

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE ARKA-KÖL, TAJEK-KÖL, KARA-KÖL, ETC.

In this little trip I was accompanied by two men of Tosghak-tschantschdi, one of them being a certain Barat Kullu, from whom the first-mentioned lake of Barat Kulning-köl derives its name (a proof, by the way, that this little lake is a perfectly new creation), and by a fisherman from the Arka-köl, who piloted the way in a small canoe. The fact that we had to cross the tongue of land on foot, and that it is traversed by a distinct footpath, is a proof that there exists no water-connection between the Ilek and the Arka-köl, but that they belong to different waterways, as also that the hydrography of this region is more intricate than I believed on the occasion of my visit in 1896. In this lake fishing is only carried on in the autumn, when, the level having dropped during the summer, the fish are more easily got at. The name Arka-köl has manifestly been given to it by the inhabitants of Tosghak-tschantschdi or Arghan, for Arka-köl means the Back or Farther-away Lake; had the lake derived its name from the inhabitants of Tikenlik, they would have called it the Ajaghi-köl, or the Lower Lake.

The Arka-köl sends out arms and ramifications in every direction. It consists partly of large spaces of open water, but is also in part overgrown with a dense tangle of kamisch and jäkän; in the south, where the Kok-ala issues that drains it into the Ilek, the vegetation is so exceptionally luxuriant, that even after setting it on fire, it would be anything but easy to force a way through it. Here then it is a perfect wilderness, into which human beings never by any chance venture. It is easy to understand, that the water which filters through reeds of this description enters the Kok-ala as pure and clear as crystal. Year after year fresh generations of kamisch spring up in these marshes, and as they do so, they strive their utmost to make themselves room by thrusting aside the dried stalks of the preceding year, even though these tower up 6 m. in height, and are two or three centimeters in diameter at the base. From this some idea may be formed of the immense quantities of organic materials which in this way accumulate in the lower part of the lake, where they are collected and compressed by the weight of the water. These dense reed-brakes retain the masses of dust and sand which drop amongst them, and as the years go by the whole forms a continually growing barrier or natural dam, which holds up the water above it, while the lake broadens and expands. Indeed I was told that the Kok-ala forms cataracts below the lake. And