

## **Plantin, the Moretus and their work / by Maurits Sabbe.**

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Museum Plantin-Moretus.

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THE PLANTIN-MORETUS MUSEUM

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# PLANTIN

THE MORETUS  
AND THEIR WORK

BY

MAURITS SABBE, Ph. D.

Curator of the Plantin-Moretus Museum  
Antwerp

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1926

Published by L. J. KRYN, Brussels



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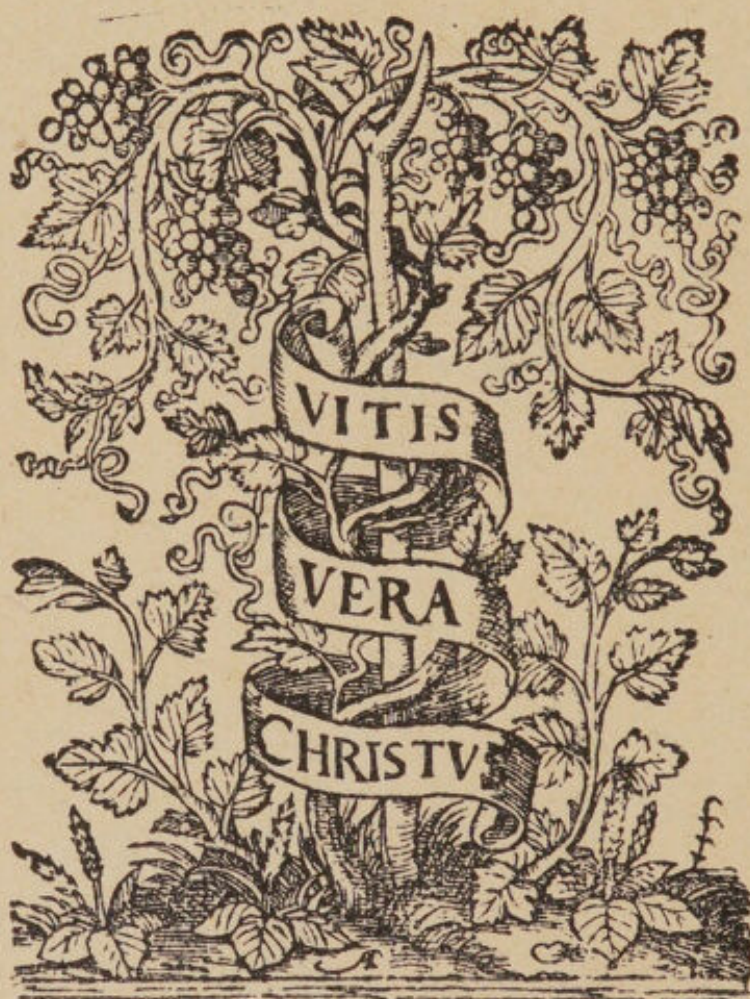


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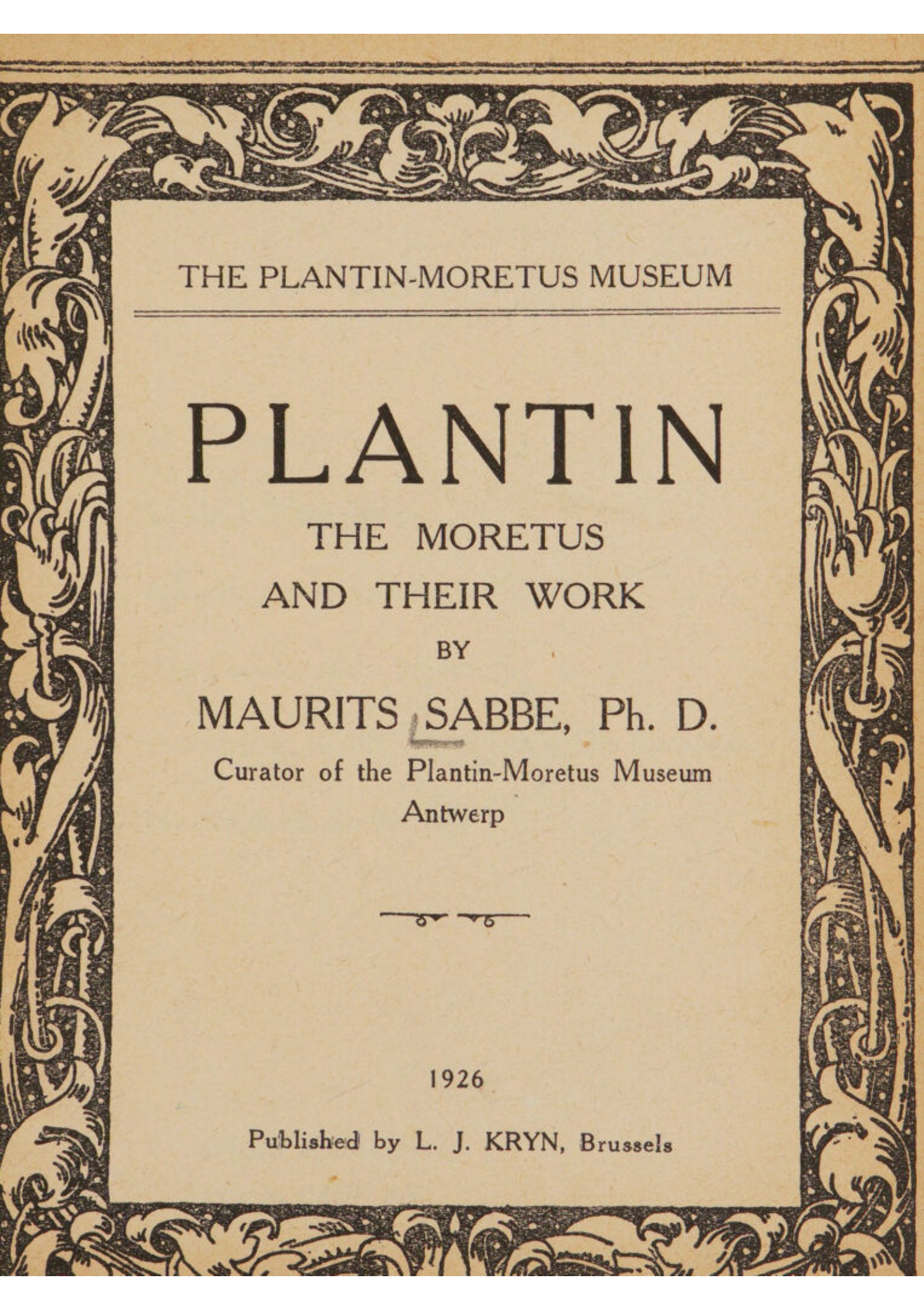


Plate 1.



One of Plantin's oldest Printers' Marks, cut in Wood by Arnold Nicolai.



The book cover features a wide, ornate border of stylized floral and foliate motifs in a dark ink on a light background. The central text is contained within a rectangular frame defined by this border.

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## THE SOUL OF THE HOUSE

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In the slumbering rooms of the Plantin-Moretus Museum the mind calls up quite easily the memory of the founder of the house, and of those who, in the course of ages, completed his work. All that surrounds us is conducive to this. The style of the building and its organization are descriptive of the people. The smallest stone of the building bears the stamp of Plantin's way of living and of that of the first Moretus.

The House of Plantin has, less than any other Museum in the world, the character of a didactic catalogue for bookmen and critics. It is a place to work in, a home, a refuge for the student, where the life of old has simply been interrupted, and it needs only a slight spur of the imagination to see it resume its course. And yet here Fancy is not allowed to follow her own free will, for all around her speaks of discipline and keeps her strictly within the lines drawn by strong personalities such as those of Plantin and Balthasar Moretus I.

It is chiefly of these two great ancestors that the house speaks to us.

Here we find Plantin who in spite of his mystical



reveries was entirely governed by very practical, unostentatious virtues; the man who taught the merchants of Antwerp the wisdom of humanism, not as a hero or a pioneer, but as a skilful worker, a perspicacious manufacturer and merchant, the man whose life will remain an object lesson of energy and spiritual balance for coming generations. He is a splendid type of the latter years of the early Renaissance period in Antwerp, with its Erasmian tendency towards a higher intellectuality, and its daring spirit of enterprise also in the domain of economy.

Next to Plantin comes Balthasar I, the most brilliant member of the Moretus family, a representative of another period, with a less daring spirit but with a higher sense of art and a deeper love for riches and splendour. It is he who so embellished his dwelling that Woverius named it together with that of Rubens amongst the wonderful sights of Antwerp; it was for him also that Rubens painted the fine portraits of princes of the race and famous friends of the family, portraits adorning the sumptuous halls with all the splendour of genuine and perfect art. This Balthasar also, with the unfaltering taste of the erudite and elegant Latinist formed in the school of Justus Lipsius, continued the printing business according to tradition, but none the less caused the magnificent genius of the Antwerp painters of the XVIIth century to flourish in his wonderful volumes.



The house reflects the character of its inmates!

In the printing shop, where the presses are now at rest after a long period of toil, and seem to be waiting for other diligent arms to come and work them again; in the correctors' room with the sparse light caressing tables and benches, where at one time so many learned men laboured with assiduous care; in the letter-foundry as picturesque as any alchymist's laboratory, with its furnaces and crucibles and its rich equipment of stamps and matrices; in the pleasant little shop of H. Geeststraat, Holy Ghost Street, whence thousands of books were sent out into the world; in the sombre black-and-gold room, where Lipsius enjoyed his friend's hospitality; in all these places, Plantin is living again with his energy, his troubles, his sense of order and his projects succeeding one another uninterruptedly. In the peaceful garden, the centuries' old vine, with its tendrils clinging to this stronghold of Work, is not a heathen vine dedicated to the gods of Pleasure; it is the venerable vine under the sheltering branches of which Plantin published his first works with the motto : "*Vitis vera Christus*", the symbol of his deep-rooted faith and trust in God.

But in the inner-court, under the gallery with its elegant arches and elaborate cartouches around the busts of the lords of the mansion; in richly furnished state rooms hung with tapestries of warm and mellow



shades, adorned with crystal chandeliers in whose thousands of facets sport the colours of the rainbow; near the collections of drawings, copper-plates and prints with their wealth of terse allegories, wherein triumphs the leading spirit of Rubens; more especially in the library with its neat rows of ruddy-brown and old ivory bindings, its rare globes, its sculptures and richly coloured canvases, there Moretus rules supreme as the scholar, the wealthy merchant, but at the same time as the distinguished patrician, whose rule of life was less stoically austere, and who loved to see around him the mellower, sunnier beauty of the Flemish High-Renaissance.





## ANTWERP BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF PLANTIN

Is it necessary to describe once more what Antwerp was in the first half of the XVIth century? This has been done so often, by historians, from the Florentine nobleman L. Guicciardini, that great lover of the river-town, down to Pirenne; their striking pages, though objectively concise, often have the brilliancy of an apotheosis and the swelling sounds of a hymn.

So far back as the latter part of the XVth century Antwerp was already the most important town of the Low Countries. Owing to the complete decline of Bruges, and especially after the discovery of the New World, Antwerp's economical power and hegemony over these provinces grew day by day. This city was the natural emporium of Spanish and Portuguese trade in the North, the nucleus where the new highroads of the world converged. By its liberal complaisance with strangers, by readily renouncing a tradition of privileges grown obsolete, to which Bruges however continued to cling, by frankly advocating freedom of trade in its widest sense, and by accepting capita-



Plate 2.

**CHRISTOFFEL PLANTIN**

after a Painting by  
P. P. Rubens

This painting belongs to the Plantin-Moretus Museum. It portrays the Founder of the celebrated house, Christopher Plantin, who was born in 1520 in St.-Avertin-by-Tours (France); he died in Antwerp in 1589 and was buried there in the Cathedral Church.











Plate 3.

**JEHANNE RIVIERE**

**Christopher Plantin's Wife**

**After a Painting  
by P. P. Rubens**

**In the Plantin-Moretus Museum**



lism as one of the new great powers of the civic pale, Antwerp soon got to harbour within its walls, besides Spaniards and Portuguese, also mighty money magnates from South Germany : the Hochstetters, the Fuggers, the Welsers and others; Italian bankers, English cloth merchants, French merchants and an outstanding host of strong-minded, enterprising men from all over the Low countries, who wanted to try their fortunes in this town.

In the first half of the XVIth century Antwerp developed into the wealthiest, economically the best equipped, and most cosmopolitan commercial city of the times, unsurpassed even by Venice, Lyons and London; over and above that, it became the Athens of the Renaissance. Antwerp did not only inherit the commercial prosperity of Bruges, but also its artistic activity. The art of Memlinc and of Van Eyck lived on in the work of Quinten Metsys, which already revealed the more direct touch with life and the stronger earthly emotions of Renaissance art, of which Antwerp was the vigorous and opulent centre. In this way, as regards art, Antwerp's international importance equalled her fame as a metropolis of commerce. Foreign connoisseurs travelled to Antwerp to buy pictures and other works of art, foreign artists went there to fraternize with their Antwerp brethren and to mingle in the world traffic of the city. Lucas Cranach came to Antwerp in 1509, Alb. Dürer in 1520,



Lucas of Leyden in 1521, Hans Holbein in 1526. Science also was to have its seat in this illustrious town, whence its horizon and its importance soon became as widely international as those of commerce and art. With the sumptuousness of the silks and velvets from Italy came also the magnificence of the Renaissance ideas on Italian humanism in the beautiful editions of Aldi and of the Giunta; with the wines from the Rhine and Moselle valleys came also the wine of German thinkers and reformers, in the printed works from Basle, Ulm and others; and with the salt from the French salt-works came the salt of French wit in the elegant prints from Paris and Lyons.

