

mountain, the broad, yellowish-brown ribbon of the river winding through it. On the other side there was an endless mass of mountains, some higher, some lower, the yellow ridges of which, separated by deep valleys, rise up in a perfect jumble in almost every direction. Looking eastward you see the same picture, though its beauty is enhanced by a white-clad mountain ridge outlined in the distance. The road, leading to the SW, ran along the ridge of the mountain we had climbed, winding round a mountain peak here and there. There was a deep valley on either side, into which the slopes descended at times steeply, at others in innumerable small terraces. Across the valley there were exactly similar ridges, among which a peak rose occasionally to a greater height. The highest point is often decked with a single tree — frequently the only one visible for a great distance. There were clefts or valleys everywhere with sides steeply inclined or descending in terraces. There was something indescribably desolate and monotonous in this greyish-yellow landscape. You could almost imagine that you were riding up the crests of an uninhabited desert. And yet you discover a little village here and there either at the bottom of a valley or on a small terrace halfway up a mountain or else high up on its crest. Their walls and houses, built of the same earth, are so like their surroundings in colour that they do not strike the eye at once, especially as they are often not marked by a single tree. Their numbers increased, however, as we went on and the whole of this inhospitable desert proved to be full of life on closer inspection. The majority of the terraces were well tilled small fields that must give a smiling appearance to the landscape later in the spring or in the early summer, when everything turns green. Some of the hills are decorated with mazar-like buildings or mounds with poles stuck into them and bits of cloth attached. Some of the villages further on gladdened our eyes with a few planted trees.

After a few hours' ride in these yellow surroundings the observer's demands become uncommonly modest. The houses are small and mostly built on narrow strips of ground. Such villages ascend the slopes in series of small steps. A large part of the population simply dig caves in the steep sides of the mountains and build a protecting clay wall that shuts off a small enclosure before the entrance. During the day we passed no less than seven such villages. All of them were small, the largest, Tavanthu, consisting of 40 houses scattered in various groups. I also saw a number of other small villages on either side of the road with innumerable roads, or rather paths, from one village to another.

The inhabitants are exclusively Dungans. They are easily recognisable by their thin skull-caps, white and black, of a peculiar shape with slightly projecting corners. The women have the small, maimed feet of the Chinese women, but do their hair in a large fringe falling from left to right half over the forehead. They wear a large white cloth round their heads. Otherwise both the men and the women wear the ordinary Chinese dress. Both old and young have the typical Mongolian fold of the eyelid. Their hair is black, and their eyes are either black or in any case very dark. They look good-humoured, the older people in particular appearing to be friendly disposed towards foreigners.

The road and the landscape did not vary in character during the day. We reached the village of Sonanpa after a ride of about 16 miles (13—14 miles on my map). It contained about 100 houses, of which only 14 were inhabited by Chinese. The livestock was said to