

Serfdom

When serfdom still existed, the poor people had to work for the landowners who abused them cruelly. At this time a certain king's son wanted to see how the people lived and worked and what was happening to them. He had observed how very sad they were, so he went to one of the landowners and said to him, "Sir, would you take me on as a worker?"

The man accepted him and appointed him as a foreman to oversee the workers. So he started to work, taking charge of the people. The foreman looked at the clock. It was twelve noon, so he said, "People, you may have your lunch now, if you have brought anything to eat."

But the workers were scared, saying, "When the master sees us sitting down to lunch without his order he will beat us!"

"Don't be afraid. Do sit down. Today I am ordering you."

At three o'clock the master came and gave them permission to have lunch, but the workers said, "We have lunched already." The master went to the foreman, took a long whip and started to beat him and the workers.

"See that this doesn't happen again! Until I come and give you the order don't dare to stop for lunch!" said the master.

The following day the foreman again went to work and at twelve o'clock gave the order for lunch. But many of the workers didn't eat for they were scared of the master. However, the foreman once more said, "Don't be afraid, people. Sit down and eat."

But again the master came by and beat the foreman and the workers. This time the master remarked, "You can give me my walking papers. I don't want to work for you because you abuse the workers." He got ready and left. In the marketplace he bought three horses: one was blind, another was skinny

and the third was fat. He harnessed the three of them together and galloped home to the king. In the courtyard he untied them. The skinny horse immediately went to the fence to search for grass, because he was hungry. The blind one stood in the middle of the yard because he couldn't see. But the fat one pranced around playfully because he was satisfied. The king's son approached his father. "Well son, did you see what the people were doing?" asked the king.

"I did. And I have driven them into the courtyard so you can see how everyone lives."

The king went out and looked in the courtyard where there stood three horses. "What kind of people are these?" he asked.

"Well, you figure that out because you are the king. You surely must know what kind of people these are."

"Well son, it would seem that this skinny horse represents the workers."

"True," replied the son. "And the fat horse? What does he stand for?"

The king thought and thought. "It seems that this represents the nobility because the horse is skittish and happy," he admitted.

"And the blind one? What is it?"

The king couldn't figure out what it represented.

"Father: that is yourself," replied the son. "You abandoned your people to serfdom. The landowners abuse the workers cruelly. And you know that is wrong."

It wasn't until the year 1861 that serfdom was abolished in Ukraine, so we know that though the king knew how the workers suffered, he did nothing about it. History also informs us that the former serfs had to buy their land back from the landowners so for many years they were no better off.