To quote Guicciardini, Antwerp was a city where all nations felt at home, but it was at the same time a pre-eminently national town, an intellectual metropolis, the influence of which was felt throughout the Low Countries by the sea, and, thanks to Antwerp, the industry and trade of these provinces flourished, their art developed and their spirit teemed with the strongest germs. It was Antwerp that gave the tone; Antwerp was the place one dreamt of visiting some day, the town that all eyes turned to and whence came the books.

The number of books printed at Antwerp in the first half of the XVIth century is relatively so great, that a review of these is sufficient to give an idea of the entire production of books in those days in the



Low Countries, and, as Guicciardini writes in his " *Descrittione di tutti Paesi Bassi* ", on the whole the social institutions of Antwerp could be considered the model followed throughout the provinces of the Low Countries, thus dispensing him as it were from the necessity of beginning such a study outside Antwerp, so likewise a study on the Antwerp bibliography of those days may very well stand for that of all the Netherlands.

We shall here let numbers speak their accurate language.

Of the 2221 books reviewed by W. Nyhoff in his : " *Nederlandsche Bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540* ", (Netherlandish Bibliography from 1500 till 1540) 1202 were printed at Antwerp, that is more than half of the total number. We have 223 for Louvain, Bruges, Ghent and Brussels. This as opposed to a total of only 796 for the northern Low Countries, leaves no less than 1425 for the southern provinces, of which more than eight tenths were published at Antwerp.

Before 1500 the art of printing, owing to the Brethren of the Common Life, had been more flourishing in the Northern than in the Southern provinces.

Out of twenty towns where the art of printing was then being practised, there were twelve for the North. Neither did Antwerp rank first in the Southern Pro-



vinces, as regards book printing during the XVth century. Before 1500, proportionally Louvain by far took the lead of Antwerp. According to Campbell's nomenclature, the Alma-Mater town, which had 9 known printers, had published by the end of the XVth century 270 books, while Antwerp, with 12 printers, produced 395 books only. And so it is right enough in the beginning of the XVIth century that the art of printing worked itself up to its prodigious height in Antwerp. The number of printing establishments diminished in all the other towns of the Southern provinces for Louvain the numbers dropped to 7 printers with 180 books, for Brussels from 2 printers with 36 books to 1 with 9, Ghent from 2 printers with 12 books to 4 with only 17 books. Alost, from 2 printers with 22 books and Oudenaerde from 1 printer with 9 books both fell down to nought. Antwerp however, from 12 printing establishments in the XVth century rose suddenly to 56 in the first half of the XVIth century.

In the XVth century the following printers practised their craft in Antwerp : Matthys van der Goes, Dirk Martens, Gerard Leeu, Nicolaas Leeu, Nicolaas Kessler, Govert Back, Adriaan van Liesvelt, Roeland van den Dorpe, Henric de Lettersnider, Hendrik Eckert van Homberck, Adriaan van Berghen and Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraeten. Of these, in the XVIth century Martens Back, the



Plate 4.

## JAN MORETUS

After a painting  
by P. P. Rubens

In the Plantin-Moretus Museum

Jan Moretus I (or : Moerentorf) was born in 1543, he died in 1610. He was the son-in-law Plantin preferred. He succeeded his father-in-law at the head of the printing office and the bookshop, and maintained strictly the Plantin traditions.











Plate 5.

**MARTINE PLANTIN**

Daughter of Christopher Plantin  
Wife of Jan Moretus I

After a Painting  
by P. P. Rubens

In the Plantin-Moretus Museum



widow R. van den Dorpe, H. de Lettersnider, H. Eckert van Homberck, Adr. van Berghen and Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraeten continued their trade. All the others that then carried on the printing business were beginners of whom several had been attracted from other localities, both inland and foreign, to Antwerp by the exceptional suitability of that town as a centre for the book trade.

Here follows a list of the Antwerp printers in the first half of the XVIth century, in the order of their importance based upon the number of books they published, and drawn up by W. Nyhoff : Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraeten (264), Willem Vorsterman (175), Johannes Grapheus (122), Hendrik Eckert van Homberck (82), Martinus de Keyzer (60), Simon Cock (49), Adriaan van Berghen (46), Claes de Grave (40), Jacob van Liesvelt (31), Jan van Doesborch (28), Nicolaas van Oldenborch (28), Dirk Martens (23), Johannes Steele (21), Widow Martinus de Keysere (20), Hendrik Petersen van Middelburch (18), Govert Back (17), Jan van Ghelen (15), Christoffel van Ruremond (13), Matthys Crom (12), Johannes Crinities (10), With less than 10 publications we have the following printers or temporary partnerships : Adriaan van Liesvelt (1), the Widow R. van den Dorpe (2), Hendrik de Lettersnider (1), Jan Dinghensche alias de Lettersnider (5), Thomas van der Noot (1), Jan



de Gheet (1), Joh. Thibault (9), Simon Cock and Gerard Nicolaus (7), Hans van Ruremond (2), Hubertus Someren (1), Hadrianus Tilianus and Joh. Hoochstraeten (2), Johannes Hoochstraeten (4), Jacob van Liesvelt and Simon Cock (1), Petrus Sylvius (1), Claes de Graeve, Jac. van Liesvelt and S. Cock (1), Willem Vorsterman and Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraeten (6), Widow Christ. van Ruremond (3), Govert van der Haghen (Dumaeus) (1), Arnold Birckman (1), Martinus de Keyser and W. Vorsterman (1), Nicolaas Corvinus (1), Gregorius de Bonte (2), Jacob van Liesvelt and Mark Martens (Brussels) (2), Franciscus Aertsen (1), Guilielmus Spyridipaeus, Junior (3), Antonius Goinus (7), Hansken van Liesvelt (1), Guilielmus Montanus (7), Adrianus Kempe de Bouchout and M. Crom (1), W. Vorsterman and Claes de Grave (3), Aeg. Copernius (Diest, 3), Johannes Coccius (1), Antonius van der Haghen (Dumaeus) (5), Mart. Meranus (Nutius, Nuyts) (1), Johannes Richard (2). Several of these printers have their period of greatest activity after 1540, however as we do not possess a more or less complete list of their publications we cannot as yet minutely determine their scope of work.

Only by considering the activity of intellectual life in Antwerp previous to Plantin's arrival, can we form an accurate idea of the extensive intellectual plane whereon Antwerp exerted itself in those days, but in



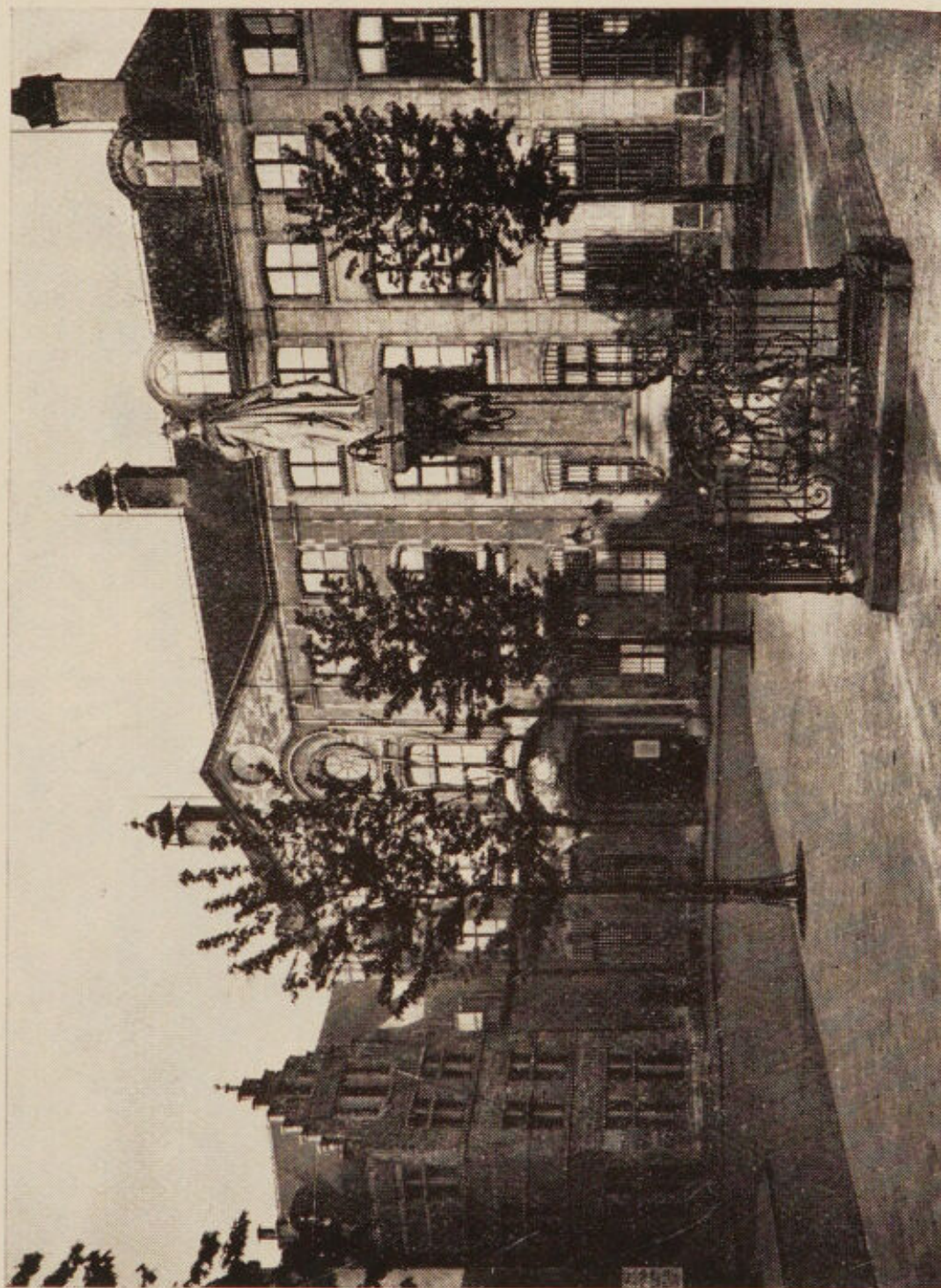
Plate 6.

### FRONT VIEW

of the Plantin Museum  
Vripdagmarkt (Marché du Vendredi)  
This portion of the house was built  
between 1761 and 1765. Over the  
door is a sculpture in low relief by  
Artus Quellin.

In the centre of the square before the  
Museum is an old pump with a cha-  
racteristic statue of a Saint. Many  
statues of this sort were found in old  
Flemish towns in former days, but  
very few remain now. This statue  
represents St-Catherine, the patron  
saint of old clothes mercants.







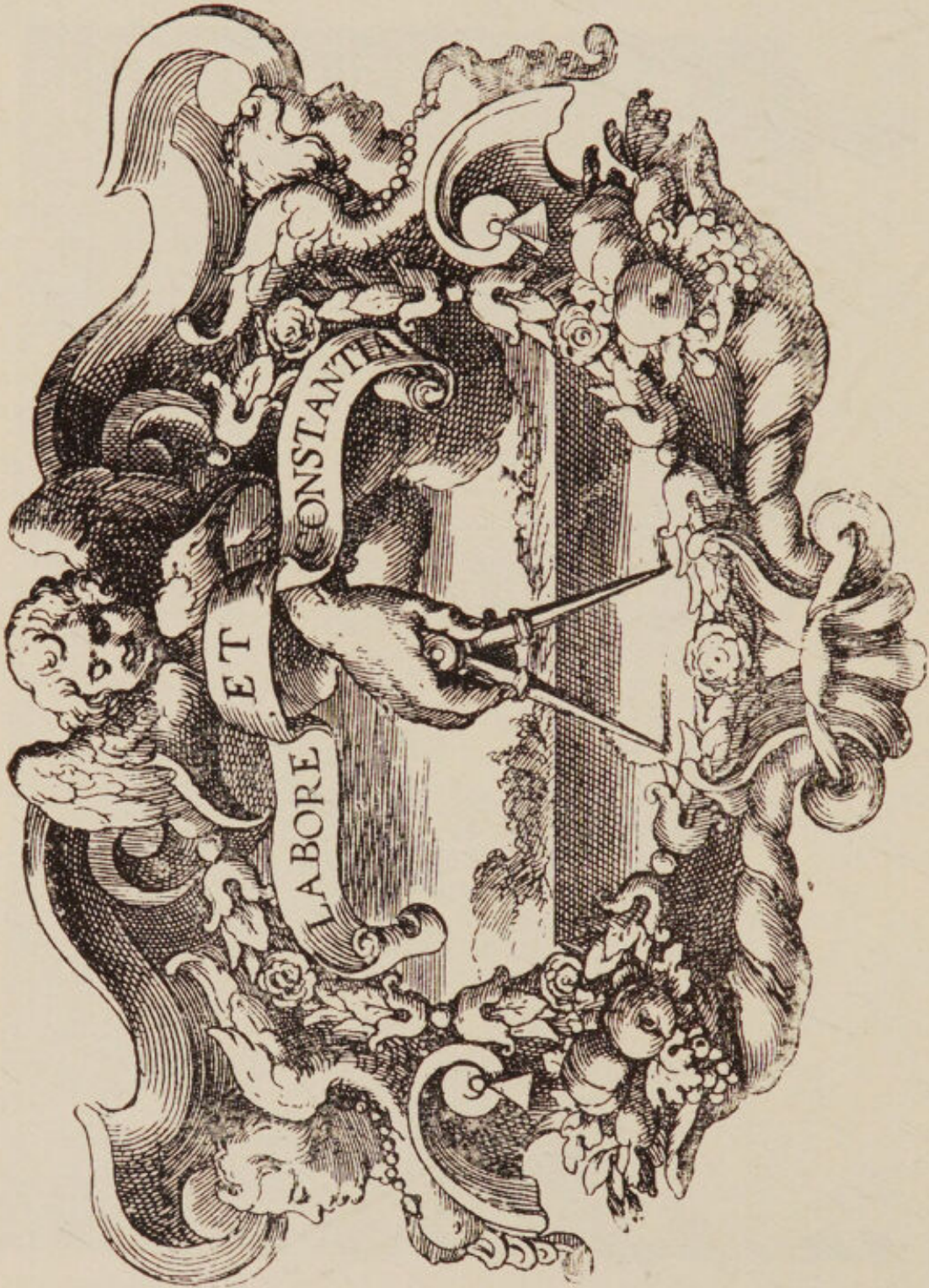




Plate 7.

