

plateaus was most trying; and when in the evening we descended to the edge of the wide marsh-filled basin which stretched westwards as far as the eye could reach, we were assailed by clouds of mosquitoes and other insects. In order to secure some protection from this pest, and yet at the same time to keep reasonably near to the springs located by the Surveyor and to the grazing, I pushed for nearly two miles beyond the edge of the basin, here lined by a belt of luxuriant vegetation, to where a bold and broad terrace of clay promised a dry and airy camping-place. For, like the wild camels whose resting-grounds we had repeatedly come upon on the top of isolated clay ridges or plateaus, we soon realized that an elevated wind-swept position was the only means for escaping the worst onsets of those insect fiends.

The tents had scarcely been pitched in the darkness when I became aware that the choice of our camping-ground had given us protection from a far more serious danger. The labourers sitting down for a little smoke while waiting for the baggage, had lit fires in the jungle and carelessly left them smouldering. A strong north wind, which rose after dark, fanned these into a big conflagration, spreading with amazing rapidity amidst the dry thickets of scrub and reed-beds. It was a wonderful sight to watch the broad array of flames over-running the leafless wintry jungle. It spread a glorious illumination on three sides of us, and burst into something like fireworks wherever groves of large Toghaks were set ablaze. From the bare slope of our clay terrace we could watch the grand spectacle without serious apprehension. But when the first supply of water brought along from the springs was exhausted, Hassan Akhun found it no easy task to take the camels back to them by a circuitous route, and most of our animals did not get a drink until daybreak.