

We glided gloriously along the left bank, where a road ran at the foot of steep cliffs. Occasionally the water swirled between stones in the bed, and a couple of times we ran aground on sandbanks and slewed right round before we got free again. Here and there boats were moored to the bank. They were all of the same type as ours. Even the size was the same; one saw no little boats and no larger vessels. The people who earn their daily bread by transporting goods and passengers up and down the river have long since discovered that this type and size of boat is best adapted to their purposes.

The river flowed S. S. E.—S. E.—S. W.—S. E. and eastwards in wide bends. At a little distance from the banks rose mountains and hills. After an hour we glided past the village Yeh-chu-ch'üan-tze (The Sty of the Wild Boar). A little lower down on the same left bank the cliffs fell sheer to the river, and here gaped a wedge-shaped grotto.

Presently we met a flotilla of a dozen boats, all with their sails up and billowed out by a fairly stiff south-east wind. In addition, long files of men on the bank were dragging them with ropes. But the current was against them and progress was slow. It did not matter; no one is ever in a hurry in China. The drag-rope ran through a ring that was hoisted to the top of the mast, and under this we must pass, unless we preferred to go round the boats. A jolly spectacle! We were surrounded by a bevy of sailing boats. It was like a change of scene at the theatre, when new wings are set up. But they had soon passed us and disappeared round the bends of the river.

At the village Chiao-su-ling we put in for drinking-water, and a couple of hours later we landed on the left bank, where the crew and the escort bought grain in a tent. They bartered and haggled in the little village, and then we put out again from the bank.

Just here a side-valley opened onto the river, and the village was situated on the delta at its mouth. The river flowed in its broad valley from the one rocky point to the other, and on the opposite bank, where conditions were favourable, lay villages with their gardens and corn-fields and their grey houses.

A spectacle that one never grew weary of was provided by the boats coming towards us, with or without sails, but always with haulers. Only very seldom did we collide with them, for we kept where the water was deepest and swiftest, while the boats we met kept to the shallow, slack water near the bank. The haulers dragged with the rope over their shoulders, with a rag in between to diminish chafing. Sweating and straining forward they went — and the melody of the »Song of the Volga Boatmen» almost sounded in our ears. Day in, day out they haul the heavy boats; and they do not get any real rest on the downstream journey either, for then they are standing the whole day at their oars.

Towards evening the river widened, and flowed for quite long stretches without any bends. Several times we ran aground on sandbanks; the oarsmen hopped