**PRINTER'S MARK**

of Balthasar Moretus I  
(1634)



relation with Plantin's own development this clearly shows that he came to till a soil ready ploughed for him. Here he found an intellectual atmosphere, a tradition of trade and labour that it would be wrong to underrate. When he came to Antwerp, everything seemed to cry out to him : *Adveniat regnum tuum* :





## THE FOUNDER OF THE HOUSE

In his childhood and youth, besides other adversities, Plantin got to know all the hardships of a poor man's life. At an early age and in tragic circumstances, he lost his mother during a plague, which caused the father to take refuge in flight with his child. That father bound as valet to his masters, could not trouble himself much about the boy, and that is how it came to pass that he left his son with but a small sum of money behind in Paris to contrive for himself. Plantin was still but a lad when he found himself alone face to face with the difficulties of life; but he soon discovered the only way of controlling and dominating them, and that way he adopted without hesitating : Work became his shield and his weapon.

Driven by a kind of natural instinct, as he once told the Duke Mathias, he applied himself to the art of printing and book-binding, and apprenticed himself to Robert Macé at Caen, where Jeanne Rivière took pity on him and married him about the year 1546. She too, like him, had nothing but her hands to work with. In later years when his daughter Madeleine



begged him for aid Plantin wrote : " We never had anything from our parents but charges and costs, and first started housekeeping on the sole work of our hands. " They had no other treasures than " assiduous work, sobriety and thrift ". (1)

At first they lived in Paris, where Plantin occupied himself chiefly with book-binding, and the working of morocco-leather, but it is to be supposed that his hopes were not fulfilled, and so he chose another locality to try his fortune in.

It is then that he dreamt of the sumptuous and imperial merchant town of Antwerp, of the *preclara et famosa città*, the *bella, nobilissima et amplissima città*, about which Guicciardini was so enthusiastic, and which irresistibly attracted the young French journeyman, as it attracted so many other enterprising minds all through Europe. It was in 1549 that Plantin came and settled down at Antwerp with his small family.

When we look at the portraits of Plantin and his " commère Jehanne " painted by Rubens at the bidding of their grandson Balthasar Moretus, what strikes us immediately is the clear perception of the inner being that the features of these two people vouchsafe.

Christopher Plantin has the sagacious, thoughtful head of a Huguenot, of a kind of lay ascetic, but

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(1) „ assidu labeur, sobriété ou espargne „. Plantin's Correspondence, VI, 2.



with, at the same time, the speaking features and the bright eye of the practical, skilfully diplomatic man of business. There is a dreamy expression in the face, which speaks of an intense spiritual life, and yet there is also something cerebral and calculating that testifies to an acute, irrepressible longing to reach an honoured rank among his fellow-creatures. His is at all events the image of a man, with whom the material pleasures of life were ever of the smallest account, and with such a portrait before us, we understand that Arias Montanus once wrote of Plantin : " There is nothing material (no matter) about the man, all is mind, he neither drinks nor sleeps. " (1)

" Mademoiselle his beloved housewife ", as Pierre Moerentorf calls her, (2) does not give the same impression of spirituality; she has the typical face of the solicitous, not always smiling " mother wife ", who, in the home rules over children and menials, sometimes herself puts her shoulder to the wheel, and is at all times the true help and stay of her husband.

There was no one better able to judge her than Justus Lipsius, who was an intimate of the house, and as such knew Dame Jehanne very well. He wrote : " She was a most virtuous woman, without any false get up, without vanity; she loved her husband

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(1) Correspondence IV, p. 270.

(2) Correspondence IV, p. 23.

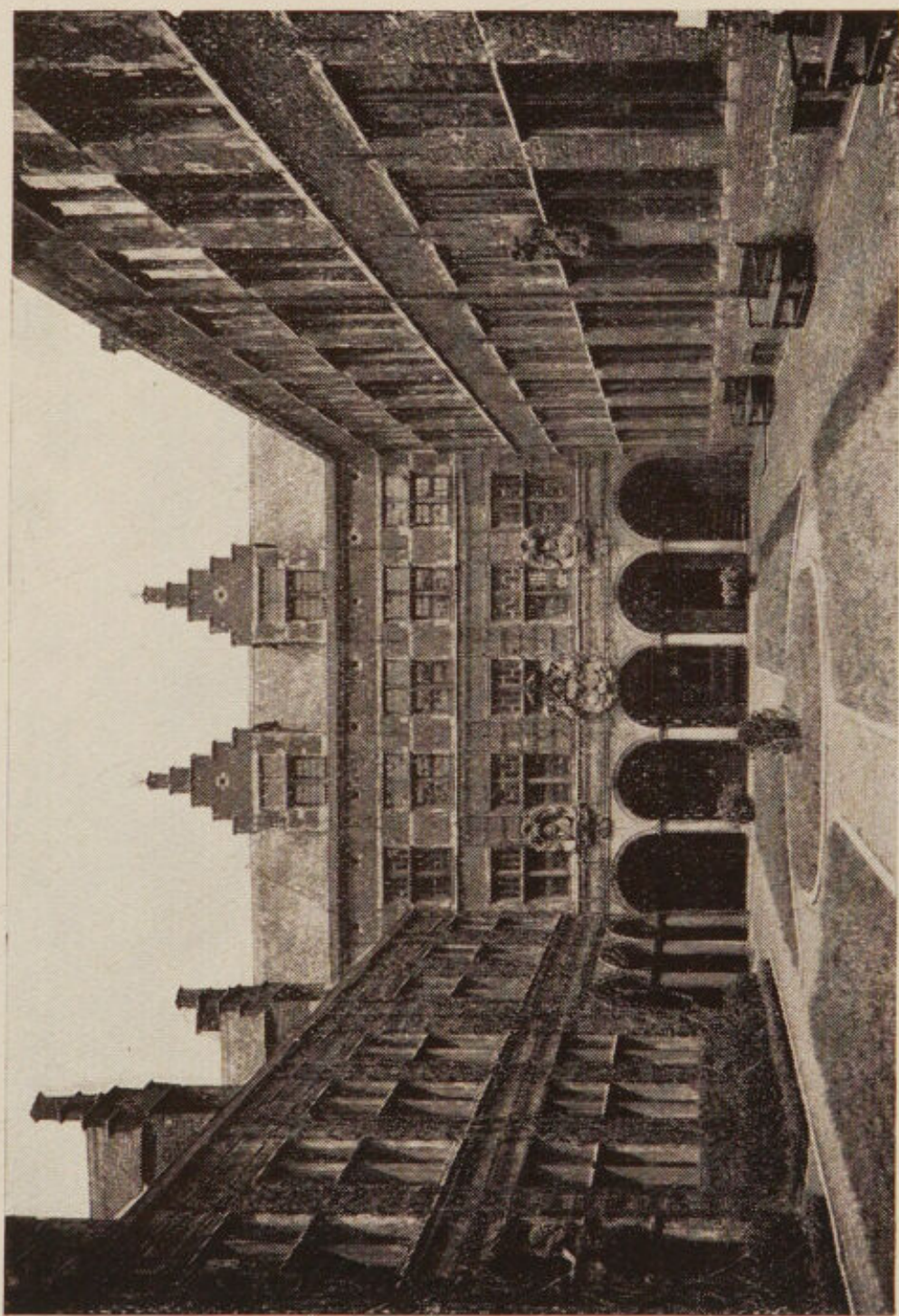


Plate 8.

### THE INNER COURT

To the left of the spectator is the renowned old vine. The wall in the background is adorned with remarkable busts dating from the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries.







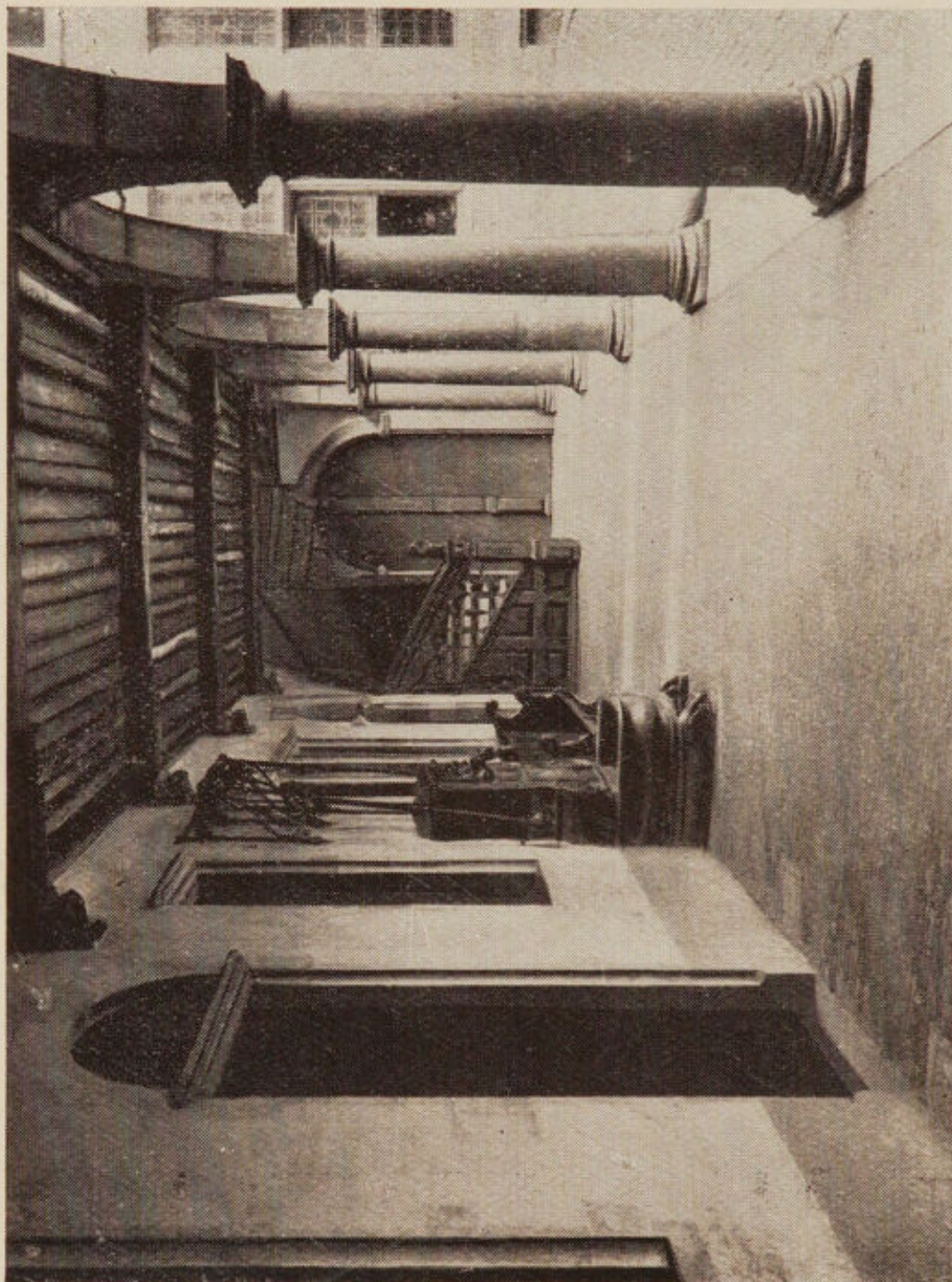




Plate 9.

