more land, his place in the Commune was much worse than before.

About this time a rumor got about that many people were moving to new parts.

"There's no need for me to leave my land," thought Pahom. "But some of the others might leave our village and then there would be more room for us. I would take over their land myself and make my estate a bit bigger. I could then live more at ease. As it is, I am still too cramped to be comfortable."

One day Pahom was sitting at home when a peasant, passing through the village, happened to call in. He was allowed to stay the night, and supper was given him. Pahom had a talk with this peasant and asked him where he came from. The stranger answered that he came from beyond the Volga, where he had been working. One word led to another, and the man went on to say that many people were settling in those parts. He told how some people from his village had settled there. They had joined the Commune, and had twenty-five acres per man granted them. The land was so good, he said, that the rye sown on it grew as high as a horse, and so thick that five cuts of a sickle made a sheaf. One peasant, he said, had brought nothing with him but his bare hands, and now he had six horses and two cows of his own.



Pahom's heart kindled with desire. He thought:

"Why should I suffer in this narrow hole, if one can live so well elsewhere? I will sell my land and my homestead here, and with the money I will start afresh over there and get everything new. In this crowded place one is always having trouble. But I must first go and find out all about it myself."

Towards summer he got ready and started. He went down the Volga on a steamer to Samara, then walked another three hundred miles on foot, and at last reached the place. It was just as the stranger had said. The peasants had plenty of land: every man had twenty-five acres of Communal land given him for his use, and any one who had money could buy, besides, at a ruble an acre as much good freehold land as he wanted.

Having found out all he wished to know, Pahom returned home as autumn came on, and began selling off his belongings. He sold his land at a profit, sold his homestead and all his cattle, and withdrew from membership in the commune. He only waited till the spring, and then started with his family for the new settlement.

IV.

As soon as Pahom and his family reached their new abode, he applied for admission into the Commune of a large village. He stood treat to the Elders and obtained the necessary documents. Five shares of Communal land were given him for his own and his sons' use: that is to say - 125 acres (not all together, but in different fields) besides the use of the Communal pasture. Pahom put up the buildings he needed, and bought cattle. Of the Communal land alone he had three times as much as at his former home, and the land was good corn-land. He was ten times better off than he had been. He had plenty of arable land and pasturage, and could keep as many head of cattle as he liked.

At first, in the bustle of building and settling down, Pahom was pleased with it all, but when he got used to it he began to think that even here he had not enough land. The first year, he sowed wheat on his share of the Communal land and had a good crop. He wanted to go on sowing wheat, but had not enough Communal land for the purpose, and what he had already used was not available; for in those parts wheat is only sown on virgin soil or on fallow land. It is sown for one or two years, and then the land lies fallow till it is again overgrown with prairie grass. There were many who wanted such land and there was not enough for all; so that people quarreled about it. Those who were better off wanted it for growing wheat, and those who were poor wanted it to let to dealers, so that they might raise money to pay their taxes. Pahom wanted to sow more wheat, so he rented land from a dealer for a year. He sowed much wheat and had a fine crop, but the land was too far from the village - the wheat had to be carted more than ten miles. After a time Pahom noticed that some peasant-dealers were living on separate farms and were growing wealthy; and he thought:



“If I were to buy some freehold land and have a homestead on it, it would be a different thing altogether. Then it would all be nice and compact.”

The question of buying freehold land recurred to him again and again.

He went on in the same way for three years, renting land and sowing wheat. The seasons turned out well and the crops were good, so that he began to lay money by. He might have gone on living contentedly, but he grew tired of having to rent other people’s land every year, and having to scramble for it. Wherever there was good land to be had, the peasants would rush for it and it was taken up at once, so that unless you were sharp about it you got none. It happened in the third year that he and a dealer together rented a piece of pasture-land from some peasants; and they had already ploughed it up, when there was some dispute and the peasants went to law about it, and things fell out so that the labor was all lost.

“If it were my own land,” thought Pahom, “I should be independent, and there would not be all this unpleasantness.”

So Pahom began looking out for land which he could buy; and he came across a peasant who had bought thirteen hundred acres, but having got into difficulties was willing to sell again cheap. Pahom bargained and haggled with him, and at last they settled the price at 1,500 rubles, part in cash and part to be paid later. They had all but clinched the matter when a passing dealer happened to stop at Pahom’s one day to get a feed for his horses. He drank tea with Pahom and they had a talk. The dealer said that he was just returning from the land of the Bashkirs, far away, where he had bought thirteen thousand acres of land, all for 1,000 rubles. Pahom questioned him further, and the tradesman said:

“All one need do is to make friends with the chiefs. I gave away about one hundred rubles’ worth of silk robes and carpets, besides a case of tea, and I gave wine to those who would drink it; and I got the land for less than a penny an acre.” And he showed Pahom the title-deeds, saying:

“The land lies near a river, and the whole prairie is virgin soil.”

