

BIG HORSE'S FLIGHT

THE TRAIL OF WAR IN CENTRAL ASIA

BY

SVEN HEDIN

TRANSLATED BY

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LONDON

MACMILLAN AND CO. LTD.

1936



GENERAL MA CHUNG-YIN, "BIG HORSE"

Chinese photograph

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**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH**

PREFACE

IN August, 1933, I was commissioned by the Central Government in Nanking to conduct an expedition to Sinkiang in order to mark out two motor roads between China proper and that remote province. I wish to thank the Chinese Government most warmly and sincerely for the confidence which was shown me before, during and after the journey.

When, on my return to Stockholm, I began to write down our experiences in the form of a book for the general public, I found the material much too ample to be contained in one volume. The subjects I had to deal with belonged to quite different fields—war and politics, the technical communications problems of Central Asia, and certain geographical and hydrographical changes which are taking place in the interior of that great continent. I resolved to devote a separate book to each of these three topics. My account of the journey through the Gobi desert was already complete in manuscript when I began to reflect on the swiftness with which political groupings in Asia nowadays change shape, and realised how important it was to describe the position as it was in 1934, before it was rendered out of date by new political storms and revolutions.

So there lay to my hand, quite unsought, a travel trilogy: the War, the Road, the Lake.

In the present volume, the first of the three, I tell the story of the bloody war which made a desert of Sinkiang from 1931 to 1934, and in the last stage of which our expedition, against our will, became entangled. The chief character is the young Tungan general Ma Chung-yin. The Tungans are Chinese who have embraced Islam and are probably also separated from the Chinese by certain racial differences. Ma is the Chinese version of the name of the prophet Mohammed. But *ma* also

means "horse", and so we always called Ma Chung-yin "Big Horse".

The second book, to be entitled *The Silk Road*, will deal with the 10,000-mile journey by motor-car through Eastern and Inner Asia. It will be a historical account of the classical Silk Road which two thousand years ago joined China, the land of the Seres, to the Roman Empire, and finally of our captivity at Urunchi, the capital of Sinkiang, which lasted for four months and, while certainly lenient, was nevertheless a trial to our patience and our nerves.

The third book, which I shall call *The Wandering Lake*, will describe a journey by canoe on the new branch of the Tarim to Lake Lop-nor, and our experiences on a most interesting trip with only two cars westward from Tun-hwang to the Lop basin, through completely unknown country.

As the composition, equipment and personnel of the expedition really form part of the book on the Silk Road, I will here say only a few words about its organisation.

Our medical man was Dr. David Hummel, our topographer Mr. Folke Bergman. We had two road and railway engineers from Nanking, Mr. Irving C. Yew and Mr. C. C. Kung, and also a surveyor and astronomer, Mr. Parker C. Chen; he had previously accompanied Dr. Nils Hörner on his travels, which lasted four years. Both our mechanics, Georg Söderbom and Karl Efraim Hill, were Swedish missionaries' sons from Northern China. These two and Hummel each drove a car, and besides them we had two Mongol drivers, Serat and Jomcha. The cook's name was Chia Kwei. The other servants were Chinese called Li, Liu Chia and San Wa-tse, and the Mongol Chokdung. So we were fifteen strong.

I thank every one of these my comrades most heartily for the loyalty, zeal and efficiency they showed and for the courage with which they faced the most perilous situations.

The convoy consisted of a Tudor Sedan and four lorries, all Fords. Three of the lorries were 1932 four-cylinder vehicles; the

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fourth, a 1933 eight-cylinder lorry, was a present to me from Edsel Ford—a kindness for which I here express my gratitude.

Finally, I would thank all those with whose photographs the book is illustrated.

SVEN HEDIN

STOCKHOLM,
September 20, 1935

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