### THE GALLERIES

To the left is a pump in blue stone dating from the XVIIth century, further is a carved oak stair from 1621.



and was admirably versed in all things concerning the proper management of a household, and she bestowed all the necessary care on her housekeeping. „

In the small dwelling of the " *Lombaardevest* ", and later in the " *Twaalfmaandenstraat* ", where Plantin passed his first years in Antwerp, he first went on binding books and making morocco-leather shrines, boxes and pasteboard cases, as he had done in Paris, but a regular cut-throat story, of which he was the victim, compelled him to give up all that. One evening, some obstreperous, masked drunkards mistook him for a guitar-player that had insulted them, and with a sword, they gave him a thrust that very nearly cost him his life. He recovered, but found himself physically unable to go on with book-binding and working leather, and so he set up as a printer. One is tempted to call the crime in question a *Felix Culpa*, as it was probably the cause of Plantin's taking the road that was to lead him to fame. No longer had he to earn his daily bread " *en liant des volumes* ", as he says in one of his poems, but he was going to write books " *à la presse sans plumes* ".

We are struck by the great esteem which, from the very beginning of his career, Plantin showed for intellectual faculties, and in his printer's trade — as witnessed by his own word — he saw a means of having intercourse with the learned and of working at their



side and with them, for the spreading of knowledge and art.

In Plantin's so remarkable correspondence many wise truths are to be found regarding the importance of book-binding and the value of study and culture of the mind, truths, which, as winged words, ought to be known everywhere. Among other things he says : " As for me, I have always esteemed that the teaching of the youth of a country, and all that depends thereof, as writing, printing and books, is surely of as great an importance for the king as money itself, or any other thing existing. " (1)

A man who had so clearly perceived that culture of the mind could enable him, a simple workman, to approach those that ranked first among his contemporaries, naturally kept a sharp watch over the instruction of his children and grandchildren.

We are not surprised to hear that from their earliest youth he taught them to fear, honour and love God, the King, all magistrates and superiors, and to help their mother about the house (2), but we are rather taken aback when we hear, that, deeming his children at the age of from four to twelve too weak for heavy work, he gave them proofs in several languages to correct. Though it is to be supposed that the proof-cor-

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(1) Correspondence I, 214.

(2) Correspondence II, 173.



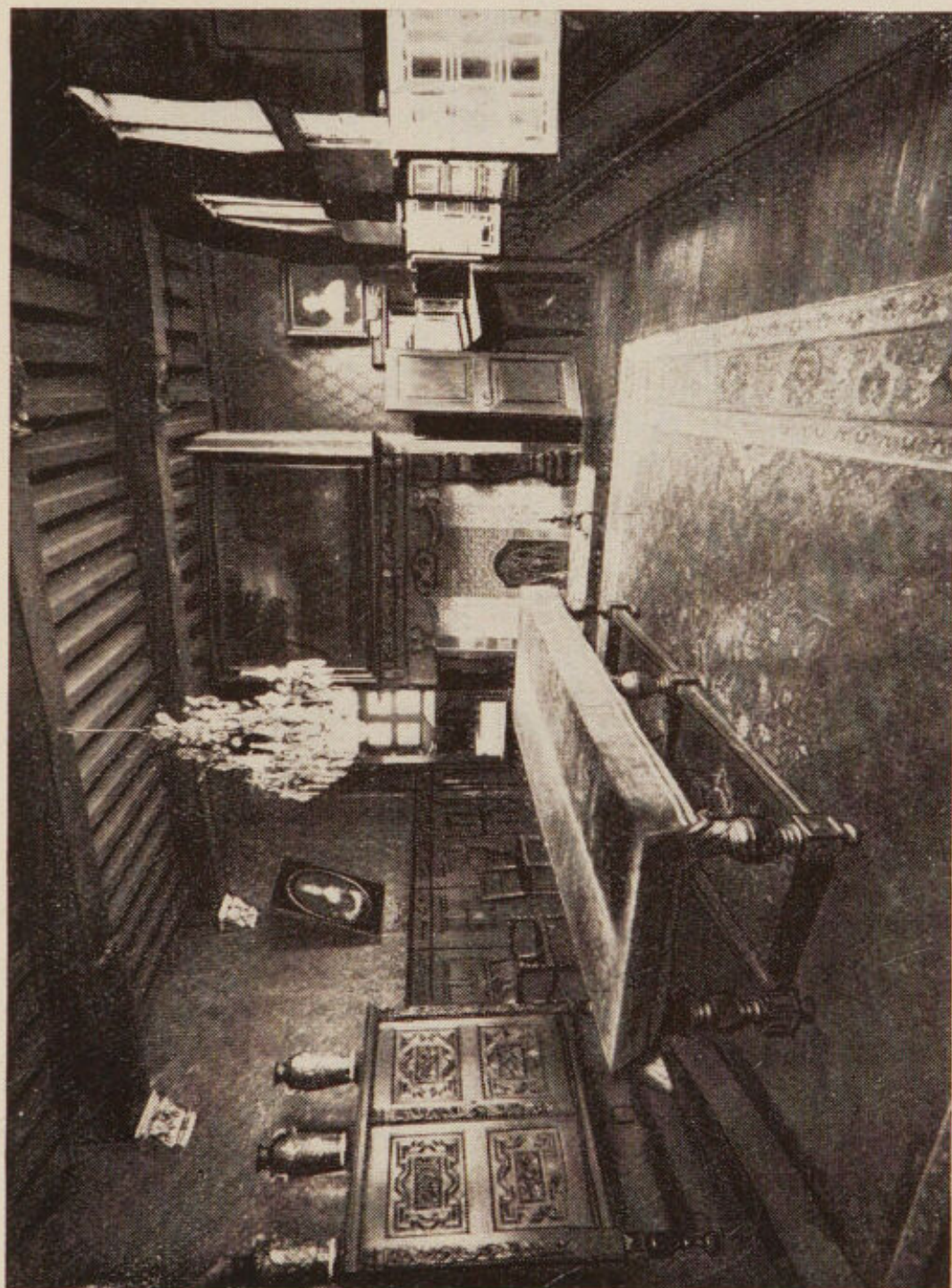
Plate 10.

## RECEPTION ROOM

First floor.

This room is entirely hung with Gordon leather. The mantelpiece (1638) was carved by Paul Dierckx. Over the mantel hangs a landscape by Pieter Verdussen (XVIth century). Further are to be seen four painted portraits of members of the Moretus family; also a beautiful crystal chandelier and remarkable furniture.







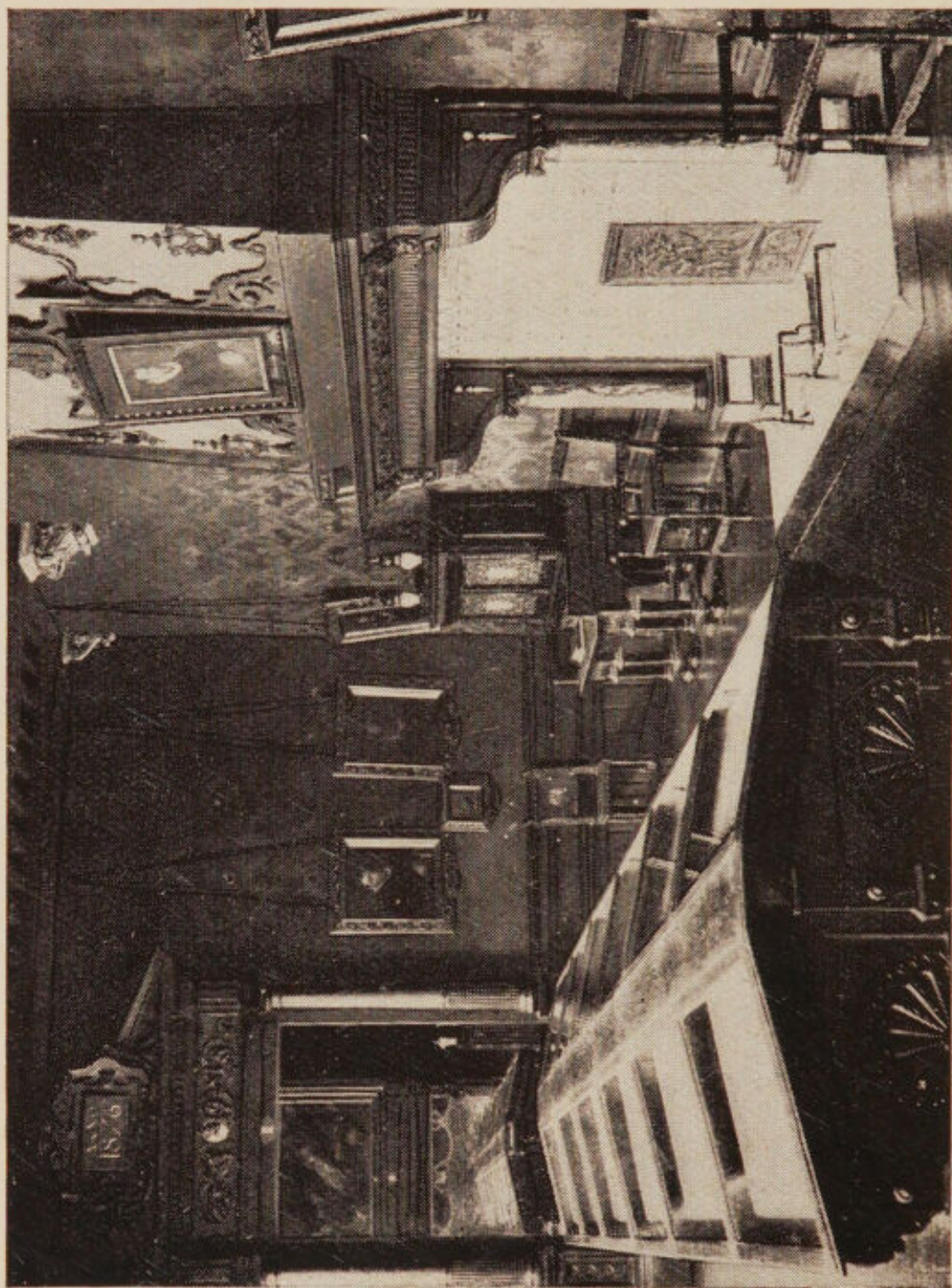




Plate 11.

## PORTRAIT HALL

Ground floor.

In this hall are exhibited the portraits of Christopher Plantin and of members of his family, by Peter Paul Rubens. Four of these are reproduced here. Further are to be seen two beautiful Flemish side boards of the XVIIth century, one of which is enriched with 24 paintings on white marble, the other one is inlaid with silverplated tin. In the centre of this room is a show case containing drawings and book decorations by various artists who have been working for the House of Plantin, among them are Adam van Noort, Rubens' master, Rubens himself, Martin de Vos, etc.



recting in question was no more than comparing of a text newly in type with a printed model, yet even then it is an exercise we would hardly think of devising for our present-day children.

And the five daughters of Plantin all worked at that job, to the best of their abilities. Madeleine, the fourth, was the most clever. She read Hebrew, Syriac and Greek texts which as a thirteen year old lassie, she had to take to Arias Montanus, who at that time was staying at the house of Jan van Straelen, and who supervised the printing of the famous *Biblia Regia*. It was she also, who at an age when our children think of nothing but fun and frolic. had on Saturdays to pay the workmen, and watch that they all did their duty. Margaret too, when a child, was remarkably quick-witted. She became, according to Plantin : " Une des meilleures plumes de tous les païs de par deçà pour son sexe : " (1) (One of the best writers (calligraphers) of her sex. He sent her to Paris that she might better learn the good strokes of the pen of a certain calligrapher, who at that time was showing the King how to write. An eye-disease put an end to her calligraphic studies. Henriette, the youngest, was the least well gifted. When she was eight years old, says her father, she did not do anything yet besides helping her mother with the housekeeping. At that

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(1) Correspondence II, 176.



time she did not yet correct proofs : " Pour la tardivité de son esprit lent ". (Owing to the tardiness of her slow brain). It was a work the girls did in the correctors' room, and if they gave it up when twelve years old, it was because Plantin did not think proper that at that age they should be in the company of men. (1)

Margaret married Raphelengius and Martine became the wife of Jan Moerentorf or Moretus. Those two sons-in-law were dearer than any others to Plantin, because they were the most like him, and possessed a love for study allied to a scrupulous sense of duty; he called them his " deux autres moy-mêmes aux deux principaux points de mon état. " (2) (My two other selves, with regard to the two principal points of my business). Proof-reading and printing were the former's, while the shop and bookkeeping were the latter's concern. Plantin gave his daughter Marguerite in marriage to the learned philologist for " his sole virtues and knowledge, foreseeing that he should one day be useful to the Christian republic " (3) which as a matter of fact, meant that Plantin foresaw how useful Raphelengius would be to him in his printer's office. Besides he candidly admits

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(1) Correspondence II, 176.

(2) Correspondence II, 175.

(3) Correspondence II, 173.



as much in another letter, when he writes : " I met a young man well versed in the Hebrew, Chaldaic, Greek and Latin languages, to whom, so as to have him near me and make intercourse easier, and because of the hope I had of his being in time able to do something for the public weal, and because of his learning and rare virtues, I gave my daughter in marriage ". (1) Of Jan Moretus it was also the learning that first stuck him. That wooer of Martine he describes as " a rather expert young man, and well versed in the Greek, Latin, Spanish, Italian, French, German and Flemish languages. (2)

He also praises his attachment : " He has always served me, in bad as in good times, without deserting me because of things that befell me, or for the sake of promises or allurements of others, even when they proposed to him richer matches and offered higher salaries than it was in my power to give him. (3) It must be said that Plantin all through was well assisted by these sons-in-law. With the others matters did not go so smoothly. Catherine, his third daughter, a clever business woman and good at book-keeping, made herself useful in the linen and lace-business which his wife had set up shortly after their

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(1) Correspondence I, 50.

