A Trip in Summer through the Yangtze Gorges.

By Dr. George F. Stooke.

"Among the mountains lone where woods and winds contend, and a vast river over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves."—Shelley.

The traveller who journeys up the Yangtze from Shanghai to Hankow may well be forgiven exclamations of weariness at the dreary miles of flat sandy waste only relieved by the range of mountains encircling Kuling. Between Hankow and Shasi, also, mind and eye tire at the Sahara-like prospect. But thirty miles above Shasi the view begins to change and there springs up a hope of better things. And this hope is not disappointed for, as Ichang is approached, the city is seen with a back ground of majestic hills through which the Yangtze has cut its bold path.

The Start by Native Junk.

From Ichang outwards the journey must be made in a native junk, and the trip is, therefore, very tedious to the foreigner used to rapid travelling on a steamer. No
steamer dare venture the upper route, however, because of the many dangerous rapids which require to be negotiated. One advantage of the slow travelling by junk is that the interesting spots en route may be studied very closely, and the lover of photography
may obtain many beautiful pictures which the hurried progress of a steamer would render impossible.

We started on our trip to Kweichowfu early in July. Our junk was a spacious craft with four large cabins, and requiring a crew of fifty to manage her. Accompanying us was a "red boat" kindly given by the military official in Ichang. Its crew are soldiers and serve for protection either from troublesome natives in the towns and villages in the gorges, or from the crew of the junk, who otherwise might be tempted to take advantage of the lonely foreigner travelling with them. The "red boat" system reflects great credit on the Chinese Government and is one of the few truly humane institutions which it patronises. At every dangerous spot on the river one of these boats is stationed for the purpose of saving life should any accident occur. They are the Chinese equivalent of our life boats and they do their work right well.
Besides the red boat our junk captain also engaged a small boat to assist his crew in carrying the trackery and taking out the ropes to the shore at the rapids; and it would also tow the larger craft when the wind failed.

We started at daylight, and that our start might be propitious, the crew indulged in some superstitious practices intended to win the good favour of Wang Laoye, the god of the river. Papers perforated to resemble the native cash were burnt and flung into the stream. Then incense sticks were lighted and fixed into the bow of the boat, one of the crew at the same time making graceful genuflections. Then, to add to the dignity of the whole ceremony, the captain of the red boat fired a salvo of blank cartridges and we were ready to start on our way. It is always an eventful journey, more especially so at high water in summer time, and many thousands are the victims that at that season the monster Yangtze claims for itself.

THE ICHANG GORGE.

The entrance of the picturesque Ichang Gorge is reached five miles out of Ichang, and there a magnificent reach of river is seen winding between the hills, till it loses itself in a long perspective. Going ashore at the entrance of the gorge, and mounting a few hundred feet, one may enter the San Yu Tong (the cave of the three idlers) cave temple which in its innermost recess provides a delicious drink of icy water in the hottest summer days. This cave is one of the largest in the Ichang district and is well worth a visit.

Three miles up the gorge is the last Custom's station for the tourist—P'ingshanpa (平善場) the Peaceful Embankment; and, that ordeal over, he may proceed on his way without fear of further molestation. The Ichang Gorge cannot boast of the rugged and majestic scenery of the other gorges, but it has a quiet beauty and a joy all its own. It is like an opening melody, preparing one for the crash of the massive variations which are to follow. The deep hush of the gorge has something in it almost oppressive—one feels himself to be an intruder, looking upon the secrets of Mother Nature. Her great mountains seem to cover one in, and you hear her song in the music

VIEW OF THE ICHANG GORGE.
of the rushing river. You feel you are laid away in her lap and that to disturb the silence would be a sacrilege. Only a merchant-mind would desire to hear a steamer's shriek disturb such deep solitudes.

Above P'ingshanpa the gorge takes many sharp and devious turns, and it is here that the artist will love to linger. But these sharp turns, though very pleasant to the
eye, are full of trouble for the boatmen. The current quickens at these bends and the junk, hugging the shore, is hauled with much vehement shouting, slowly from rock to rock. These boulders being composed of conglomerate are very convenient for the boatmen, and where a pebble has been washed away afford good lodgement for the grappling hooks used by the men on board.

With no wind, progress is very slow and patience is sorely tried, but the crew are always full of hope for the favouring breeze, and now and again utter long tremulous cries which are said to fetch the breeze.
Near the end of the Ichang Gorge there is a remarkable conical hill, known as the Pillar of Heaven, (天柱) and when the little hamlet of Nant'o (南沱) is reached the traveller has passed through his first gorge.

THE YAOCHAN RIVER.

