

worked hard, thirteen or fourteen hours a day, and still they were always cheerful and joking. Beads of sweat stood out on their foreheads and backs. They had bought cucumbers and a fresh supply of onions as a change from the eternal millet.

One moment dense clouds and the next — sweltering sunshine! The air was saturated with moisture, everything was wet, all were in a continual perspiration, and my shirt was sticking to my back. GEORG wore only swimming trunks and MONTELL little more.

At one place three boats were being loaded on to carts drawn by three mules. The carts had been taken far out on the gravel-bed of the river, so that the boats could be pushed up on them without difficulty. They were to be transported overland to a neighbouring river.

AN UNPLEASANT ENCOUNTER

By half-past four we were just opposite the village Hsi-chai on our left. On the bank stood five men — though it was impossible to say whether they were robbers or shabby soldiers. We had been deserted by our last escort a short time before. The five were all armed with rifles, and they signed to us to land. The leader handed over his rifle to one of his men and drew forth a Browning. With fore-finger on the trigger and the pistol pointed now at one, now at another of us he stepped on board. One of the men on shore stood leaning against the gunwale, keeping us covered with a Mauser pistol. In an overbearing and insolent tone the man put questions to SÖDERBOM, who answered quietly and clearly, and to the crew. And the whole time he held his pistol ready to fire. After a cross-examination of ten minutes he went ashore, making a gesture with his hand that signified that we were at liberty to continue. As a rule it is impossible to distinguish between robbers and soldiers in China. In most cases the robbers are discharged soldiers, who steal their rifles and consider that it pays better to plunder. But it is dangerous to be in the vicinity of these rough fellows, when they are fumbling with their weapons.

THROUGH »THE DEVIL'S MOUTH«

The river grew wider, the current slackened more and more; our oarsmen had to work unceasingly at their oars. Again we brushed past thirty boats with white canopies, moored at the bank. The valley was broadening all the time. One observed a peculiar variation in the erosion above Kuei-k'ou. Instead of as usual going diagonally over its bed from the right to the left cliff-foot, and then gradu-