

oar. He had no need to give orders; the two boys at the oars in front knew the river and needed no telling what to do.

After a while we were caught up by a boat in which the district chief of Hsia-pan-ch'eng, a captain, had charge of ten soldiers. He confirmed what we had heard about the two hundred robbers lying in ambush farther down the river near the provincial frontier; and it was on this account that he had now come to add to our security. The Governor-General had given strict orders in the matter. We were now a little flottila of three boats manned by soldiers, for three men kept guard on board our own vessel also. The captain was so tactful that he did not want to make us uneasy with the horrid news. But it indirectly reached our ears all the same.

At one o'clock it was half dark and disagreeable enough, with rain and a temperature of 25° C. From the soil on the bank one could see that the river had recently been two feet higher. Clouds hung like great pillows over the earth, and their ragged edges hovered like tufts of cotton round the crests of the mountains.

Presently we met eleven boats being hauled upstream. Their sails were not up, for there was no wind. We got tangled up in one of the drag-ropes. Altercation and good round oaths! Frequently one saw whole rows of idle boats at the banks, all with the characteristic canopy of braided mats and sacking.

Rising in splendid isolation, a great mass of rock presented an impressive spectacle, while to the left a mighty complex with jagged points resembled a king's crown. A miniature waterfall came splashing down its steep wall.

At frequent intervals we passed homely little villages nestling between the foot of the mountains and the river, with green trees and waving corn-fields. Marking some more important highway a ferry crossed the Luan-ho, and on the slopes in the vicinity a flock of sheep were browsing.

Time and again we met the same manifestation of the laws of erosion. At every new bend the current gathered its energies in a rapid and rushing kind of suction, washing at the foot of an abruptly projecting cliff. Here the river shrank and became narrow. When its waters had wrestled wrathfully with the cliff it grew quieter and crossed the bottom of the valley diagonally, only to gather into the same rushing tumult at the foot of the mountain on the opposite bank.

A file of twenty-four boats were being hauled upstream. Most of these big transports were taking grain as provisions to the troops in the province of Jehol.

## RAPIDS

When we had progressed for a fair while in a south-westerly direction we saw the village Ch'e-ho-k'ou, »The River-place of the Carts«, ahead of us. Boats from Jehol were generally allowed to drift thus far before stopping for the night. But our first day had been short, and on the second we had been delayed by the chang-