At Nant'o we rested for a night, and the next day started on our way on that part of the river known by the natives as the Yaochanho (腰站河) the Reach of the Stopping Places, from the great hindrances to forward progress met there. This is a reach some fifteen miles long, lying between the Ichang and the Niukan gorges, and in high water is one of the very worst stretches of the river. The bed of the river is here filled with huge accumulations of boulders which often divide the great stream into three or more branches. The water rushes seething amongst these rocky masses making the whole fifteen-mile reach one long continuous rapid which only the patience of a Chinese could surmount. In the lower water season this part of the river contains several definite and named rapids, but in summer the water comes down like the falls of Lodore.

Passing Hwanglingmiao (黄陵廟) our boat soon reached troublous water, so the captain had her tied up and went on shore to buy ropes for the future hard tracking. The ropes made in this place are all of bamboo, very thick, and capable of standing a much greater strain than hempen
ones, and they do not wear so rapidly from the friction they receive against the rocks. In a future journey we now know that it is wise to accompany the captain on this purchase to see that he does not save his precious cash by purchasing rubbishy ropes. Left to himself he will do this, and risk his boat and men's lives for the sake of a paltry gain.

THE TRACKERS.

And now a few words on the trackers. It would need a pen mightier than mine to vividly describe their hard lot. For a mere pittance and a daily supply of coarse food they will make the six weeks' journey from Ichang to Chungking, every day risking their lives and constantly under volleys of abuse and blows from their masters. They are characterised by wearing a white strip of cloth round their heads. They pull on the big rope from the shoulder by means of a cloth bandage, ending in a string to which is fastened a copper cash, and with this they hook on to the large bamboo cable. At a rapid it is painful to see them heaving and straining at their hard work. Over every dozen of them is an overseer, the very incarnation of an Egyptian task-master, whose duty it is to see that all are pulling with their full strength, none shamming. There he stands over them with the broken end of a thick bamboo rope in his hand and, should he suspect a tracker of merely pretending to pull, he delivers many sounding blows on the man's bare back which the poor wretch receives like a patient mule. When I protested against such treatment of men, the philosophic captain replied "This thing must be or how would my boat reach Chungking?" Should a tracker dare to desert he is liable to the death penalty if discovered again in Ichang. In one rapid the two chief men in our smaller boat, for failing to help the big boat,
were seized by the crew on board, hauled over to the rocks by their queues and then

beaten till the blood poured. One day another Hood shall give us a "Song of the Trackers."

The First Rapid.

At one spot on the Yaochanho, known as the T'atung (蘆洞) Rapid, the water had a sheer drop of three feet, and tore down like a waterfall. Four bamboo ropes were put out at this place. The first one was in charge of the trackers a quarter of a mile ahead, and when the drum in our bow was beaten they would start pulling. The other three were fastened at vantage points at the side of the rapid to keep us from drifting down, should the front rope give way. All being ready the drum was sounded, and off we started
against the rushing current. One minute, and we may have moved an inch. Then
some under-current swung us in near the rocks, but the men in the bow wielded their
long sweep and we escaped that danger. The tugging and straining were kept
up bravely by our trackers and in, perhaps, a quarter of an hour, we were nearing
the top of the rapid, and a few minutes would have brought us into the smooth
water above. But a loud shout from the shore warned us the front rope had given,
and our boat gradually floated backward. And now all interest was centred on the
three ropes put out to save the boat from drifting aimlessly down. Would they hold?
Vain hope! First one, then another, and then the last one gave with a loud snap and
we were off at the mercy of current, whirlpool, and rock. But a brave man in the bow,
seeing the danger, leaped into the boiling rapid with another coil of rope in his hand
which, by good fortune, he fastened round a boulder in time to bring us to a stand and

![Entrance to the Niukan Gorge](image)

a heaven-sent backwater also helped to save us. But it was a close thing and, had the
junk been carried out into the main stream of the Yaochanho, we would have been
helpless. It is at the smaller rapids that the greatest danger exists, for at the really big
ones double ropes are put out and many more men taken on for tracking and, though
the water is more fierce, the extra precautions taken ensure greater safety.

We were not surprised at this spot to see a junk bottom up floating down in mid-
stream, a large hole gaping in her side. Word was soon passed along the shore of
the rich prize coming down and small boats put off to seize whatever might be
removing in the wreck. Soon followed masses of wreckage and, higher up the river, the body of a woman floated past us. China might well say in the words of Kipling:

We have fed our stream for a thousand years
And she calls us still unfed.

If blood be the price of admiralty
Lord God we ha' paid in full.

THE T'UNGLING RAPID.

But now we are reaching the end of the fearful “Reach of the Stopping Places,” and are approaching a spot of sad interest. For at the foot of a little knoll on the right bank lies the wrecked steamer “Siuhsiang.” She struck a hidden rock more than a mile above this place at the T'ungling Rapid, but drifted slowly down, and now lies twenty-two fathoms deep, her hull having been defined on two separate occasions. The T'ungling, or K'ungling Rapid is at the entrance of the second gorge and in high water is non-existent as a rapid. But a trip in the winter months shows the rapid in its glory and no landsman will wonder the powerful steamer found her end there.

