

spent in picking our way through the maze of tamarisk cones, darkness forced us to halt in the first thicket of Toghraks.

Small channels, which looked as if cut by running water at no very distant period, here traversed the jungle in plenty. But of water, or of those reed patches which usually denote its presence not deep below the ground, there was none. For the men this mattered little; for in our 'Mussucks' we had brought a plentiful supply; but I was sorry for our ponies, which could not quench their thirst after a long and warm march. By 9 P.M. the Naik arrived and reported that he had brought in the last straggler, the man who had driven or rather dragged along our three refractory sheep. In the light of big bonfires which the men lit, I discovered that close to my tent were decayed huts dug out from the ground and covered with rough tree-trunks. No doubt herdsmen had once camped here, and water could not then have been far off. But how long ago was it? Here was an illustration of the doubts ever besetting the student of things primitive and devoid of chronology.

Rest came only after midnight, and before daybreak I was aroused by the news that two labourers were missing. My honest secretary was greatly excited about it. He knew that the two men were confirmed opium-smokers, and feared that, having strayed from our track in the darkness or lagged behind surreptitiously to indulge in a smoke, they would get hopelessly confused, and wander about without aim, to succumb at last to thirst. Vainly I represented how difficult it would be for men possessed of their senses not to see the light of our camp fires or to trace our track in daylight. While I resigned myself to the belief that the men had taken the first chance to decamp and were now moving back to Nan-hu, compensated by an unearned advance of money for whatever trouble they might have in their wandering, Chiang's imagination saw the hapless men already lying dead in the jungle.

In any case we had to clear up the matter of their disappearance, and if they were really lost to bring them