Pahom plied him with questions, and the tradesman said:

“There is more land there than you could cover if you walked a year, and it all belongs to the Bashkirs. They are as simple as sheep, and land can be got almost for nothing.”



"There now," thought Pahom, "with my one thousand rubles, why should I get only thirteen hundred acres, and saddle myself with a debt besides? If I take it out there, I can get more than ten times as much for the money."

V.

Pahom inquired how to get to the place, and as soon as the tradesman had left him, he prepared to go there himself. He left his wife to look after the homestead, and started on his journey taking his man with him. They stopped at a town on their way and bought a case of tea, some wine, and other presents, as the tradesman had advised. On and on they went until they had gone more than three hundred miles, and on the seventh day they came to a place where the Bashkirs had pitched their tents. It was all just as the tradesman had said. The people lived on the steppes, by a river, in felt-covered tents. They neither tilled the ground, nor ate bread. Their cattle and horses grazed in herds on the steppe. The colts were tethered behind the tents, and the mares were driven to them twice a day. The mares were milked, and from the milk kumiss was made. It was the women who prepared kumis, and they also made cheese. As far as the men were concerned, drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton, and playing on their pipes, was all they cared about. They were all stout and merry, and the summer long they never thought of doing any work. They were quite ignorant, and knew no Russian, but were good-natured enough.

As soon as they saw Pahom, they came out of their tents and gathered round their visitor. An interpreter was found, and Pahom told them he had come about some land. The Bashkirs seemed very glad; they took Pahom and led him into one of the best tents, where they made him sit on some down cushions placed on a carpet, while they sat round him. They gave him some tea and kumiss, and had a sheep killed, and gave him mutton to eat. Pahom took presents out of his cart and distributed them among the Bashkirs, and divided the tea amongst them. The Bashkirs were delighted. They talked a great deal among themselves, and then told the interpreter to translate.

"They wish to tell you," said the interpreter, "that they like you, and that it is our custom to do all we can to please a guest and to repay him for his gifts. You have given us presents, now tell us which of the things we possess please you best, that we may present them to you."

"What pleases me best here," answered Pahom, "is your land. Our land is crowded and the soil is exhausted; but you have plenty of land and it is good land. I never saw the like of it."

The interpreter translated. The Bashkirs talked among themselves for a while. Pahom could not understand what they were saying, but saw that they were much amused and that they shouted and laughed. Then they were silent and looked at Pahom while the interpreter said:



“They wish me to tell you that in return for your presents they will gladly give you as much land as you want. You have only to point it out with your hand and it is yours.”

The Bashkirs talked again for a while and began to dispute. Pahom asked what they were disputing about, and the interpreter told him that some of them thought they ought to ask their Chief about the land and not act in his absence, while others thought there was no need to wait for his return.

VI.

While the Bashkirs were disputing, a man in a large fox-fur cap appeared on the scene. They all became silent and rose to their feet. The interpreter said, “This is our Chief himself.”

Pahom immediately fetched the best dressing-gown and five pounds of tea, and offered these to the Chief. The Chief accepted them, and seated himself in the place of honor. The Bashkirs at once began telling him something. The Chief listened for a while, then made a sign with his head for them to be silent, and addressing himself to Pahom, said in Russian:

“Well, let it be so. Choose whatever piece of land you like; we have plenty of it.”

“How can I take as much as I like?” thought Pahom. “I must get a deed to make it secure, or else they may say ‘It is yours,’ and afterwards may take it away again.”

“Thank you for your kind words,” he said aloud. “You have much land, and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure which bit is mine. Could it not be measured and made over to me? Life and death are in God’s hands. You good people give it to me, but your children might wish to take it away again.”

“You are quite right,” said the Chief. “We will make it over to you.”

“I heard that a dealer had been here,” continued Pahom, “and that you gave him a little land, too, and signed title-deeds to that effect. I should like to have it done in the same way.”

The Chief understood.

“Yes,” replied he, “that can be done quite easily. We have a scribe, and we will go to town with you and have the deed properly sealed.”

“And what will be the price?” asked Pahom.



"Our price is always the same: one thousand rubles a day."

Pahom did not understand.

"A day? What measure is that? How many acres would that be?"

"We do not know how to reckon it out," said the Chief. "We sell it by the day. As much as you can go round on your feet in a day is yours, and the price is one thousand rubles a day." Pahom was surprised.

"But in a day you can get round a large tract of land," he said.

The Chief laughed.

