

be ahead, sometimes last of all. The boatmen's song rang out from every boat; and the rhythm of these monotonous, melancholy songs made the paddling easier. A paddler who sings does not get tired; or at any rate he does not notice that he is tired until he stops singing. This singing starts at the first stroke, accompanied by the splash of the blades. Sometimes, when our boats were keeping quite close together, the men sang in unison, or in a kind of catch, with several boats' crews joining in the chorus. Their repertoire was not large; the same songs recurred every day, and echoed across the river from morning to night. We soon knew them by heart, but we did not tire of them.

Compass, watch and pencil were the instruments I used for my map-making. Only now and again could I take a bearing for five minutes; as a rule our course changed every minute or two. I was thus continually occupied, and was able to make an entry in my diary only when we did not change our direction for several minutes on end.

CHEN was equally busy; his time was wholly taken up with gauging the swiftness of the current, and the speed we could attain with the help of the paddles. He had also frequently to measure the depth of the river, and here and there its breadth as well.

At six o'clock my forward paddler, SADIQ, suddenly called out: «*Ördek keldi!*» The Turki word *ördek* means «wild duck», *keldi* «has come». Busy as I was with my mapping, my first hurried thought was that SADIQ wished to call my attention to the first wild duck we had seen since leaving Konche a few hours before. But when at the same time he pointed to two horsemen riding along the left bank in the same direction as ourselves, I realized that one of the riders, an old man with a white beard, was my old body-servant ÖRDEK, «Wild Duck», who had come to see his old master once again in this life after more than thirty years.

We steered diagonally across the river and landed at the point where the two horsemen had dismounted. The old man slithered down the bank and came on board. He approached me with tears in his eyes, holding out his hands, hard and horny with toil and the years. And it was really ÖRDEK himself. Time had ravaged him mercilessly. He was thin, shrunken and withered; his forehead was deeply wrinkled, his beard and moustaches hung down in straggling tufts. He was wearing a shabby cap with a sheepskin border, and was clad in a coat of the kind worn in Turkistan, bleached and ragged, and secured about the waist with a cloth girdle. His tattered boots had evidently been worn on countless journeys through desert, steppe and brushwood.

«Well, ÖRDEK, how have you been getting on since we last met thirty-two years ago?»

«Allah has protected me, sir, ever since I was in your service. I have been comfortable enough; but I gave up hope of ever seeing you again a long time ago.»