(2) Correspondence II, 174.

(3) Correspondence II, 252.



marriage. Catherine was sent to Paris, to Pierre Gassen, who represented that same lace-business there, and whose nephew, Jean Gassen, became the young woman's husband. Already in the first months of their married life, Plantin had to interfere to restore the broken peace in the household.

He does so in two remarkably beautiful letters, wherein he puts all his heart. It makes him sad and heavy-hearted, to hear that his children do not get on together. When he first heard that such was the case, he was filled with a "just wrath" against his daughter and also against his son-in-law, who had reproached him with approving that Catherine showed herself "haughty, despotical, disdainful, lazy and proud." Plantin writes to him words which, as he says himself, come from his innermost heart, as a leaping flame which burns there. He shows them that he has "blood at the nails" (*du sang aux ongles*). (1) But, reflecting on human fragility, he abandons his wrathful tones and writes as a real patriarch, as a wise moral counsellor.

"Pride is the root of all evil", and Plantin's best remedy for such things is humility, the gist of his own way of life.

Over and over again he sings its praises and recommends it to all. Humility is the moral basis of his

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(1) Correspondence II, 284.



being, which humility, as the years went by, developed more and more, finding satisfaction in the mysticism of a Niclaes and a Barrefelt.

To Jean Gassen he writes : " I feel I have no higher duty, and what is more there is nothing I shall try to do besides helping my children to acquire a real humility of heart, which is the fountain and the source of all heavenly good, and renders that of the earth sufficient. (1) Catherine he admonishes to remember that she is no better than her father and mother, and : " that it is necessary to carefully, diligently, heartily and humbly serve those to whom we are beholden or attached. " (2) He tries to influence Catherine by telling her to take example by him, her father : He got up early and was always willing to do even the most menial work. " Do not consider yourself too dignified to do even the most abject things that may have to be done in a house " (3)

Plantin's moralizing very easily acquires a dash of mystical religiosity : " Consider that neither you nor I, nor your husband are other than such lumps of flesh as the lowest on this earth. " Whatever betide, Catherine may not allow " any plant of pride, vain-glory and arrogance to blossom in her heart ". Later

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(1) Correspondence II, 247.

(2) Correspondence II, 254.

(3) Correspondence II, 254.



he gives the same advice to his daughter Madeleine :  
" To be humble, to suffer and endure patiently and willingly all that which it will please God to send to you. " Those were " the most beautiful the richest and the best gifts he could bestow on her. " (1)

The Ten Commandments and her father's will must be Catherine's guidance in days of trouble. He was not to be troubled long, however, with Catherine's household concerns. She became a widow when hardly twenty-two years of age. Her husband, while travelling in the Low Countries, was killed by highwaymen. Plantin and his wife went to Paris to fetch the young widow and brought her back with her children to the home of her girlhood. Some time after, Catherine married H. Arents, known also as Jan Spierinck.

The marriage of his daughter Madeleine with Gilles Beys was a source of still greater trouble to Plantin. Some years before, Beys had been Plantin's shopboy, but in 1567 he became the manager of Plantin's bookshop in Paris, and later he started business on his own account.

When we consider Plantin's character, and more especially the gigantic work he achieved, we come to the conclusion that he chose the golden compasses with the words " *Labore et Constantia* " as printer's

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(1) Correspondence II, 102.



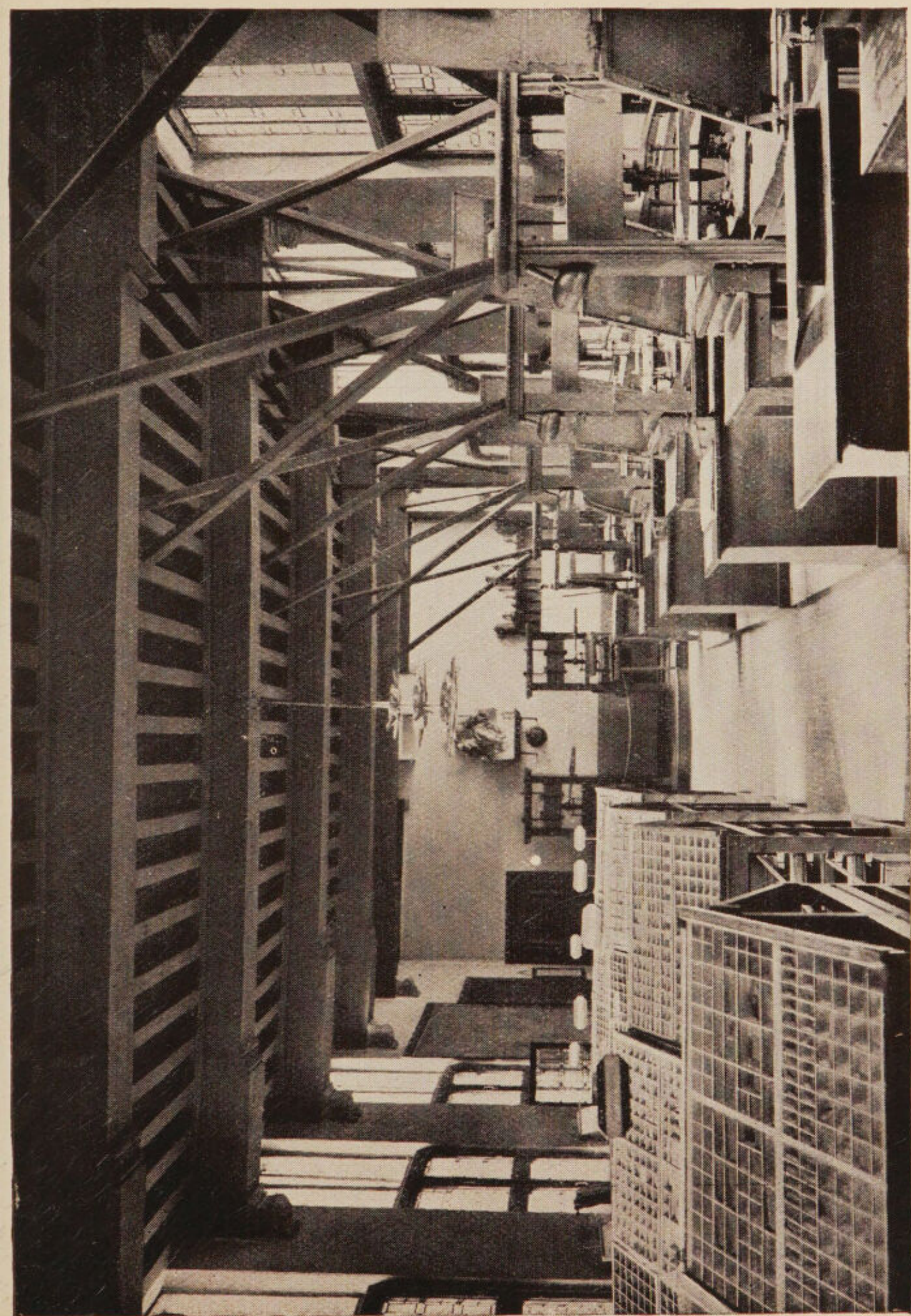
Plate 12.

### THE PRINTING SHOP

This shop is a faithful example of a work place of 1576. Seven printing presses are to be seen, two of which are particularly old : they date from Plantin's time.

On these presses were printed the splendid books that made the name of Plantin famous throughout the world. Occasionally these presses still serve when special works are printed on them by order of the City Authorities. At one end of this work shop is an interesting carved group representing Our Lady of Loreto.







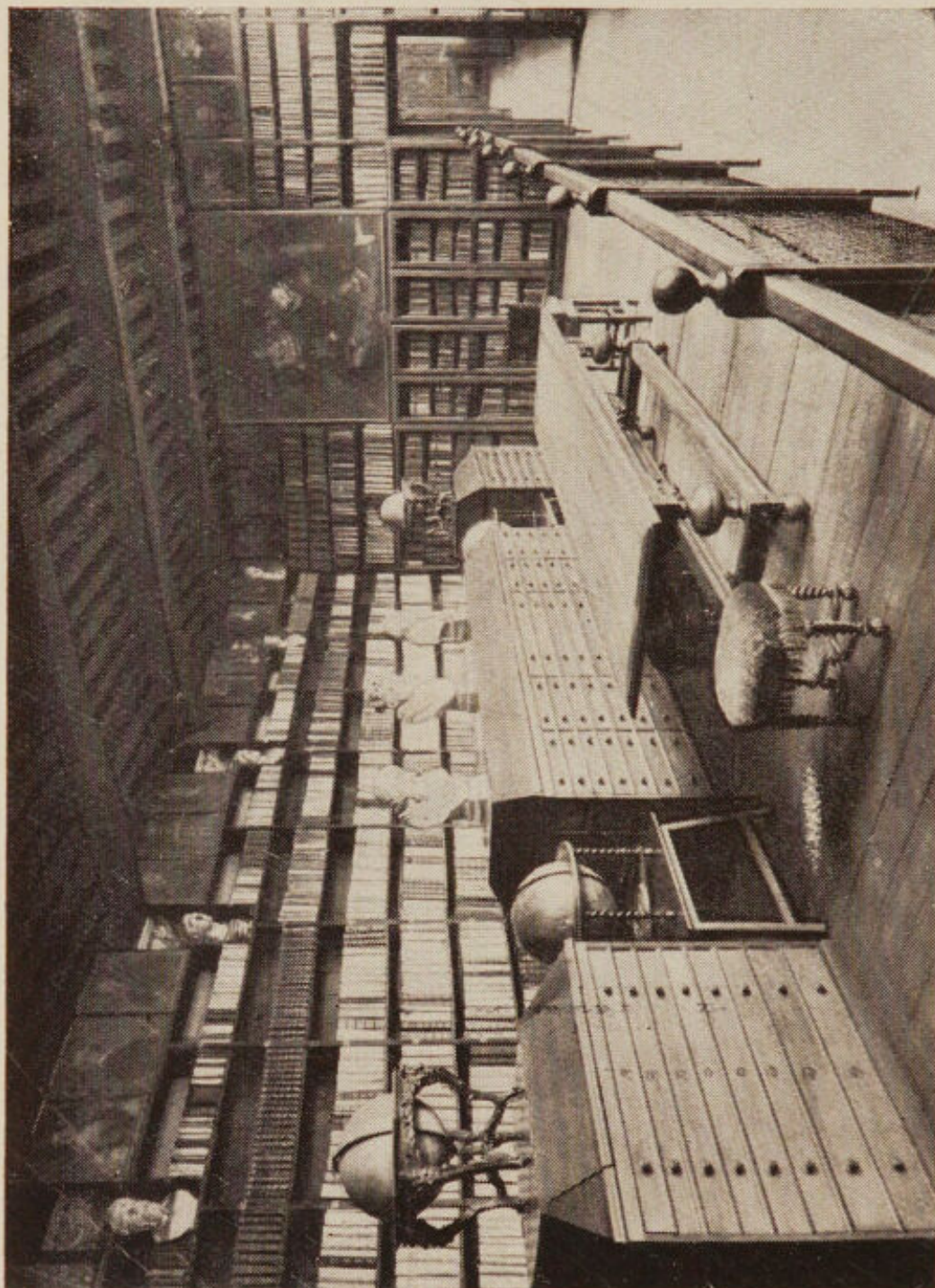




Plate 13.

### THE LARGE LIBRARY

This room is entirely in old style and contains a very rich collection of prints gathered by Christopher Plantin and by his successors. Many of these prints are not to be found now, others fetch fabulous prices when they occasionally come under the hammer. The old globes and the busts in this room claim special attention, as well as the paintings by P. Thys and G. Zegers.



motto and also as the motto of his life, not only in accordance with the taste of our forefathers for terse and pithy emblems and aphorisms, but more so because he was aware that therein he was to find the rendering of the principles which were to vouchsafe him through life the most powerful and surest support. The fixed point of the compasses symbolizes the tenacious, unwavering steadfastness, which Plantin, notwithstanding all possible difficulties and reverses, never failed to display in the achievement of an accepted task; and the other point of the compasses describing a circle, stands for the never slackening work embracing the widest horizons of the intellect, which rendered the great printer immortal. Plantin was wont to complete that nomenclature of vital virtues by adding those of humility and patience. For instance in 1558, the year before his death, he wrote on the rough copy of a letter the following rhyme, which characterizes him completely :

*Un labour courageux muni d'humble constance  
Résiste à tous assauts par simple patience. (1)*

(A courageous labour to which is added a humble constancy, by means of simple patience resists all attacks.)

Thanks to those qualities it did not take Plantin

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(1) Archives of the Plantin Museum X; fo 230.



long to surpass the thirty printing establishments in full activity at Antwerp when he came to settle there. And it is not too strong a word to call simply marvellous what he managed to achieve in this town.

