

The peculiar character of the Dead Sea has given rise to a host of fables. It was anciently believed that no bird could fly across its expanse without being stricken dead by unwholesome vapours, and that its waters were of so great a density as to support a human body on their surface without difficulty. It does not require, however, the aid of fiction to produce a strong impression on the mind of the spectator.

In many respects, as Dean Stanley observes,* it is one of the most curious of inland seas. It lies, as already stated, 1300 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and is thus the most depressed sheet of water in the world. Its basin is a steaming caldron—a bowl which, as it has been well described, from the peculiar temperature

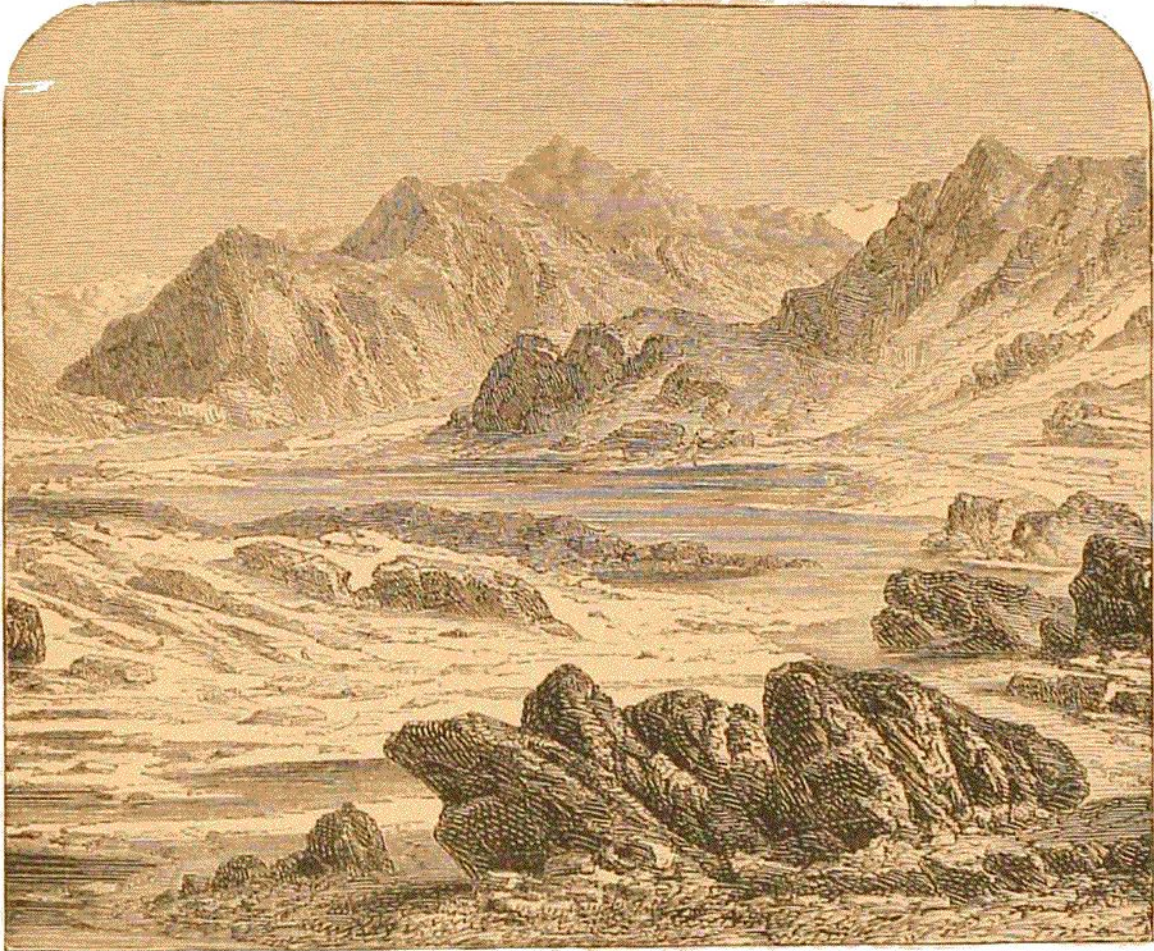


FIG. 201.--LAKE OF KIOUK-KIOL, IN TIBET.

and deep cavity in which it is situated, can never be filled to overflowing. The river, itself exposed to the same withering influences, is not copious enough to furnish a supply equal to the demand made by the rapid evaporation.

The excessive saltiness of the Dead Sea is, however, even more remarkable than its deep depression. This peculiarity, says Dean Stanley, is mainly occasioned by the huge barrier of fossil salt at its south-western corner, and heightened by the rapid evaporation of the fresh water poured into it. Along the desert shore, the white crust of salt indicates the cause of sterility. Thus the few living creatures

* [Dean Stanley, "Sinai and Palestine." pp. 290-293.]