



Fig. 22. The Tsaghan-burgasun oasis.

In the night the temperature sank to  $-21^{\circ}.4$  C. I woke up at half-past two, hearing the dogs barking furiously and rushing off southwards. In an interval between the barking I caught the distant sound of caravan bells. On such a desert route as this the arrival of another caravan is like a connection with the outer world. One hoped for news from China and wondered whether these nocturnal merchants had by any chance anything to sell. The caravan encamped in the valley just to the south of our own camp. I lay awake for an hour, and the sound of bells from successive camel-files reached my ears the whole time, arriving one after the other at Tsaghan-burgasun.

#### A BIG MERCHANT CARAVAN.

The next morning we found out that it was a merchant caravan of twelve hundred camels and ninety men on its way from Kuei-hua to Barkul and Guchen, while a couple of sections were bound for Hami. About fifty different firms were represented in this huge caravan. The most prominent of these was the firm of Ta Sheng K'uei, a big firm in Kuei-hua. They had joined forces and were taking their wares on hired camels, the owners of which, seven in number, having contributed with one hundred and fifty or two hundred camels each. The goods com-