Among the sights of Antwerp described by Guicciardini, the Florentine nobleman, as "worthy to be viewed with delight and pleasure", such as "the spire of the Cathedral, the new Exchange, the Mint, the Town-hall, the Hansa-house, the wonderful furnace of Jacob Pesquet of Brescia, where crystal is made in the Venetian way", he expatiates with a particular predilection on the extensive and beautiful printing establishment of Christopher Plantin, the Royal printer. "Up till now, he writes, there has never been seen, nor is seen, in the whole of Europe, a similar, where there are so many presses, letters of all sorts, prints and tools, proper and capable men earning higher wages with working, correcting and revising in all languages, strange as well as familiar ones without any exception, so that all things combined, in this house, with its adherents and dependencies, more than three hundred florins, that is more than one hundred and fifty crowns are spent on every work-day; which establishment, surely a noble and royal one, not only redounds to the credit and honour of its worthy founder and head, but also to that of the town itself; for its beautiful and valuable works are sent



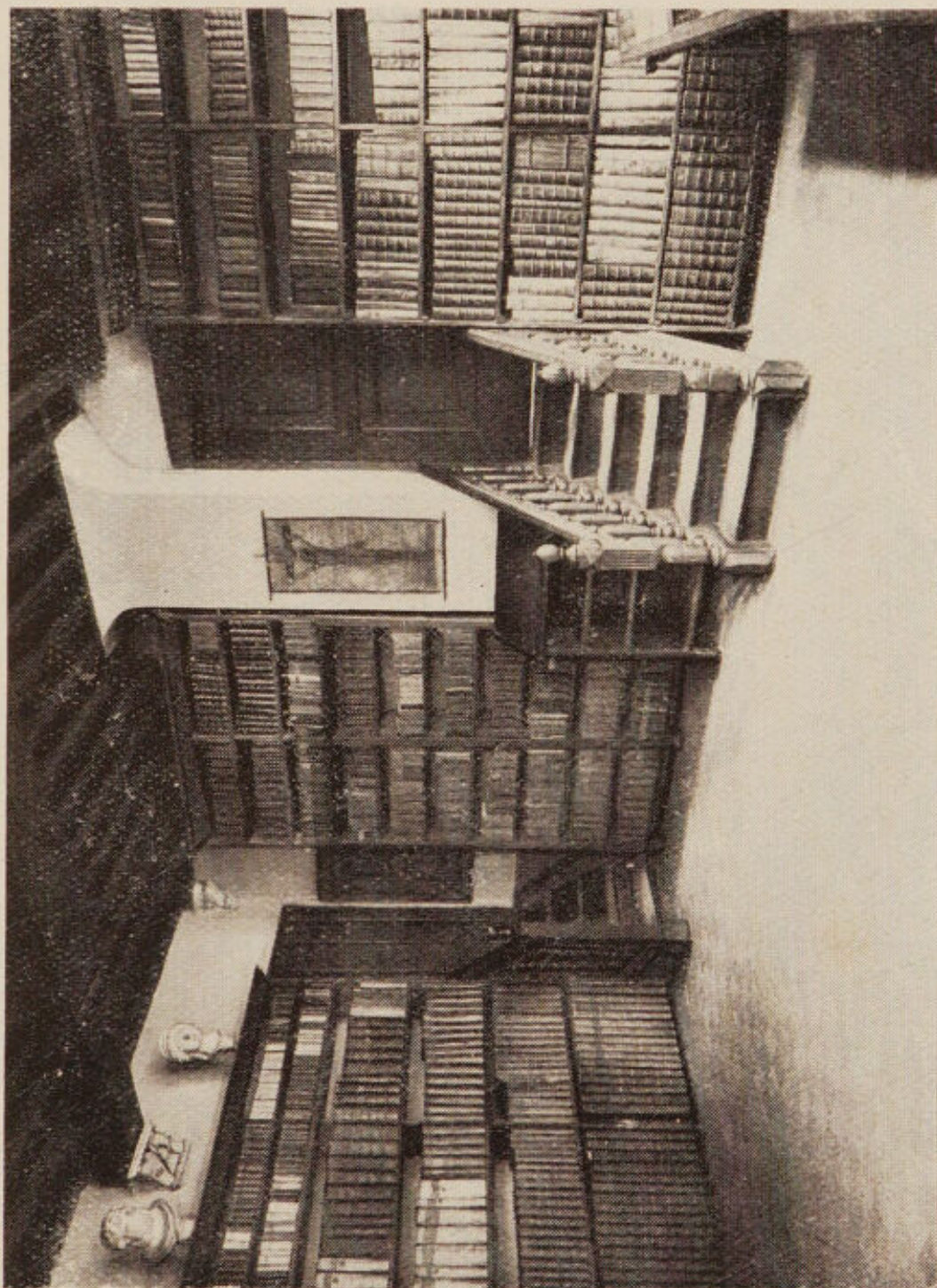
Plate 14.

**THE SMALL LIBRARY**

In this cosy room are brought together specimens of the art of Plantin and of his successors. These works are splendid examples of typographical art. The copper plates and wood blocks for book ornamentation were engraved or cut by the most illustrious artists of the XVIth and XVIIth centuries.

This library contains practically all the works published by the celebrated house of Plantin-Moretus.







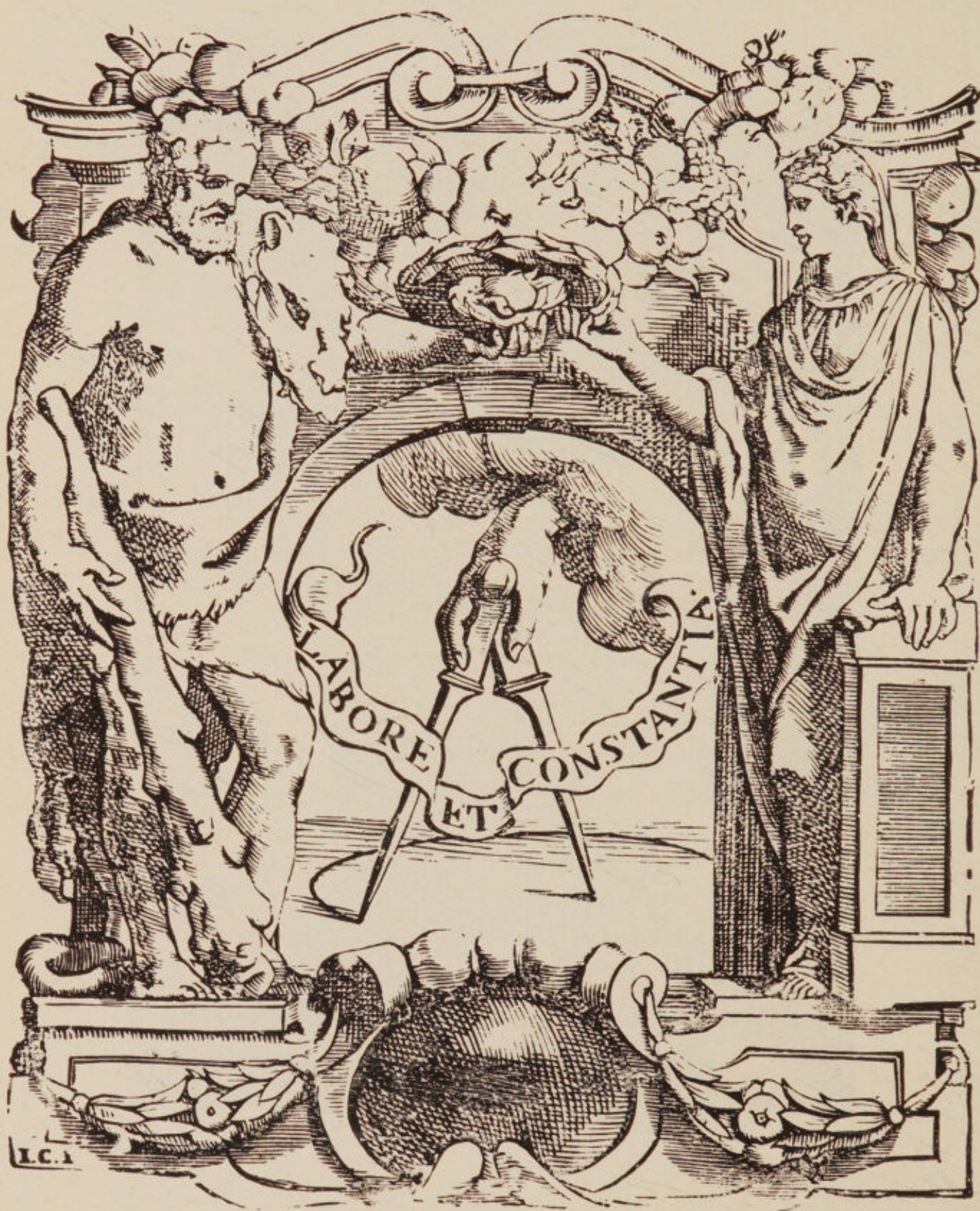




Plate 15.

**PRINTER'S MARK**

Woodcut by Jan Christopher Jegher,  
after a design by P. P. Rubens.



and spread in large numbers all over the world. " (1) And Plantin was fully aware of all this. He mentions it in a petition addressed to the town magistrates (1577) perhaps slighting rather too much all that had been done before him in the domain of typography : " Antwerp printing, of which formerly the words were used as by-words for things of little value, has since been admired, appreciated and sought after by all, under the names of Antwerp and Plantin, not only by our neighbours and people of the middle-classes, but by foreign nations and by the greatest nobles of Europe, both ecclesiastic and lay. " (2) In another letter to the magistracy he declares : " without boasting " to possess so many stamps, matrixes, presses, types and figures, that all the printers in Europe assert never to have seen so many together as in this establishment (3), and he repeats it once again in a letter to De Cayas (4).

It is a proved fact that Plantin's activity and influence as a printer made themselves felt far outside the boundaries of the Low Countries. He had uninterrupted business relations not only with Dutch, Flemish and Brabant booksellers and printers, but

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(1) Description of all the Low Countries.

(2) Correspondence V, 247.

(3) Correspondence VI, 35.

(4) Correspondence V, 308.



Englishmen, Scotchmen, Germans, Italians, Swiss, Poles, Portuguese and Spaniards were among his faithful clients. Ever since 1567, Plantin had a branch establishment in Paris; at Leyden Raphelengius carried on the business which the arch-printer had taken over from Silvius in 1583. He had business agents in Spain, later, a branch establishment at Salamanca, and was on the point of opening one in London. He disposed of his Hebrew Bible published in 1566, mostly with the help of special agents, in the north-western region of Africa, between the Mediterranean and the Sahara, in so-called Barbaria. He sent books to America (1), and was one of the most regular and influential visitors at the Frankfort book-fairs. (2) Those international book-fairs, which Henri Estienne called "Academy or Universal Exhibition of the Muses", were held twice a year, in Spring and Autumn, and there assembled not only all the important publishers and editors, but also a great number of learned men of the period.

As an industrialist too, Plantin's qualities were remarkable. The management of a numerous staff, the advancing of considerable sums for paper and wages, the regulating of the work, and ever so many

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(1) Correspondence VI, 35.

(2) H. Stephanus, *Franco fordienne Emporium sive Franco fordienae nundinae* 1574.



more cases called for an exceptional will-power and a great perspicacity. And his correspondence is sufficient evidence that things did not always go smoothly. "To be a printer does not suit everybody", he writes; "it does not suit him to whom it does not come by nature, or by a kind of divine inclination, added to a continuous and assiduous labour, and a firm assurance to be able to control himself with regard to his companions, who, as I have often found, generally are malignant and faithless to their masters, and full of whims, especially when they know that their master has an enterprise in hand. (1)" Elsewhere he alludes to some particular cases of ill-will shown by his workmen, against which he had to take effectual measures. "The workmen of the printing-office, knowing that I had work to finish, had clubbed together against me, so that (besides having money difficulties) I had been compelled to chase them from my house, and to pretend that I was not going to print any more, so that at length they returned, having sent to me to beg me to forgive them, and let them come back to work. (2)" In another letter he complains of the impossibility of getting ordered work ready in time. This could be done, if "by some laws, reasoning or conditions, the indolence, drunkenness

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(1) Correspondence III, 222.

(2) Correspondence III, 224.



and the malice of the workmen could be repressed and reduced " so as to make sure of some few days of work." (1) We readily believe him, when he avers that, for his trade, are wanted : a broadness and nimbleness of mind, added to a continued diligence, assiduous labour, and a perpetual care, more than for the practising of any other kind of work. " (2)

Besides these difficulties with the workmen, Plantin, during a long period of his life, had to battle with many others of a financial nature.

The extensive orders given by the King of Spain forced him to run deeply into debt. Philip II, whose financial situation was far from brilliant, failed to pay the promised relief-moneys and other sums owing. Yearly Plantin had 25,000 florins to pay as interest only of the loan contracted for the printing of the *Biblia regia*. By order of the King he disbursed 50,000 florins solely for liturgical works; 36,000 for choir-books, etc., and it was many years before he saw any of that money back again. To all that had to be added the great losses occasioned by the Spanish Fury and other political occurrences of those troubled times. Throughout Plantin's correspondence we find him complaining about pressure for money. He begs and prays to obtain that which is owing him.

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(1) Correspondence III, 227.

(2) Correspondence III, 244.



He is so sorely dunned that it makes him ill. (1) He is forced to sell property in order to satisfy his creditors, and several times he declares himself decided to give up printing altogether.