THE NIUKAN GORGE.

The T'ungling Rapid passed we enter the magnificent Niukan Gorge. Its full name is Niukan Mafei (牛肝馬肺) Ox-liver and Horse-lung, which very prosaic title has been given it from some strange stony concretions on one of its cliffs, which have some resemblance to those entrails of an animal as seen hanging in a slaughterhouse. But, though its name be hideous, the gorge is all grandeur. Huge mountains tower on each side rising often over 3,000 feet, and leaving but a thin line of sky, as it were a reflection of the river lying below.

Crossing from one side to the other in this gorge a whirlpool nearly capsized us, and we heard afterwards that already that day one boat had been lost. A strong
favouring wind accompanying us we sped all too quickly through this truly majestic gorge and, passing a picturesque village on the steep mountain side, brought up at the great triple rapid—the Hsint'an.

THE HSIN RAPID.

This rapid (新涯) like the T'ungling is no rapid in the high water, when it presents one fine sheet of water over which the junks sail with little to hinder them. In the winter, however, there are three rapids, and the place is busy as a beehive. Below the rapid twenty or thirty junks will be waiting their turn to make the ascent, their crews on shore laying out the tracking ropes, which must be carried above the topmost rapid, while those left on board watch with lively interest the fate of the vessels making the

A VILLAGE IN THE GORGES.

THE HSIN RAPID.
ascent. Owing to the great addition of men needed to haul the junks at this place, quite a large village has sprung up on the banks, and a walk through it revealed one of the cleanest streets it has been my lot to see in China.

THE PINGSHU GORGE AND KUEICHOW.

We were delayed by head winds for half a day at the head of the Hsint'an; but late in the afternoon the wind turned and we sailed swiftly through the Pingshu (兵書) Gorge the shortest of all the gorges. Some miles after this is passed the river becomes narrowed considerably by two large tongues of rock which form the “Lower Stone Gates” (下石門). There is no rapid at this place, but the current is very swift, and it was with the greatest difficulty that our vessel passed through the narrow channel.

And we had passed it none too soon for the wind began to veer, heavy clouds gathered, and our boat tied up to prepare for the expected storm. A gathering storm in the gorges is a marvellous sight and acquires a majesty all its own amid those mighty hills. It was soon upon us in full tropical force. When the first drops came the sun was still shining and they fell like drops of pure gold, but later it grew darker and a cold wind rising drove the rain into the river, lashing up its waters as it were like beaten wool. It was over as
fast as it came and we were able to get within sight of Kueichow (歸州) before sunset. The town of Kueichow made a beautiful picture in the early morning before sunrise. Its inhabitants were just rising and their fires were being lit, and the white smoke hung over the town like a veil of gossamer. The sharp turn in the river here was much feared by our boatmen, and we had been warned of this difficult spot from the start. But fortune favoured us and we passed the dangers unscathed. Then it was but a few miles journey to that most dreaded rapid the Yeh't'an.
THE YEHT’AN.

Yeht'an (洩瀉) means the Leaking or Oozing Rapid, though how such a roaring torrent can be styled by the adjective leaking passes my dull comprehension. But the subtle Chinese are content with the name. Here the greatest care was taken to ensure a safe transit. The usual inhabitants of the Yeht'an village were about working in the fields, as very few junks make the journey in the high water. Our boat clubbed with two others and it was agreed that the combined crews should help to pull each other over. Two powerful ropes were sent out from our bow, one fixed to a rock at the top of the rapid to be pulled on by the men on board, and the other for the trackers, and such was the extent of this rapid that the men pulling ahead looked like ants on the hillside. It
P'EISHIH THE BOUNDARY BETWEEN HU'PEH AND SZECHUAN.
was a long, long pull, and half way up the trackers’ rope broke. Two boatmen on shore, for the ample reward of 200 cash, put out their boat into the seething current and let themselves down the rapid by the broken rope. When they had reached the end of this they managed to pull in to the rope still holding, and to this they looped on the broken end. Our boatmen slowly came up with this and soon the broken end was fixed on board, and the remainder of the passage was uneventful. The natives show great courage at these dangerous rapids and are very contemptuous of foreigners, who they say are cowards preferring to walk ashore.

THE NIUK’EO GORGE.

That afternoon after passing the “Upper Stone Gates” we reached another rushing torrent the Niuk’eot’an (牛口) the Ox-head Rapid. It was here that H.M.S. “Woodlark” met with a serious accident and was repaired successfully by her crew on the spot, practically a new bow being made for her. This rapid was nearly as bad as the Yeht’an though a much shorter one. Our navigator in the bow took us over splendidly and made the men under him use the great bow-sweep with excellent effect. The captain was a nonentity at these difficult places and all trust was placed in our bow-man, the captain doing his little best by swearing vociferously in a high soprano at the toiling trackers. Further up our great bow-sweep, caught by a sudden current, snapped clean in two, and no further progress was possible till it should be repaired. The men did this very deftly and in an hour we were under weigh again. While working at it they needed some wire and, none being forthcoming, one of the trackers blandly offered to cut a length from the telegraph wires overhead, but the wiser counsels of his superiors prevailed and prevented him.

