

SCHMITT'S GRAND COUP

By H. R. SPENCER

Flourished in the Fatherland, Schmitt should have been crowned king of them all. My observations of the man and his methods in Port Arthur before the war justify me, I think, in making this statement. But he was nothing if not progressive, and it is not of his petty achievements that I wish to tell. In Port Arthur they are still talking about the grand coup he planned, and of how it was carried through to a successful conclusion.

At the time of which I speak, Schmitt had captured the hearts of the military by his jovial activities, and had become the social hub around which the social spokes revolved. Then a man was judged by his storage ability; and for the various and sundry braus on the Manchurian market Schmitt had a capacity like a bulk oil freighter.

Moreover, he had a good, solid, North Country headpiece, so firmly set on his vast shoulders that the highest tide of *burgerliches brau* could not budge it from its balance. Vasinovitch, the Russian colonel who used to be the champion absorber, tried conclusions with Schmitt a few times, but always floated away from his moorings, and finally resigned his title, and became thenceforth a humbled but ardent admirer of that mighty man.

Schmitt flourished in those prosperous days, and the adulterated foods, French wines, German beers, and other necessities of life which he supplied to the Russky hordes enjoyed a tremendous popularity. Vasinovitch was really responsible for this satisfactory state of affairs, for he let the contracts for all supplies of the kind. He exacted the usual Russian "squeeze," and Schmitt his one per cent, so both seemed satisfied, loved each other apparently, and became bosom companions. There's where the colonel made a mistake. He was all kinds of a rip-roaring good fellow, but he allowed valuable information to spill over from time to time that should have reposed forever in his faithful breast. Governmental secrets thus came into the possession of Schmitt the unscrupulous. Rosy rainbow dreams of mile high stacks of rubles lulled to slumber every night that acquisitive, deceitful, thieving, tricky, treacherous son of Gambrinus. In an old, yellow bank in his native city he had what he called his Hamburg stake, which consisted of a goodly store of ill-gotten gold, drawing interest and awaiting his return.

On the other hand, Vasinovitch was generous to a fault, and spent his money like the royal prodigal he was. Schmitt shared the Colonel's pleasures, took delight in his company, and accepted his hospitality, but clung to his own cash like a burdock to a little woolly lamb. And so it was wine, feasting and song to an unconscionable degree, and both of the worthies were having the times of their lives. But one bright day it changed, as all things will, and this is the way it came about.

At four o'clock on that calamitous afternoon the Colonel closed with Schmitt a monster deal for army supplies, and to celebrate it they repaired straightway to a drink emporium. In a retired corner they talked things over again, meanwhile consuming just enough liquor to raise their spirits to a never-mind pitch. Soon they had not a care in the wide, wide world—all was sunshine, roses, and marguerites, and the more good friends who came in to join them in a draught, the more care free they became. In fact, Vasinovitch became downright reckless.

"I tell you what," said he, his mind reverting to a former occasion when the same convivial crowd sat grouped around the same table; "I bet you a thousand rubles I can drink more beer than you this once."

"Done," said Schmitt. "I take it."

Rabelais could have described the bout that ensued. I cannot. Suffice to say that at the end of three hours of strenuous application Schmitt was still bright eyed and rosy cheeked, whereas poor Vasinovitch sank back in his armchair with a gurgling cry of "Ne mets!"

"Get him to his room at once," said one, and this they did with the assistance of some Chinamen with a wheelbarrow.

"What has happened I don't know, but I can fix it," said Schmitt. "Leave me to him," and he waved the crowd from the house.

Schmitt undressed the unfortunate fellow to the accompaniment of a string of sputtering, gasping, choking protestations, and placed him on a couch. "I drown," murmured the Colonel, feebly.

Schmitt worked harder than any coal-heaver. He was past master of all the arts of first aid to the injured in a struggle with the amber tide. Soon he had the satisfaction of seeing the Colonel established in comfort upon his bed, where he sank forthwith into deep sleep. Poor, poor Petrofsky, Makaroff Vasinovitch! His life was saved, but at what a price!

"What think?"

"Mebbe one lac, mebbe two lac, s'pose can do."

"Two lac. One b'long my, one b'long Sing," said Schmitt.

Sing turned to his dinner with a thoughtful air. Picking up the end of a strip of duckskin, he put it between his teeth and snapped it out of sight with a noise like a banana man devouring macaroni. Schmitt toyed with the sharks' fins, and called for beer.

"Who b'long?" asked the Chinaman.

"Vasinovitch."

Sing gave a few exhibitions of sword-juggling with his ebony chopsticks, sized up his *vis-a-vis* thoughtfully, and finally remarked, "Can do." Whereupon Schmitt delivered into his keeping a fat bundle of papers, and vanished.

That night Schmitt laid himself down on his feather bed with a contented mind. Rosy dreams

chain of thought was thereby broken. "Herein!" he called, and Vasinovitch entered, pale, haggard, and groaning pitifully with every step he took. Schmitt welcomed him, and drew up another chair.

"Ah, to-day I die," moaned the poor Colonel. "I am come to express my farewells. The night that passed I cannot sleep, but, my friend, I owe my wretched life to you, and for that I express my deepest gratitude. Ah, had I but died and ended all! General Robberoffsky gave me some important papers to deliver for him, and they're lost! I forgot all about them, and they have gone from my pocket forever. At six o'clock Robberoffsky is shooting himself, and I join him if the papers are not found. The General says he cannot live longer, since he should have delivered the papers himself to the Commandant instead of trusting them to a fool like me. So how can I live? I die!"

As Schmitt closed the door on his visitor a large smile of jubilation lit up his beefy face, and he leaped into the air and clapped his feet together in ecstatic throes of joy.

"Too good; too easy!" he confided to the room at large. "Now to tell Sing, and at two o'clock I take the money."

Sing was indulging in a little opium preparatory to having a few rosy ruble dreams of his own, when Schmitt burst in upon him, all breathless and eager. The Chinaman grunted and stolidly waved his visitor to a dark, backless seat of teak.

"What thing?" he inquired, languidly.

"Can make pay proper fashion two o'clock. You give me paper back now, I settle by and by."

"No can do. My fien' have lock up. S'pose you pay one lac, can catch. S'pose you no pay, no can catch."

"By and by can pay," said Schmitt, angrily. "Sing, this no b'long white man fashion. Before never have robbery, Sing. What thing happen now?"

But Sing wasn't in the mood for argument. There was a steamer leaving at three and Sing knew it. He was afraid Schmitt knew it too, and he wisely decided it would be just as well to get his share on the transaction before giving the papers up.

"Sing, I pay you four o'clock. First must catch papers, then can settle."

"No can do," reiterated Sing the sly.

Schmitt was furious, and finally left in high dudgeon. What a blithering idiot he had been! Of course, if Vasinovitch had not come to him he should have been obliged to use Sing in effecting the sale of the papers, but as it was, he was simply throwing away a hundred thousand rubles.

"I will strain a point," he said to himself. "I will go to the bank, borrow this money for Sing, and when Vasie digs up I will return it again."

So he went to the bank and obtained a big collection of nice new paper bills. Sing was out when Schmitt reached his shop, but he had left word to wait, as he would not be gone long. Schmitt fumed and stewed around until two forty-five, when Sing reappeared.

"Here's your money," shouted Schmitt. "Give me the papers."

Sing counted the bills deliberately, and thrusting them into a pocket somewhere in the depths of his blouse, he walked to the safe and turned the combination. He handed the papers to Schmitt, who examined them hurriedly, saw that all was right, and tore from the room. The banks closed at three o'clock, and there was no time to be lost if he was to get his money that day. Colonel Vasinovitch and General Robberoffsky were in the former's apartments when Schmitt entered.

"My dear Schmitt," they cried in unison as they embraced him and covered his face with kisses, "you have saved our lives! It was so kind of you to find those papers! Sing brought them to us only a few minutes ago, saying you had told him they were ours. Dear Schmitt, what can we do for you Name it!"

But with these words they stopped and exchanged glances.

"I forgot," said the Colonel, apologetically. "We must wait. You have, dear Schmitt, our undying gratitude and affection; but, as for this world's goods, alas! Sing demanded all we had on earth, and we have paid."

Schmitt gasped, drew his precious papers from an inside pocket and looked at them again.

"Copies!" exclaimed his companions, in the same breath.

Schmitt covered his eyes with a pudgy hand, and sank into a chair with a deep groan of misery. Through the window could be seen the good ship *Laimoon* moving majestically across the bay. Hanging over the taffrail was a yellow-skinned Celestial, gazing at the whirlpools churned up by the propeller. Rosy rainbow dreams of mile high stacks of rubles were flitting through his brain, while dimmer and dimmer in the distance grew Port Arthur.



SING FINALLY REMARKED, "CAN DO."

And now Sing makes his appearance. Sing was a Shanghai man, bright as a shiny brass button, and crooked as a hopvine gone wrong. Schmitt and he were after-dark cronies, and together they had pulled off many and many a shady deal. They met presently in the street, exchanged a few words, and at seven that evening Schmitt slid through the side entrance to Sing's house. Dinner was ready, and the two sat down.

"What thing?" asked Sing, munching a fifty-two-year-old egg. His beady black eyes were two glittering interrogation points.

"Fine pidgin," said Schmitt. "This time have catchee telegraph code and plans all garrisons Manchuria-Siberia side."

"How much?" inquired Sing, significantly, jumping at once to the gist of the matter.

of mile high stacks of rubles lulled him to a sound and soothing sleep. When morning came he awoke at the usual time, shaved himself, took his shower, and climbed into his clothes, better satisfied with himself than ever before in his life. He was gay, very gay, and he softly hummed, "Du Bist wie Eine Blume" as he was sitting down to his fruit, porridge, fish, ham and eggs, steak, cold beef, hot rolls and coffee. The morning paper intimated the probability of war with Japan in the very near future, and Schmitt's agile mind immediately conceived the idea of setting a price of three lacs instead of two on the papers he had placed in the hands of Sing. Why not? Japan would pay the price. If they were worth it to the Japs, why not the same amount to the Russkies? Why not, indeed? But suddenly there came a knocking at his chamber door, and his

Schmitt had been thinking.

"Why not offer a reward?" he asked.

"Ah, and then every one would find out. It is that which must be avoided. It is the disgrace to the General and to me about which we must think. Still, we would pay, we would pay gladly. My good friend, my dear friend, I commission you to spend anything, everything for their recovery. I beseech you to find them. Will you not do so for me?"

"I will try, but I must think, my dear Vasie; so leave me now, and I will call on you at two o'clock. I have your authority to spend as much as three hundred thousand rubles for the papers, yes? Well, then, I will ask you to sign a letter I shall prepare."

Schmitt disappeared for a few moments. When he returned he held a letter in his hands. This the Colonel signed, and departed.