He struggles with all those difficulties as with a many-headed monster. That is how he puts it in his picturesque language, and we feel that he is not giving us some figure of speech, but the palpitating though condensed expression of the bitter feelings that rankle within him. To De Cayas he says : „ The printing-office is a regular chasm or whirlpool, into the jaws of which, by a steady and assiduous labour, one must try to be always throwing what is necessary, for otherwise it devours and swallows even its master and all those concerned. ” (2)

Plantin is himself astonished at having managed to conquer all these difficulties, and he writes that all those who know him must be greatly amazed and look upon it as a miracle, that a man such as he has succeeded in bringing to a happy conclusion a typographic enterprises of such magnitude, especially the publishing of the royal Antwerp Polyglotta.

Plantin's gifts, as regards the intellectual management of his printer's and publisher's business, were very nearly those of a genius. He succeeded in ma-

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(1) Correspondence III, 297.

(2) Correspondence III, 245.



king " The Golden Compasses " the centre where, the most excellent contributors within the range of existing science came together from all parts of Europe. The history of Plantin's publications and of his relations with the learned of his time who entrusted their works to him, is a brilliant chapter of the history of humanism not only in the Low Countries, but in the whole civilised Western hemisphere. During the first half of his career, until the Spanish Fury, (1576) Plantin's printing-office was the nucleus of the real Renaissance spirit of daring, of the unslakable thirst for knowledge, that was never daunted by any great enterprise.

It is not our intention to sum up here all the learned men with whom Plantin kept up a correspondence, who visited him at Antwerp, who stayed at his house and with him formed friendships proof against all possible doubt. They are well known those men of great renown, who honoured Plantin with their esteem and hearty affection. The erudite orientalist and theologian Arias Montanus, who at the bidding of Philip II of Spain, wrenched himself away from his pious meditations in the hermitage of Aracena, to come and edit at Antwerp in the years between 1568 and 1572, the famous *Biblia sacra hebraice, chaldaice, graece et latine*; the so-called Antwerp Polyglotta, which rendered Plantin's name immortal; the geographer Abraham Ortelius, whose fine atlases Plantin publi-



shed; the numismatologist Hubert Goltzius, Sambucus, whose *Emblemata* Plantin made popular; the mathematician S. Stévin; Cardinal Baronius, the author of the *Annales ecclesiastici*; R. Dodoens, Ch. de l'Escluse (Clusius), M. de Lobel, the three eminent botanists who each had a remarkable Herbarium published at Plantin's; the renowned Justus Lipsius, D'hunaeus, D. Goudanus, Rediger, Masius, J. Isaac and so many others, too numerous to be mentioned here, belonged to that sort of academy of which Plantin was the soul, and of which the members remained on the most friendly terms with one another, either because of personal intercourse, or else by keeping up a correspondence, so that at times there came to Antwerp letters so numerous, that Plantin likened them to a "bevy of starlings". (1) It fills one with wonder to see how Plantin, the simple typographer who never went to any university managed to force the respect of the greatest minds of his time.

Next to this host of great scholars whose works were published by Plantin, we can place a group of no less brilliant graphic artists who ornamented his books : Pieter van der Borcht, Crispyn van den Broeck, Godefroid Ballain, Luc D'Heere, Martin de Vos, Pieter Huys, A. Nicolai, A. van Leest; G. Jansen, Corn. Muller, W. van Parys, Jean de Gourmont,

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(1) Correspondence IV, 160.



the brothers Jan and Hieronymus Moercx and other wood and copper-plate engravers contributed to giving to Plantin's publications that refined artistic character which distinguishes them among all others.

Two sources of many difficulties, of great danger to Plantin, were politics, which in the troubled years of his sojourn in Antwerp threw his mind into such a passionate state of ferment, and gave rise to so many bloody conflicts. The very nature of their business placed all printers in the very midst of the strife. J. van Liesvelt was beheaded for having printed forbidden books; J. Roelants and P. van Keerberghé were thrown into prison for the same reason. With Plantin matters never went quite so far; as a fact, his bearing with regard to the contending parties caused him more than once to be accused of double-dealing.

Several times he was suspected of nourishing calvinistic sympathies. In 1562 all his property was declared forfeit and sold, on discovery that he had in 1561 printed the heretical booklet "*Brieve instruction pour prier.*" The searching of the house, with the arrest of the whole family, serving-maid included, is one of the favourite subjects of Antwerp painters, who down to some years ago helped to keep alive a kind of Plantin-romanticism. Plantin, who in the last days of December 1561 had fled to Paris, at all times denied having printed the book in question. Three of



his workmen were punished for it, and already in 1563 Plantin was allowed to return.

Several times after he had to refute similar accusations, in 1563 for the opusculum of Pierre de Ravillan, *Instruction Chrestienne*, that appeared in 1562 with his address, and of which he declared himself not to be the printer. On the title-page which is at the Plantin Museum he wrote that declaration himself in the following words : " This printing is falsely attributed to me, for I did not do it nor cause it to be done. "

In order to re-establish his printing business, Plantin went into partnership with Goropius Becanus, C. and Ch. van Bombergh and Jacob Schott, who later became convinced calvinists. That also was brought up against Plantin, but did not embarrass him.

About C. van Bombergh he writes to Jean Mofflin, that he had certainly been his friend, but broke off with him completely as soon as he became aware of the man's calvinistic sympathies : " I requested him not to visit at my house, or that if he wanted to continue his visits, he would do so less familiarly, as they might give rise to scandal. " (1) And then he adds one of those fervid professions of his catholic faith, such as he was wont to write to De Cayas and to many other patrons and friends : " I have never

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(1) Correspondence I, 255.



adhered to nor favoured any sectarians, and neither to live nor to die am I willing to swerve from obedience to our most catholic King, our Mother the Holy Church, in whose faith I am determined to live and die." (1)

This renunciation of C. van Bombergh did not deter Plantin from still associating with other decided calvinists. The well known French preacher, Hubert Languet, had chosen him as his confidential man in Antwerp, Metellus, Dousa, Alexander Grapheus and other members of the Reformed Church, were among his friends at a later period. After the Spanish Fury, he was appointed printer of the States-General, he published anti-Spanish pamphlets; and he also composed poems in honour of William of Orange, the Duke of Alençon and the Archduke Mathias. Again at a later period, from 1583 till towards the end of 1585, he settled down at Leyden and became the printer of the young calvinistic university. All this was more than enough for Plantin to be looked upon by many catholics as a protestant in disguise, but he none the less at all times repudiated this accusation most emphatically. In doing so he showed himself very adroit : He worked for the States-General and for the Leyden University, that was true, but he did that solely because the large sums that the King of

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(1) Correspondence I, 259.



Spain owed him had not yet been paid. He worked at a fixed salary, and had fixed duties to perform. If ever he printed anything against either King or Church, it was under compulsion either of the States-General or the Archduke Mathias. He did not even look at the context of what he had to print, and those pamphlets were corrected by individuals who were absolute strangers to the business. If ever subversive works bearing his name appeared, he declared to Buyssetius (1), then they were things got up by jealous enemies who wanted to work his ruin. And to Arias Montanus he wrote that he never printed anything that had not first been approved by the censor, unless of course when compelled to do so by the authorities. (2)

He declares however that whatever had occurred, his feelings had remained unaltered with regard to Church and King, and he gave an irrefutable strength to his vindications by pointing out that besides the publications for the States-General objected to, he had gone on publishing breviaries, missals, diurnals and other liturgical books. (3)

His representations were if anything confirmed, and more especially so as regards his stay at Leyden,

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(1) Correspondence VI, 106.

(2) Correspondence VI, 119.

(3) Correspondence VI, 86.



by his praise of the toleration which he had always met with in his calvinistic surroundings. He wrote to De Cayas : " I was always treated most cordially, notwithstanding that they all knew me to remain at all times faithful to our holy catholic religion, and that at any time I would have protested to print any book contrary to that religion, but only such classic works as were suitable for all schools in all countries. " (1)

At one time, however, an individual whose name is not known and declaring to act in the name of a certain Don Antonio, wanted Plantin to print a tract against the King. Plantin " flatly " (" tout à plat ", as he writes) refused, and when the Dutch States in opposition to his will, authorized that the printing of the tract should be done in his establishment, he decided to leave Leyden. Nevertheless he continued at all times to praise the tolerance of the Dutch, and more especially that of the Leyden University.

He that did most to persuade Plantin to come back to Antwerp, was the theologian and humanist Laevinus Torrentius, a faithful friend who had been made bishop of Antwerp in 1575, but who entered upon his office only in 1587. Immediately after Plantin's departure for Leyden, Torrentius wrote to him telling him how deeply he regretted that Plantin should live

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(1) Correspondence VII, 242.



in a calvinistic town, and what difficulty he had in convincing the printer's old friends that he was not a renegade. He promised him, in name of the Vatican, a large amount of fine work, and begged him, whatever betide, not to publish anything heretical. (1) Also Plantin's first visit when he came back from Holland, was to Torrentius who at that time lived at Liège. It was with pleasure that to that friend too he sent the certificate of orthodoxy which the prebendary Walter van der Steghen had given him. Shortly after the Spanish Fury he had been offered by Henri III, and had refused, the office of "*typographus regius* for France; and so he likewise refused several tempting offers made to entice him to other countries, among others there was that of Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy, who wanted to induce him to come and establish himself at Turin. He followed Torrentius' advice, remained true to Antwerp, became once more the printer of Church and King, and was buried there in 1589, in the choir of the Cathedral.

And yet he was not the exemplary, docile catholic, unconditionally and without the slightest restriction finding peace and absolute tranquillity in the bosom of his church. Actually he does not seem to have been a calvinist, and as regards that we may credit his many

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(1) Correspondence VII, 112.



affirmations of true catholic faith, but it is a fact that he successively joined two sects which by an ordinary catholic can hardly be termed other than heretical. The first was that of the " House of Love " (*Huis van Liefde*), which had at its head Hendrik Niclaes, and advocated a rather intricate mystical doctrine. Plantin was deeply devoted to this sect. He printed secretly all the books of Niclaes, and made it possible for one of his workmen, Aug. van Hasselt, to establish himself at Vianen, and there to print the tracts of Niclaes. Plantin remained in correspondence with Niclaes until during the rule of Alva, when Philip II favoured him with the authorisation to print the *Biblia regia*, several other liturgical works, and even the *Index librorum prohibitorum*. The foundations of Niclaes's conceptions were however very characteristic of those troubled times, when human beings fought one another to the death because of dogmas and ritual. The outward form of worship hardly counted with Niclaes; what mattered most was to be imbued with love, with the real love of God and of our neighbour. Niclaes even allowed his followers to belong to another church. He himself, the head of the House of Love, declared himself to be a humble Roman Catholic, and Plantin, as regards himself, could reason likewise.

After 1567 Plantin left the Niclaes community, and became one of the followers of Hendrik Janssen,



Plate 16.

### THE TYPE FOUNDRY

This work shop is as picturesque as an alchymist's laboratory, with its rich collection of furnaces and crucibles, matrixes and dies.







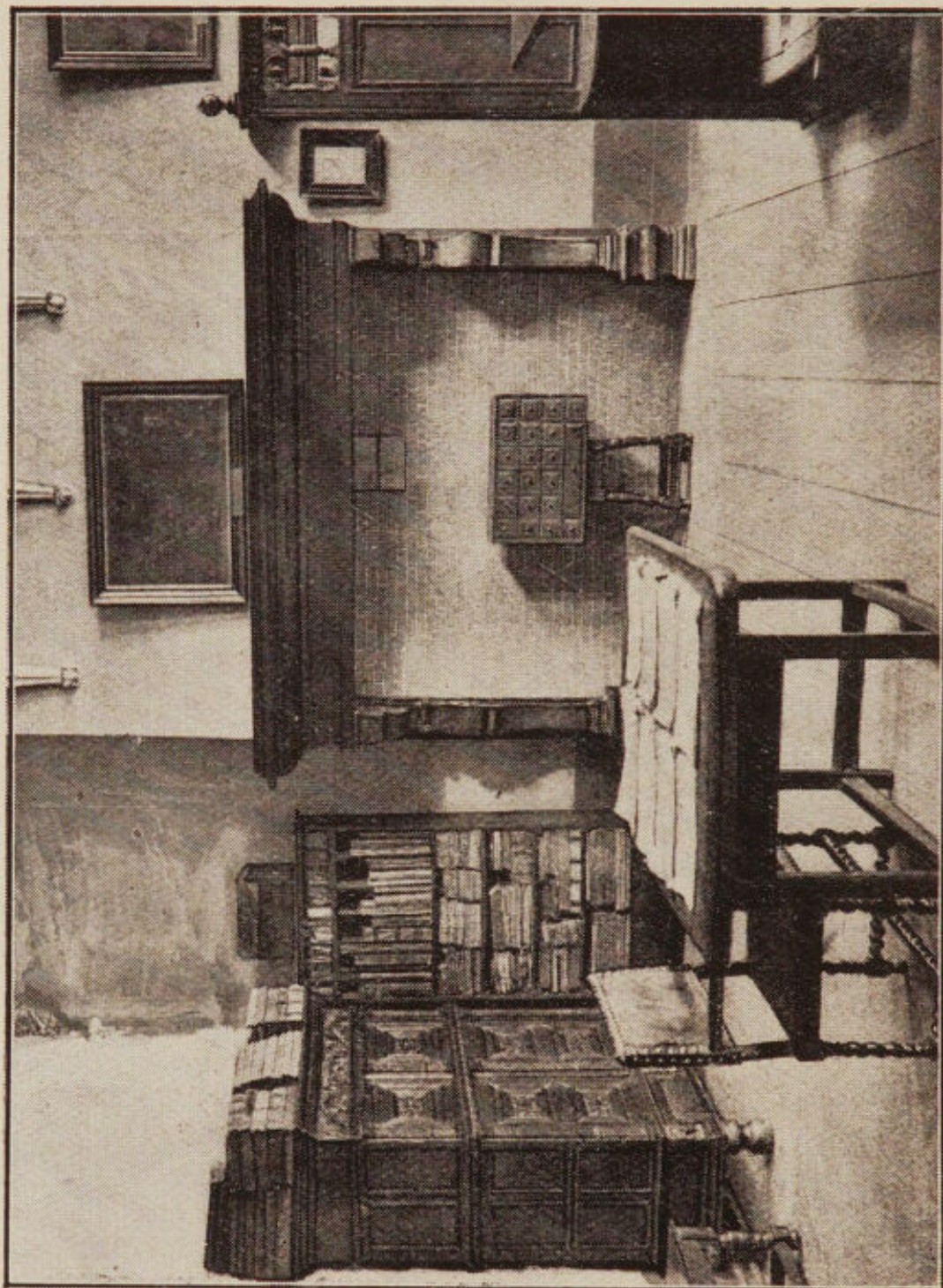




Plate 17.