"It will all be yours!" said he. "But there is one condition: If you don't return on the same day to the spot whence you started, your money is lost."

"But how am I to mark the way that I have gone?"

"Why, we shall go to any spot you like, and stay there. You must start from that spot and make your round, taking a spade with you. Wherever you think necessary, make a mark. At every turning, dig a hole and pile up the turf; then afterwards we will go round with a plough from hole to hole. You may make as large a circuit as you please, but before the sun sets you must return to the place you started from. All the land you cover will be yours."

Pahom was delighted. It was decided to start early next morning. They talked a while, and after drinking some more kumiss and eating some more mutton, they had tea again, and then the night came on. They gave Pahom a feather-bed to sleep on, and the Bashkirs dispersed for the night, promising to assemble the next morning at daybreak and ride out before sunrise to the appointed spot.

VII.

Pahom lay on the feather-bed, but could not sleep. He kept thinking about the land.

"What a large tract I will mark off!" thought he. "I can easily do thirty-five miles in a day. The days are long now, and within a circuit of thirty-five miles what a lot of land there will be! I will sell the poorer land, or let it to peasants, but I'll pick out the best and farm it. I will buy two oxteams, and hire two more laborers. About a hundred and fifty acres shall be plough-land, and I will pasture cattle on the rest."



Pahom lay awake all night, and dozed off only just before dawn. Hardly were his eyes closed when he had a dream. He thought he was lying in that same tent and heard somebody chuckling outside. He wondered who it could be, and rose and went out, and he saw the Bashkir Chief sitting in front of the tent holding his sides and rolling about with laughter.

Going nearer to the Chief, Pahom asked: "What are you laughing at?" But he saw that it was no longer the Chief, but the dealer who had recently stopped at his house and had told him about the land. Just as Pahom was going to ask, "Have you been here long?" he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga, long ago, to Pahom's old home. Then he saw that it was not the peasant either, but the Devil himself with hoofs and horns, sitting there and chuckling, and before him lay a man barefoot, prostrate on the ground, with only trousers and a shirt on. And Pahom dreamt that he looked more attentively to see what sort of a man it was that was lying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself! He awoke horror-struck.

"What things one does dream," thought he.

Looking around he saw through the open door that the dawn was breaking.

"It's time to wake them up," thought he. "We ought to be starting."

He got up, roused his man (who was sleeping in his cart), bade him harness; and went to call the Bashkirs.

"It's time to go to the steppe to measure the land," he said.

The Bashkirs rose and assembled, and the Chief came too. Then they began drinking kumiss again, and offered Pahom some tea, but he would not wait.

"If we are to go, let us go. It is high time," said he.

VIII.

The Bashkirs got ready and they all started: some mounted on horses, and some in carts. Pahom drove in his own small cart with his servant and took a spade with him. When they reached the steppe, the morning red was beginning to kindle. They ascended a hillock (called by the Bashkirs a shikhan) and dismounting from their carts and their horses, gathered in one spot. The Chief came up to Pahom and stretching out his arm towards the plain:



"See," said he, "all this, as far as your eye can reach, is ours. You may have any part of it you like." Pahom's eyes glistened: it was all virgin soil, as flat as the palm of your hand, as black as the seed of a poppy, and in the hollows different kinds of grasses grew breast high.

The Chief took off his fox-fur cap, placed it on the ground and said:

"This will be the mark. Start from here, and return here again. All the land you go round shall be yours."

Pahom took out his money and put it on the cap. Then he took off his outer coat, remaining in his sleeveless under-coat. He unfastened his girdle and tied it tight below his stomach, put a little bag of bread into the breast of his coat, and tying a flask of water to his girdle, he drew up the tops of his boots, took the spade from his man, and stood ready to start. He considered for some moments which way he had better go - it was tempting everywhere.

"No matter," he concluded, "I will go towards the rising sun."

He turned his face to the east, stretched himself, and waited for the sun to appear above the rim.

"I must lose no time," he thought, "and it is easier walking while it is still cool."

The sun's rays had hardly flashed above the horizon, before Pahom, carrying the spade over his shoulder, went down into the steppe.

Pahom started walking neither slowly nor quickly. After having gone a thousand yards he stopped, dug a hole, and placed pieces of turf one on another to make it more visible. Then he went on; and now that he had walked off his stiffness he quickened his pace. After a while he dug another hole.

Pahom looked back. The hillock could be distinctly seen in the sunlight, with the people on it, and the glittering tires of the cart-wheels. At a rough guess Pahom concluded that he had walked three miles. It was growing warmer; he took off his under-coat, flung it across his shoulder, and went on again. It had grown quite warm now; he looked at the sun, it was time to think of breakfast.

"The first shift is done, but there are four in a day, and it is too soon yet to turn. But I will just take off my boots," said he to himself.

