

selves not infrequently on the eastern bank of the Märdäk-köl: they come from the east, out of the Desert of Lop, whither they also return when they are disturbed. About a year previously a troop of fifty had been seen east of the Sadak-köl; but this number is certainly an exaggeration.

The Ilek was now said to be at its highest, and was expected to begin to fall in the end of May. During the summer it drops a finger's breadth every day; but during the autumn it rises again. It has little or no *kömul*, and freezes in the same way as a lake, a consequence no doubt of its great depth and in general its small velocity. The Ilek had never before contained so much water as it did that year. Upon comparing this information with what we know about the Tarim, we find that the river-system is working its way back towards the east; for whilst the Ilek is said to be bigger than ever before, the Tarim is reported to be smaller.



Fig. 408. THE BRIDGE OF DAP-KARAN.

Here again the winter had been severe; the natives declared it was a good thing they had such an abundant supply of fuel, »otherwise they would have been frozen to death». The snow had been 2 dm. deep, a very unusual thing. The toghraks and kamisch were two weeks later than usual in beginning to shoot; and the gnats were later in putting in an appearance. Kum-tscheke is also called Kum-modschuk, or Sandy Cape.

On 23rd April we made an excursion to the Märdäk-köl. The canal conveying water from the river into the lake, which in 1896 I rode over with ease, was now so deep »that the water reached to the upper lip of a man standing up in it». We paddled down-stream therefore as far as the bridge, and then followed this *atscha*, which soon expanded into narrow lakelets, for the most part overgrown with vegetation. Here nets were set out at intervals, as they were also in the canals that run parallel to the river, though they speedily rejoin it. Next we pene-