

Story #511 (Tape #12, 1970)

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Do we have entry for
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Ahmet Vefik Pasha¹ Has Shrewd Peasant's Oxen Returned

Once when Ahmet Tefik Pasha was governor, a peasant came into his presence. This man said, "Sir, I am a peasant. While we were plowing the other day, my team and I became tired. I stopped the team, put feed bags on them so that they could eat, and myself sat down under a tree to rest. I must have fallen asleep, for when I wanted to continue plowing, I found that my animals were gone. I did not know what to do. I looked to left and to right, but there was no sign of them anywhere. I have now finally come to you for help. Please find my animals for me."

Ahmet Vefik Pasha asked, "Why did you sleep when you were supposed to be plowing? One should not leave his animals untended as you did in order to sleep."

"Sir, I slept because I knew that Ahmet Vefik Pasha would not sleep at this desk. If I had thought that Ahmet Vefik Pasha might sleep, I would not have slept in my field."

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The pasha was quite surprised at this response. He thought it unusual that such a clever answer should come from the mouth of an ignorant peasant. He thought to himself, "How can a pasha like me,

¹A distinguished diplomat and scholar of the mid-19th century. He was responsible for translating numerous French literary classics, including Gil Blas and the plays of Molière. The first Turk to compile a modern dictionary, he was a lexicographer in Turkish comparable with Samuel Johnson in English.

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whose reputation has spread so widely, be placed in such an awkward position by an ignorant peasant?" He called the commanding officer of the gendarmes and ordered, "Find this man's animals and have them delivered to him within twenty-four hours or else pay him--." He turned to the peasant and asked him, "How much are your oxen worth?"

The peasant gave him the value of the oxen in terms of the money of that day, "Three or five liras."²

"Pay him, then, that amount from my next month's salary [if the oxen are not found, that is]," said Ahmet Vefik Pasha.

Upon receiving this order, the commander of the gendarmes took action immediately. The animals were found before twenty-four hours had elapsed and returned to their rightful owner.

This anecdote is an example of how Ahmet Vefik Pasha was put in a difficult position by an ignorant peasant. It shows how an ignorant person can sometimes be very shrewd.

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²There were once golden liras, and so it is possible that a team of oxen might be purchased for three or five liras. The combination of three with five is almost universal among Turkish rural residents. Instead of a couple of anything, three or four, half a dozen, or a few, the expression three or five is more often used.