PATUNGISIEN.

Five miles below Patunghsien (巴東縣) a white pagoda is reached, erected to
ensure the good luck of the town above. Three years previously my companion had lost a cargo boat full of books at this place, but the damaged boxes were recovered from the water and were sealed up by the local official in a temple in the town. As these were to be overhauled we had to enter the place. The people treated us courteously though this has not been their constant attitude to foreigners, and near this place a Roman Catholic priest was brutally butchered but a few years since. A ghastly photo of the murdered man, with his priest friends standing round the open coffin, is still on sale at Ich‘ang, but so repulsive a picture would be better suppressed.

**THE WUSHAN GORGE**

For many miles after Patung is passed the scenery is very monotonous, but it is soon relieved by the grandeur of the entrance to the Wushan (巫山) the Witch Mountain Gorge. This entrance has a very forboding look, it is so dark and sombre, and we were not surprised that the feeling of the men on a native gunboat behind us should be so worked upon that they fired off three shots before entering, to gain the favour of the gods. We had just entered the gorge when the sun went down, and the glory of that sunset is past telling. Longfellow has painted a scene very like it:
"And the evening sun descending
Set the clouds on fire with redness:
Burned the broad sky like a prairie;
Left upon the level water
One long track and trail of splendour."

This is the longest of the gorges being some twenty-five miles in length and, half way through, the boundary between the Hupeh and Szech'uan provinces is passed at a village named P'eishih (培石) where a white stone marks the boundary line. In the Hupeh portion of this gorge there was no opportunity of tracking, so the crew worked the oars to the accompaniment of a tenor who sang the quaint chant on the next page.

At P'eishih, however, a fine road begins, though now in places in sad disrepair. It is said to have been constructed from the money of a lawsuit fine, and it continues
through the rest of the gorges to Kweichowfu. Above P'eishih the river was very
dangerous and we narrowly escaped being wrecked. The fault being laid at the door
of the trackers their two leaders were accordingly beaten. At the end of this long
gorge lies the town of Wushanhsien where enters a river springing in the mountains
of the interior which are said to be very rich in copper and other minerals. Passing
Wushanhsien we came to a reach of the river resembling the lower Yaochanho a
stretch of water, all rapid, and whirlpool, and unexpected breakwater, so that our
forward progress was very exciting.

THE FENGSXIANG GORGE.

We had now reached the last gorge, the Fenghsiang, Wind-box or Bellows
Gorge, which is the grandest of them all. The high cliffs of this fine gorge narrow the
river in places to two hundred yards, and the turns in it are full of beauty. The great
road is cut in the limestone cliffs right through this gorge, and midway a tablet is seen inscribed with four characters, 閻闐奇功 “the opening (of the road) a marvellous work.”

In this gorge also is a spot of historic interest. In the high cliffs have been chiselled out a series of holes for holding wooden poles which (according to our boatmen) were used of old by the Chinese military when fighting with rebels. Should the rebels have chased them to this gorge the army would have mounted the cliffs by these beams, the last man pulling them out as he went up.

KWEICHOW.

At the end of this gorge Kweichowfu (夔州府) city comes in sight, and in
mid-stream is a large rock known as the Kweiifu rock. If the water have risen high enough to cover this rock the Kweiifu officials do not permit any boat to pass down river, for so dangerous is the back-water at this spot that boats can hardly escape being driven on to the rock.
KWEICHOWFU AND THE RETURN JOURNEY.

Arrived at Kweichowfu city our boat was met by a company of elderly matrons who, squatting down on the beach, soon had a busy trade by stitching up our trackers' torn garments. For each mend they charged eight cash. That evening at dark our boat was serenaded by a group of singing sirens who did their best to lure our men away, and I fear they succeeded only too well.

My companion was proceeding on to Chungking, but as there were no more gorges and rapids to be seen (the Hsinling't'an not existing in high water) I engaged a small sampan for the return journey. We reached Ichang in twenty-four hours after leaving Kweichowfu, but the trip was full of hair-breadth escapes so small a boat being completely at the mercy of the fierce whirlpools. Even the experienced old boatman was terrified, and at every bad rapid and whirlpool I would hear him mutter between his teeth “Oh Wang Laoye, save me! and I will indeed give you a fowl at Ichang.” And right thankful were we to see the white cliffs of the Ichang Gorge looming in sight again, knowing that they meant for us safety and home.