

A MANIA FOR BUYING RESULTS IN A STRANGE COLLECTION

Sale of the Effects of the Late Mrs. Theodore Moss Reveals a Remarkable Assortment of Things Gathered Apparently Through the Mere Love of Shopping.

POSSIBLY the most remarkable instance of the collecting mania that has ever come to light is that which was revealed by the sale of the effects of the late Mrs. Theodore Moss, which has been going on for the last two weeks at the family's home, 543 Madison Avenue.

Details of the discovery of her valuable jewels in an old pedestal have appeared in print within the last few days, but in general the larger public has had little information of the circumstances leading to this find and little idea of the vast stores which for years have been accumulating in the house where Mrs. Moss lived up to the time of her death.

Day after day, mornings and afternoons, in the gloom enshrouded drawing room of the old four-story and basement brownstone house the voice of the auctioneer has been heard crying out the wares, the assembling of which had occupied the better part of a lifetime, and among which, in addition to much that was intrinsically valuable, there were innumerable items that have long since lost their value simply through the fact that time passes and fashions change.

Collectors of rare pottery and pictures very often discount time. Pictures by acknowledged masters and examples of fine craftsmanship in art often grow more precious with the years. So, too, old laces have an increasing value. But among the vast possessions which Mrs. Moss stored away here was a surprising amount of odds and ends in women's finery which, though originally expensive, is now, on account of the change of fashions, of practically no earthly use.

There were buyers for these things at the auction sale, for as often as there can always be found buyers for everything and anything so long as they seem bargains, but beyond starting for some one else a collection of apparently useless objects the old-fashioned finery appeared to have no value.

Silks and satins in the piece and the roll, muslins delicate as a spider's web, laces of intricate design over which eyes must have grown dim many, many years ago, curious examples of old handcraft in embroideries, and a vast miscellaneous collection of all those gewgaws which women so much admire at all times—these things in plenty, and a surprising amount of odds and ends in women's finery which, though originally expensive, is now, on account of the change of fashions, of practically no earthly use.

An afternoon at the sale revealed a crowd of eager, excited women jostling one another in the hunt for a place to see and hear, and catching the attention of the auctioneer like a flash of fish struggling for the bit of food that chance or the fisherman has cast into the water.

In the old carp pond at Fontainebleau hundreds of fish, many of them of a hoary antiquity, swim about day after day waiting for the crusts of bread thrown to them by curious wayfarers at the fine old castle. As the bread falls into the water they dodge and shove and push, leap over one another, tussle and fight, for its possession. And though a little less violently aggressive, perhaps, the women at an auction sale which has been in progress at the late Mrs. Moss home for all the world not unlike those greedy carp.

Could the collector herself be present to note the feverish buying she might have been as much surprised as anybody. For Mrs. Moss, according to those who knew her well, was not the emotional type of woman who loses her head, buys big in a poke, and is sorry ever after. The very fact that she was shrewd in business matters—that she knew the value of a dollar, and that her buying was systematic and with a knowledge of values—these were the more strange the story of her vast collections.

Among the effects found after Mrs. Moss's death was a little, well-thumbed volume devoted to the subject of collecting. Its writer, at one time a clergyman in this city, now teacher of English in a Western university, expressed in a preface his belief that no one could be truly happy who did not collect. If you cannot afford to collect pictures or bric-a-brac, he wrote, collect something—buttons, business cards, stamps, butterflies—it really does not matter what—only be a collector of some sort or other if you would realize the full sum of human contentment.

In a measure there can be no doubt that the advice was good. Every man and woman ought to have a hobby, and collecting, if not carried to excess, is as good a hobby as any other.

But here, again, there is danger, first that the mere desire for collecting will kill real appreciation, just as we know that there are collectors of books and paintings who buy merely on account of rarity, without any sense of the intrinsic merits of their possessions, and, secondly, there is danger that a spirit of selfish and unreasonable acquisitiveness will develop.

The hoarding of vast quantities of merchandise, merely for the sake of hoarding it, represents one of the most remarkable examples of this kind of acquisitiveness imaginable.

In her earlier purchases it is probable that Mrs. Moss bought with an idea of the practical utility of her possessions. Fine linens and silks and laces, tableware, silver, crockery, and the thousand and one odds and ends which fit out the feminine wardrobe and the household might readily enough tempt any woman with a taste for beautiful things and the means to gratify it.

But the idea of finding use for all her many purchases must have been discarded many years ago. If she ever thought about it. And still this strange victim of the collecting mania—for it is that when it reaches such a point as this—went on adding to her stores, duplicating and tripling them after them, and locking up a veritable fortune in material things, many of which became less and less valuable as time went on.

Imagine to what uses the same amount of money might have been put! If, for instance, instead of investing it in useless fineries it had been spent in ameliorating the condition of the poor. Imagine how many barren households might have been made bright and cheerful; how many young girls with barely enough to clothe themselves might have been relieved of anxious cares; if, instead of ordering up van-load after van-load of furniture and fixings with bolts and rolls of dry goods, tossed aside probably never to be seen again by their owner in her lifetime, the money had been devoted to charity. And yet those who knew Mrs. Moss in her lifetime say she was a woman who was very charitable and who gave liberally to those less fortunate than herself.

So far as could be learned, the Moss family was never aware of the extent to which Mrs. Moss was investing in this merchandise. The house in Madison Avenue contains seventeen or more rooms and of these at least ten were used as a storeroom by Mrs. Moss. She carries the keys, and no one ever entered the rooms but herself. Here her purchases were tucked away as fast as they arrived and when, after her death, the rooms were opened, the sight was one to amaze even



Mrs. Theodore Moss.

those who knew of Mrs. Moss's remarkable inclination for buying. An elaborate series of drawers and shelves, suggestive of a miniature department store, had been arranged in a number of the rooms, and into these receptacles the goods had been poured. There were found hundreds of yards of dress materials and laces, silk petticoats, berthas and boas by the dozen, feathers and ribbons by the gross, fans and furbelows of every sort, in boxes and packages, many of them still tied up as they had come from the stores, and still bearing the original price tags.

Her books, many of them subscription sets of the kind that are sold by agents, and with innumerable first editions together with set after set of Thackeray, Dickens, Longfellow, Hawthorne, and other standard works, filled two rooms. Several other rooms were jammed with household furniture. And in still others there was the vast assortment of smaller articles, containing about everything im-

aginable from tea sets to collar and cuff sets in linen and lace.

From the largest to the smallest item it was all by wholesale—dozens of this, half dozen of that, and hundreds upon hundreds of yards of fine material.

Strangely enough, though both Mr. and Mrs. Moss had been known as large buyers of fine jewelry, a careful search failed to reveal any trace of these treasures. The family was amazed. They knew that Mrs. Moss was not inclined to sell her possessions, and to much of the jewelry particularly a certain amount of sentiment attached. Room after room was ransacked, but still not a trace of it could be found.

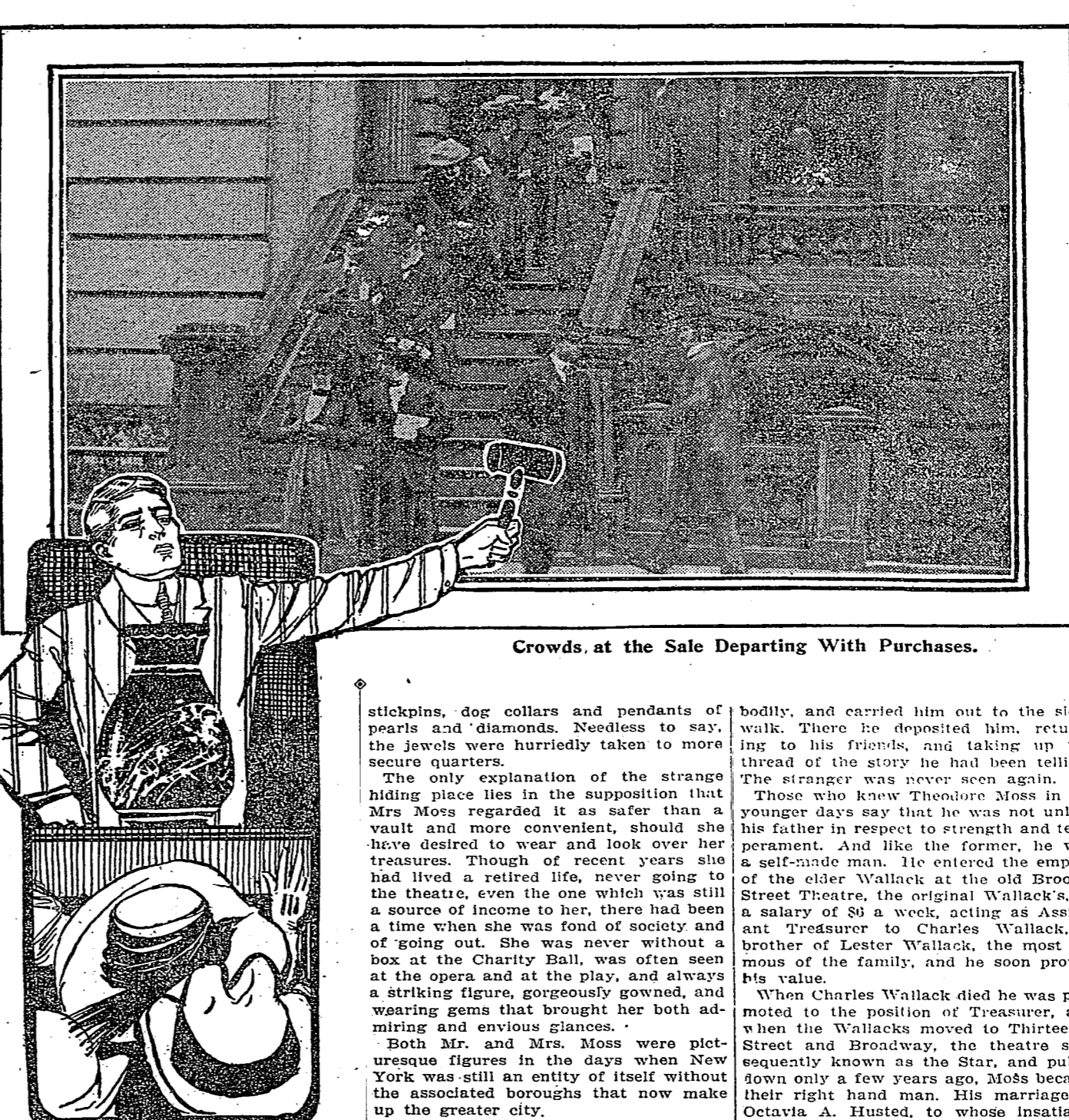
Her son, Royal E. Moss, and her two grandsons, Beverly and Randall Keator, both of whom had lived in their grandmother's home after the death of their mother, spent days in the search, incidentally discussing every conceivable notion as to the possible disposition of the jewelry. The idea of theft was scouted,

and yet the gems could not be found.

Then, one afternoon, a few weeks ago, Beverly Keator, passing hurriedly through the drawing-room, accidentally struck his side against a tall pedestal holding a heavy bronze ornament. The pedestal swayed and toppled, and the ornament came down with a crash. From the hollowed inside of the pedestal several tissue paper parcels were spilled out upon the floor. They contained rings and brooches.

An examination showed that the pedestal was a veritable gold mine, containing jewelry, much of it old fashioned and to setting, but with many precious gems, and subsequently appraised at a value of over \$50,000.

One brooch alone contained over 300 diamonds. In addition to this there was Russian enameled garters blazing with gems, a gold owl's head containing fifty diamonds, a necklace of thirty diamonds, the centre stone of which weighed fifteen carats, and an endless array of rings,



Crowds at the Sale Departing With Purchases.

stickpins, dog collars and pendants of pearls and diamonds. Needless to say, the jewels were hurriedly taken to more secure quarters.

The only explanation of the strange hiding place lies in the supposition that Mrs. Moss regarded it as safer than a vault and more convenient should she have desired to wear and look over her treasures. Though of recent years she had lived a retired life, never going to the theatre, even the one which was still a source of income to her, there had been a time when she was fond of society and of going out. She was never without a box at the Charity Ball, was often seen at the opera and at the play, and always a striking figure, gorgeously gowned, and wearing gems that brought her both admiring and envious glances.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Moss were picturesque figures in the days when New York was still an entity of itself without the associated boroughs that now make up the greater city.

Theodore Moss's father had a chandler's shop in Maiden Lane, and in his day was as well known a man as his son was destined to become. He was famous as a story-teller, and was always one of a little group who made a rendezvous of good fellowship at the old Stevens House. A big, muscular, handsome man, he was said to have been of somewhat erratic temperament, quick to take offense, and never loath to defend himself against encroachments on his dignity.

On one occasion it is said that a stranger, a sombrero-wearing Westerner, wandered into the hotel where the elder Moss and his cronies were having a bowl of punch and regaling each other with gossip of the town and the new anecdotes they had to tell.

The stranger joined in the conversation uninvited, and then, in a burst of spiritual eloquence, began to dilate upon his fierceness and his strength. Mr. Moss listened patiently for a few minutes, then growing tired of the man's interruptions, rose from his chair, picked the fellow up

bodily, and carried him out to the sidewalk. There he deposited him, returning to his friends, and taking up the thread of the story he had been telling. The stranger was never seen again.

Those who knew Theodore Moss in his younger days say that he was not unlike his father in respect to strength and temperament. And like the former, he was a self-made man. He entered the employ of the elder Wallack at the old Broome Street Theatre, the original Wallack's, at a salary of \$8 a week, acting as Assistant Treasurer to Charles Wallack, a brother of Lester Wallack, the most famous of the family, and he soon proved his value.

When Charles Wallack died he was promoted to the position of Treasurer, and when the Wallacks moved to Thirteenth Street and Broadway, the theatre subsequently known as the Star, and pulled down only a few years ago, Moss became their right hand man. His marriage to Octavia A. Husted, to whose insatiable collecting habit this article is devoted, occurred in 1864. At the time of the marriage Mr. Moss was earning about \$10 a week.

But during his association with the Thirteenth Street house he became the intimate of men like W. R. Travers, the famous wit; W. Butler Duncan, Addison Cammack, and Leonard Jerome. They controlled affairs at the Academy of Music in those days, and in the various important social functions which occurred it was natural that the Mosses should have a part.

To a woman like Mrs. Moss, young, beautiful, and brilliant—for it is said that she was an exceptionally clever conversationalist, as well as a woman of great personal attractiveness—these great affairs came as breaks in a somewhat rigorous routine. Mr. Moss had not yet acquired his fortune, but circumstances had thrown him in a position where he met people of prominence and distinction. And it was fortunate that his young wife, whose name was embrodered, was both a sympathetic and helpful com-

panion, and one who, when occasion required, could gracefully fill her position in the set in which they moved.

When the reception was arranged for the Prince of Wales Mr. Moss was one of those most active, and both he and his young wife were among the guests. In the big Sanitary Fair held in the Twenty-second Regiment Armory in Fourteenth Street, a notable social function of that day, and at the famous Crystal Palace Fair, the Mosses were also conspicuous.

By this time Mrs. Moss had begun to attract attention as a woman of exceptional taste in dress, and no account of the affairs was complete without a detailed description of what she wore.

When Leonard Jerome opened the Jerome Park Race Track Theodore Moss was made the Treasurer, and one great social function after another served to extend Mrs. Moss's acquaintance and her social influence.

Prosperity came and with it the means to satisfy luxurious tastes, but Mr. and Mrs. Moss were never considered extravagant people. Both husband and wife, however, were lovers of fine diamonds, and invested heavily in them. And it is said that even at this early date Mrs. Moss had developed an unusual fondness for fine fabrics, and had begun to collect odd and beautiful patterns and weaves of silk, fine laces, exceptional table linens, not for hoarding, but for use, because she enjoyed looking at such things and liked to have them in her possession.

Mrs. Theodore Moss, described as a woman of medium height, dark, and as a girl vivacious and pleasing in appearance and manner, came of old Revolutionary stock, her mother being one of the Stevens family of New Jersey. Her mother was the wife of Peter V. Husted. One of her daughters, Florence Moss, married Morris B. Flinn, once well known as a member of the County Democracy. She afterward married C. H. Gilbert, the architect. Another daughter of Mrs. Moss married Arthur Wallack, son of Lester Wallack, the famous actor, while a third daughter married Eugene Hays, member of an old family of bankers, and a fourth daughter married Thomas R. Keator, a member of the New York Athletic Club, who at one time held the record as an amateur sculler. Still another daughter married William P. Earle of the well-known family of hotel proprietors, and the youngest daughter married Edward Braden of Chicago. Mrs. Arthur Wallack, Mrs. Eugene Hays, and Mrs. Thomas Keator are dead.

The son, Royal Moss, married the daughter of Mr. Drake of Madison Avenue, for many years a neighbor of the Moss family. Previous to their purchase of the Madison Avenue property, in the early seventies, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Moss lived in a leased house in Twenty-second Street, near Sixth Avenue.

The couple were fond of company, and before the marriage of their daughters they entertained a great deal, both at their town home and at Long Branch. In the summer their country home was always filled with guests, and they were known as the most charming of entertainers.

Those who knew Mrs. Moss best say that she was a woman of a very kindly disposition, whose charities were numerous, though she made no public display of giving. She was a good business woman, and though in recent years she had become somewhat of a recluse, her responsibility for its maintenance rested upon her, she kept in touch with affairs and always knew what was going on.

At Mr. Moss's death he left a will intrusting all of his property to his wife. But at her death it will be found.

Six heirs remained to divide the property, which at the present time, in addition to the vast collections of merchandise and jewelry that it has required two weeks already of auctioning to dispose of, included the ownership and lease of land of five acres, situated on the corner of Thirtieth Street, a valuable house and tract of ground at Seabright, a large tract of land on Jerome Avenue, originally invested in by Mr. Moss at the advice of Leonard Jerome. In all the fortune is estimated at something over a million dollars.

Column after column would be required even to enumerate the items of merchandise found in the Madison Avenue house after Mrs. Moss's death. Five large catalogues were printed for the auction sale, each containing from a thousand to three thousand items, and many of the items dealing with lots in a dozen or more pieces, or rolls and packages of material containing from fifty to one hundred yards each.

Some faint idea of the vastness of the collection may be had from the fact that in the dry goods section alone there were over ten thousand yards of lace, from the commonest point to Cluny, Valenciennes, Oriental, and rose point, some of it worth as much as \$125 a yard. In some of the laces, made to order for the buyer, Mrs. Moss's name was embrodered.

There were at least twenty thousand yards of ribbon of every description, from the narrowest baby blue to broad flowered sash patterns of the most expensive sort. At least one hundred gowns were found, there was a collection of more than a hundred parasols, and the dress trimming ran into hundreds of yards. More than five thousand yards of silk in the piece and fully as many yards of fine velvets in rolls were found piled on the shelves. These were still in the original wrappings.

Every variety of dress goods in the same enormous quantities, as well as about two thousand collars of lace and embroidery, and miles of edgings, were discovered still fastened to the original cards. There were at least a hundred dressing sacks, and fifty tea gowns, from the simple linen patterns worth \$2 to elaborately embrodered costumes as high as \$200 each. Innumerable curious old-fashioned dolmans and capes were found, as well as many dresses made up with the bustle and indicating very clearly the old vintage to which they belonged.

There were at least five hundred table covers, and nearly as many sofa cushion covers, while the table cloths, napkins, &c., would have been sufficient to stock an ordinary-sized hotel.

In addition the books and pictures, bric-a-brac, and furniture filled various rooms, and there was scarcely an item which had not been duplicated. A rough but conservative estimate of the original expense of Mrs. Moss's shopping expeditions places it at about \$200,000, while the sale in its entirety netted possibly \$25,000.

Time and time again the auctioneer was compelled to announce that he would have to stop the selling if the ladies did not give him air, as the crowd around his stand became so dense that breathing was difficult. Nevertheless, in spite of the desire for bargains much of the merchandise had so far outlived its usefulness that even the bargain hunters failed to appreciate it. What might have been done with the money thus tied up in a useless hoarding of objects the owner could not by any possible chance use in several lifetimes may be easily imagined. After all, then, even good advice ought to be taken with caution. The collecting fat is a good one, but like other things it may be overdone.