He sat down, took off his boots, stuck them into his girdle, and went on. It was easy walking now.



"I will go on for another three miles," thought he, "and then turn to the left. This spot is so fine, that it would be a pity to lose it. The further ones goes, the better the land seems."

He went straight on for a while, and when he looked round, the hillock was scarcely visible and the people on it looked like black ants, and he could just see something glistening there in the sun.

"Ah," thought Pahom, "I have gone far enough in this direction, it is time to turn. Besides I am in a regular sweat, and very thirsty."

He stopped, dug a large hole, and heaped up pieces of turf. Next he untied his flask, had a drink, and then turned sharply to the left. He went on and on; the grass was high, and it was very hot.

Pahom began to grow tired: he looked at the sun and saw that it was noon.

"Well," he thought, "I must have a rest."

He sat down, and ate some bread and drank some water; but he did not lie down, thinking that if he did he might fall asleep. After sitting a little while, he went on again. At first he walked easily: the food had strengthened him; but it had become terribly hot and he felt sleepy, still he went on, thinking: "An hour to suffer, a life-time to live."

He went a long way in this direction also, and was about to turn to the left again, when he perceived a damp hollow: "It would be a pity to leave that out," he thought. "Flax would do well there." So he went on past the hollow, and dug a hole on the other side of it before he turned the corner. Pahom looked towards the hillock. The heat made the air hazy: it seemed to be quivering, and through the haze the people on the hillock could scarcely be seen.

"Ah!" thought Pahom, "I have made the sides too long; I must make this one shorter." And he went along the third side, stepping faster. He looked at the sun: it was nearly half-way to the horizon, and he had not yet done two miles of the third side of the square. He was still ten miles from the goal.

"No," he thought, "though it will make my land lop-sided, I must hurry back in a straight line now. I might go too far, and as it is I have a great deal of land."

So Pahom hurriedly dug a hole, and turned straight towards the hillock.



IX.

Pahom went straight towards the hillock, but he now walked with difficulty. He was done up with the heat, his bare feet were cut and bruised, and his legs began to fail. He longed to rest, but it was impossible if he meant to get back before sunset. The sun waits for no man, and it was sinking lower and lower.

“Oh dear,” he thought, “if only I have not blundered trying for too much! What if I am too late?”

He looked towards the hillock and at the sun. He was still far from his goal, and the sun was already near the rim.

Pahom walked on and on; it was very hard walking but he went quicker and quicker. He pressed on, but was still far from the place. He began running, threw away his coat, his boots, his flask, and his cap, and kept only the spade which he used as a support.

“What shall I do,” he thought again, “I have grasped too much and ruined the whole affair. I can’t get there before the sun sets.”

And this fear made him still more breathless. Pahom went on running, his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him and his mouth was parched. His breast was working like a blacksmith’s bellows, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were giving way as if they did not belong to him.

Pahom was seized with terror lest he should die of the strain.

Though afraid of death, he could not stop. “After having run all that way they will call me a fool if I stop now,” thought he. And he ran on and on, and drew near and heard the Bashkirs yelling and shouting to him, and their cries inflamed his heart still more. He gathered his last strength and ran on.

The sun was close to the rim, and cloaked in mist looked large, and red as blood. Now, yes now, it was about to set! The sun was quite low, but he was also quite near his aim. Pahom could already see the people on the hillock waving their arms to hurry him up. He could see the fox-fur cap on the ground and the money on it, and the Chief sitting on the ground holding his sides. And Pahom remembered his dream.

“There is plenty of land,” thought he, “but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life, I have lost my life! I shall never reach that spot!”



Pahom looked at the sun, which had reached the earth: one side of it had already disappeared. With all his remaining strength he rushed on, bending his body forward so that his legs could hardly follow fast enough to keep him from falling. Just as he reached the hillock it suddenly grew dark. He looked up - the sun had already set! He gave a cry: "All my labor has been in vain," thought he, and was about to stop, but he heard the Bashkirs shouting, and remembered that though to him, from below, the sun seemed to have set, they on the hillock could still see it. He took a long breath and ran up the hillock. It was still light there. He reached the top and saw the cap. Before it sat the Chief laughing and holding his sides. Again Pahom remembered his dream, and he uttered a cry: his legs gave way beneath him, he fell forward and reached the cap with his hands.

"Ah, that's a fine fellow!" exclaimed the Chief. "He has gained much land!"

Pahom's servant came running up and tried to raise him, but he saw that blood was flowing from his mouth. Pahom was dead!

The Bashkirs clicked their tongues to show their pity.

His servant picked up the spade and dug a grave long enough for Pahom to lie in, and buried him in it. Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed.