



The Story of
THE HAMMER COLLECTION
of Russian Imperial Treasures

by AARON MARC STEIN
Art Critic, New York Evening Post

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The largest collection of jewels and other personal possessions of the Romanoffs, formerly rulers of all the Russias, ever to be shown in America, has been placed on exhibition in the Georgian Room at Lord & Taylor's.

Ikons dating back to the fourteenth century; other sacred images in which each nimbus is incrustated with gems; furniture, porcelains, brocades and the fabulous jewels that were one of the oriental or mediaeval characteristics of the Russian Imperial Court, are included in the collection, formed by a young American doctor who searched village market places for relics of imperial glory.

The doctor was Armand Hammer, M.D. It was a very new M. D. conferred on him by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University, and the young physician set out on an errand of adventure and mercy. He organized a relief expedition which reached Russia in 1921. Civil war had hardly ended, and in the Urals Dr. Hammer found famine sweeping the country.

BREAD GREATEST NEED

His two interpreters, his drugs and his medicines, he explained today, were of virtually no value in fighting famine. The Urals had greater need of bread than of a young graduate of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Hammer was able to

arrange with the authorities for the shipment of 1,000,000 bushels of grain from America for relief in the Ural country. The shipment was handled in the United States by his brothers, Harry Hammer and Victor J. Hammer.

Through this transaction, Dr. Hammer added, the three brothers became big business men in a Russia that had just rejected big business. They were given important concessions by the Government, and

Dr. Hammer remained in Russia, managing the concessions and acting as agent for American industrial corporations.

"After the revolution," Dr. Hammer said, "large

sections of the imperial palaces were turned into lodging places, clubs and offices. Much of the contents of the palaces were scattered, and surviving members of the old aristocracy were selling their treasures in an effort to live."

STARTS HIS COLLECTION

It was at this time that Dr. Hammer began to form his collection. His only competitors, he said, were a few persons in foreign embassies who had the funds and the interest in works of art to make purchases



betrothal. On the back is the original inscription of gift. The halo of the Christ head is a solid mass of precious stones and fine gems incrust the frame and background. In the nimbus alone there are 128 diamonds.

There are 300 ikons in the collection and they date back as far as the fourteenth century. Many are jeweled and even those that are not laden with gems are precious as rare examples of the esoteric Russian development of the tradition of Byzantine painting.

Several Easter eggs in the collection come into the category of crown jewels. They were gifts made on Easter Sunday, according to the Russian custom, within the Imperial family. One egg is of rose enamel, lavishly jeweled. It was a gift from the last of the Czars to the Dowager Empress.

TINY PANELS IN EGG

The egg unfolds to form a small screen with each panel decorated with a delicate miniature panel of one of the Empress' Danish castles. The two end panels bear miniatures of her two yachts. It was presented in celebration of the Easter of 1895 and was six years in the making.

Another of these eggs is of lapis lazuli covered with an elaborate gold

such as he made throughout the country.

When the Five-Year Plan was organized the Russian authorities took over the Hammer concessions. As part of the transaction, Dr. Hammer explained, permission was granted to the Hammer brothers to take their art collection out of the country.

When Dr. Hammer finally left Russia after ten years of residence, the collection numbered more than 2,000 items. It has been exhibited in several of the larger cities of the United States, but has never before had a public showing in New York.

ALEXANDER II SNUFF BOX

Among the jewels is the snuff box of the Emperor Alexander II. A gold box, it is encrusted with diamonds and bears the monogram of Alexander in diamonds on its lid. Another important collection of precious stones is set in an ikon presented by the Empress Catherine the Great to her son, Paul I, on the day of his



filigree. Approximately the size of an ostrich egg, it is lavishly jeweled and set with a square flat diamond into which is cut the monogram of the Empress and the date. This egg was the gift of the late Czar to his wife. When opened this egg contains a double eagle set with diamonds and a miniature portrait of the Czarevitch, done in the full round. The bust portrait of the little Prince in his sailor suit is handled in a naturalistically life-like manner.

Both of these gifts were the work of Faberge, court jeweler, who according to Dr. Hammer, is now starving in Paris. He cannot today find patrons for the kind of work for which he is fitted. Only the Imperial family of Russia required such elaboration of gold and jewel-ing, a variety of the jeweler's art that has been dead in the Western World since the days of Renaissance.

MINIATURE OF NICHOLAS II

Another Imperial gift piece in the collection which is the work of Faberge, is a miniature of the late Czar Nicholas II presented by him to the Empress in recognition of their thirteenth wedding anniversary.

China from the Imperial manu-factory presents another extensive part of the collection. This factory produced porcelains only on order of a member of the Imperial family,

with the result that its products before the revolution were only in the possession of the Romanoffs or of the few favored individuals who received gifts of china from the Imperial rulers.

Dr. Hammer said he had acquired some examples from the period of Nicholas II, in a small restaurant in Moscow. His dinner was served to him on the Imperial plates and he engaged the proprietor in conversation. The restaurateur told him that he had purchased them cheap at a sale, but that they were not very satisfactory since the dishwashers broke them too easily. He sold them to Dr. Hammer for the price of replacing them with heavier earthenware crockery that would prove more durable under the heavy hands of his kitchen help.

Gold brocades and vestments in the collection, Dr. Hammer said, he saved from destruction when he saw them at St. Petersburg in the Czar's Winter Palace. It had been planned to destroy them for salvage of the gold and silver threads. Dr. Hammer succeeded in convincing the authorities in charge of their disposal that their value as works of art was greater than the value of the precious metals. He won the argument by the simple expedient of paying more for them than the metals would bring.

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