

On the 12th, 13th, and 14th December I made an excursion to the lakes of Basch-köl and Jangi-köl, which I will now briefly describe. My starting-point was the village of Jangi-köl, inhabited by about twenty families, and consisting of kamisch huts disposed in two rows, together with two houses of clay (adobe), situated close beside the lake's inflow canal. Formerly this village is said to have stood on the shore of the Basch-köl, but was flitted many years ago. In 1892 eleven of the inhabitants of the village died of small-pox. The canal in question is a cutting in the ground 4 m. deep. The mass of solid ice that filled its bottom was 4 to 5 m. broad, but the channel itself varied between 20 and 50 m. in breadth. At the first glance it appeared more than doubtful whether it was of artificial origin, because, owing to its great breadth in places, the labour of digging it would have been enormous. The mouth of the canal, at the Tarim end, had, I was told, been stopped up for ten years, and the water which lay frozen on its bottom had found its way in by infiltration through the sand. Every year however a second and smaller canal is opened for a time, to let in fresh water, otherwise the fish would all die. Even as it is, the water of the lake is perceptibly salt. My guide, Pavan Aksakal, an old man of sixty, and the oldest inhabitant of the village, assured me that originally the canal was dug, but had been widened to its present dimensions by the inflowing river-water. Pavan's father used to fish in the lake, but after he ceased to do so, the lake, which had obviously been cut off from the river, gradually dried up, until about the year 1860 its bottom was an arid waste, though a



Fig. 201. THE CANAL OF BASCH-KÖL.

few poplars and some kamisch grew round it. About 1880 Pavan and his associates spent three years in digging out the canal again, and the first high flood which came after they had finished filled the lake-basin. In 1890 they once more closed the canal, and since then have made a good thing out of the fishing.

The greater part of the lake was covered with a thin sheet of ice, which only just bore the weight of a man in the narrow parts and close round the shores. Broad expanses in the middle were still unfrozen, the water being of a beautiful light blue, and as bright as crystal. Ducks and swans were swimming about on these open expanses, and on the shores were partridges, hares, and foxes, besides traces of wild-boar, though these creatures, I was told, only frequent the reed-brakes in the summer. On both sides the lake is shut in by lofty dunes, which thus give it the appearance of a fjord. Close along the margin of the water there is a belt of level ground, consisting partly of fine silt, partly of saliferous sand, soft in summer, though at the time of our visit frozen. Ten years ago this strip of ground is said to have been under water, as indeed was plain to see, and if the canal were to be now opened, it is supposed that the lake level would rise the height of a man, or about 1.6 m. Inundated ground of this description is called *schor*, a word which connotes the presence of salt. Between the strip of *schor* and the desert sand there occurs a belt of thick luxuriant reeds, seldom more than 50 m. broad, generally indeed not so broad; and the lower slopes of the dunes are thinly dotted with tamarisks. Poplars are few and far between, most of those which do occur being on the west shore, where the dunes have a gentle ascent; on the east side they rise at an angle