### THE CORRECTOR'S ROOM

In this room, where the sparse light caresses stools and tables, many great scholars laboured with assiduous care; it was here also that Plantin's little daughters used to read proofs of new set type in all languages.



better known as Barrefelt or Hiël, who at one time had also belonged to the House of Love. The followers of Barrefelt too attached not the slightest importance to the authority of texts and dogmas. Self-sacrifice, love and humility of heart were the means by which, in their mystical aspirations, they endeavoured to become identified with God. Plantin kept up a brisk correspondence with Barrefelt, and that sometimes in a secret, conventional language. He printed the *Verborgen Akkerschat* (Hidden Field Treasure), the book that was most honoured by the sect. He was the head of the Antwerp group, to which several members of his family also belonged. Shortly before his death even, Plantin received a hearty epistle from Barrefelt, in which the latter called him his " friend dear to his heart and brother in the Lord " (1).

It seems quite obvious now that it would be unfair to represent Plantin as a kind of heretic in disguise or to accuse him of hypocrisy on the ground of his joining the group of Niclaes, even less so for joining that of Hiël.

We readily admit that in those troublous times Plantin's attitude and actions were more than once inspired by purely opportunist considerations. All his deeds cannot always be considered as manifestations

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(1) Correspondence VIII, 528.



of a pure, unbiassed, spiritual life. Often we must judge them as a means of defence of perhaps even as a calculation. But all that is but outward semblance.

To understand the religious convictions of this clever business man who at the same time was a mystic, we must watch him as he communes with himself, when neither in thought nor action he is influenced by any single outside factor, and when he shows himself as he really is.

It is thus that we find him in his letters.

There can be no question of double-heartedness, when in intimate letters to his children he advises them to remain at all times faithful to the Catholic Church, though he himself at the time, adheres to the doctrine of Hiël. He does not find anything incompatible in that.

Plantin cannot be accused of double dealing when he solemnly assured his friend Arias Montanus whom he loved like a brother, and who at many critical junctures in the printer's life gave him real brotherly help and succour, of his true catholic convictions, on the ground of which he begged his friend to intercede for him with the King. Hiël's adherent could very well give this assurance of catholic orthodoxy without falling short of the sincerity of which true friendship made a duty. This point of view is much strengthened by the fact that Arias Montanus, the eminent catho-



Plate 18.

### THE BOOK SHOP

This picturesque little shop bathes in an atmosphere of bygone days. Several interesting objects are to be seen hanging on the walls, amongst others the very rare catalogue of forbidden books (1569) also a price list of schoolbooks and prayer books. Near the window is the shop clerk's stool, further there is to be seen a calendar of 1595.







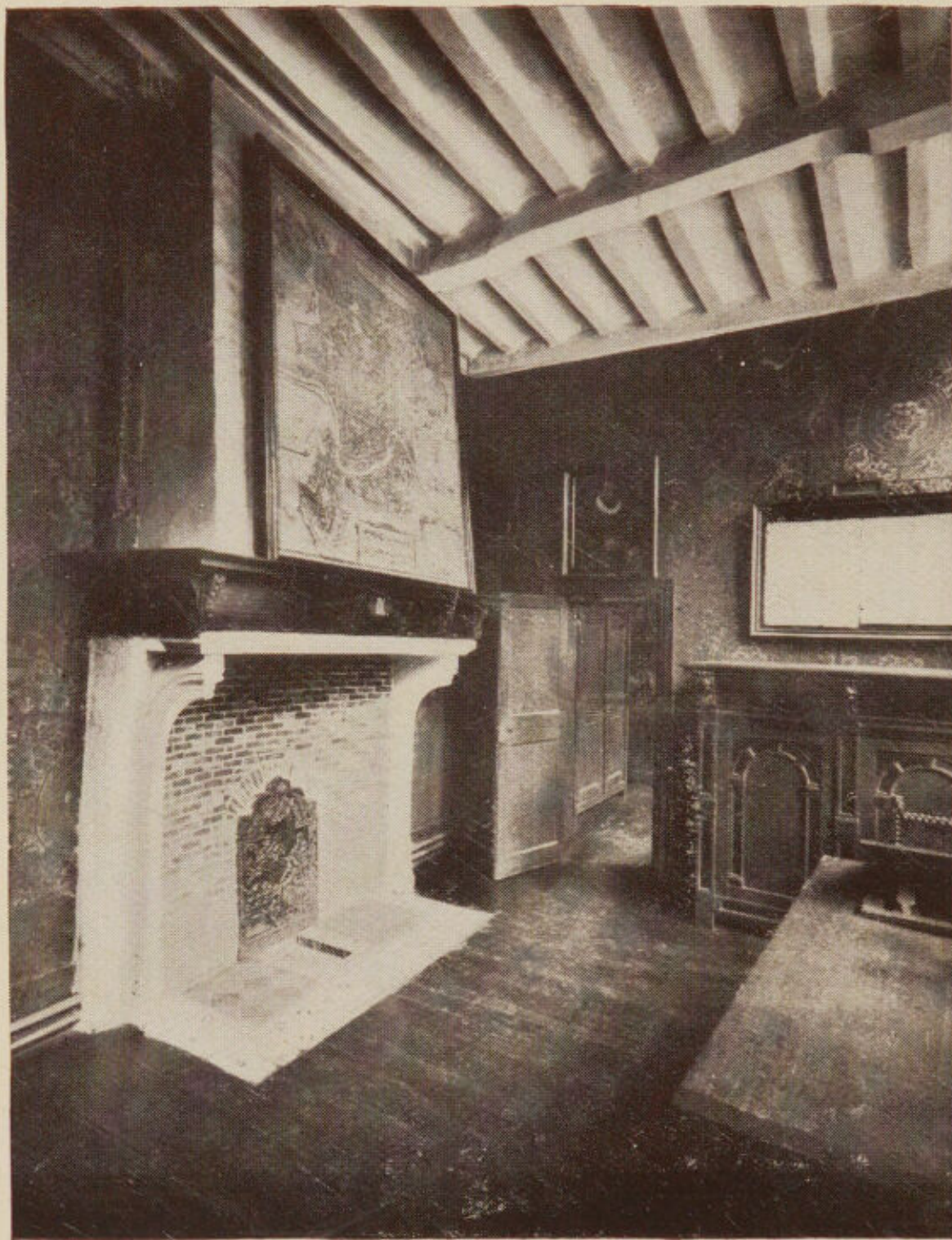




Plate 19.

### JUSTUS LIPSIUS' ROOM

The learned Justus Lipsius was a friend of the Plantin family, and was their guest each time he came to Antwerp, he even had his own room in Plantin's house.

Justus Lipsius was born in 1547 in Overysse (near Brussels), he was famous throughout the world as a philosopher. He became professor at the University of Louvain and died in the latter town in 1606.

The House of Plantin published several of his works, e. g. his edition of Seneca's works (1615 and 1632) with title and engravings by G. Galle after designs by Rubens.

Over the door is a portrait of this scholar at the age of 38.



lic divine, confessor of Philip II, was not only cognizant of Plantin's sympathy for Hiël, but shared it and materially helped Hiël, and made use for some of his own writings of the latter's commentaries on some places of the Bible, which commentaries Plantin and Moretus translated for him from the Dutch, the only language that Hiël ever wrote.

According to tradition Plantin is the author of the well-known sonnet " *Le Bonheur de ce Monde* ", which, printed on the old press in the printing-shop of the Antwerp Museum with the XVIth century characters is still to be had there. There is no reason to disbelieve that Plantin really wrote this sonnet. It is a free paraphrase of an epigram by Martialis (X, 47), such as have been made also by Vauquelin des Yvetaux, Agrippa d'Aubigné, Des Barreaux and others. The sonnet attributed to Plantin gives a way of looking at life which tallies remarkably with that of the great printer.

Avoir une maison, commode, propre et belle,  
Un jardin tapissé d'espaliers odorans,  
Des fruits, d'excellent vin, peu de train, peu d'enfans,  
Posséder seul sans bruit une femme fidèle.  
N'avoir dettes, amour, ni procès, ni querelle,  
Ni de partage à faire avecque ses parens,  
Se contenter de peu, n'espérer rien des Grands,  
Régler tous ses desseins sur un juste modèle.



Vivre avecque franchise et sans ambition,  
S'adonner sans scrupule à la dévotion,  
Domter ses passions, les rendre obéissantes.  
Conserver l'esprit libre, et le jugement fort,  
Dire son Chapelet en cultivant ses entes.  
C'est attendre chez soi bien doucement la mort.

(The Happiness of this World. To have a comfortable house, clean and beautiful, a garden with walls decked with sweet-smelling espaliers, fruit, excellent wine, a small establishment, few children, to possess alone, in quiet, a faithful wife; to have no debts, no love affairs, no lawsuit nor quarrel, nor anything to share with relations; to be content with little, not to expect anything from the Great, to regulate all one's purposes according to a proper pattern; to live openheartedly and without ambition, without scruples to give oneself up to one's devotions, to subdue one's passions, to render them obedient; to keep the mind free and one's judgment strong, to tell one's beads while growing one's (grafted) trees, this is how to wait peacefully at home for death.)

This cannot be called an epicurean sonnet. The longing for happiness in life has so earnest and devout a character that with its restraining and disdaining of the passions, it, if anything, advocates a kind of moderate stoicism, such as was dear to the heart of Justus Lipsius.



We cannot find it strange that Plantin should have appreciated a beautiful house, a garden, a well-spread board and a glass of good wine, even though he were a man with strict principles. Was not Plantin the first builder of that fine home which later his grandson Balthasar Moretus made so beautiful, that it was looked upon together with the home of P. P. Rubens, as the finest of the town? Did he not belong to a period in which, according to De Lobel, the love for gardens and plants was more developed in his country than in any other? Was he not the tenant and in later years the owner of a fine garden at Berchem, a suburb of the town? Was he not the friend of the best known botanist of his day : Dodoens, Clusius and De Lobel; and did he not exchange as costly gifts, with his good friends Arias Montanus, Justus Lipsius and others, rare seeds of herbs and flowers? And more than once, as it appears from the accounts in the archives of the Plantin-Moretus Museum, a cask of wine was brought into the house.

It has been said that Plantin cannot have expressed the wish " to have few children ". And why not? We may not consider this wish from a modern, more or less neo-Malthusianistic point of view. It is quite plausible that Plantin who had six children, who had lost a little son and had suffered much anxiety and trouble through his daughters, should look upon a small number of children as a source of less trouble,



consequently also of happiness. " To have no debts " must also have been an ideal for a man who all his life had had to contend with pecuniary difficulties which caused him much suffering, as is shown in so many of his letters. And that " to expect naught from the Great ", is it not a cry from the very heart of that royal printer who had so implicitly relied on the promises made by Philip II, and who through waiting so long for their realisation, at length found himself in such a critical fix?

The sonnet is an enumeration of all the earthly possessions Plantin appreciated, also of those he did not possess but which, as a warrant for greater happiness, he considered it worth while to long for; and he probably wrote all that on a sunny day, when drawing up the balance of his life, with the good humour which notwithstanding the carking cares that weighed him down, never entirely deserted him.









## ANTWERP IN THE XVIIth AND XVIIIth CENTURIES

In 1685 Antwerp commemorated the hundredth anniversary of the capture of the town by A. Farnèse. With sumptuous pageants and shows of all kinds the people celebrated the return of the city to the catholic faith and the Spanish dynasty, but what seems very strange, in their festive joy they forgot that the year 1585 had for them yet another meaning, which however was not of a nature to give rise to a joyful enthusiasm.

This year marks the beginning of the decline of Antwerp as a great commercial city and as a world centre of intellectual life. It is then that for Antwerp dies out the XVIth century with its broad Erasmian conceptions, its wonderful efforts in the realm of thought, its epic contest between the old scholastic world and the new spirit of the Renaissance.

The political and religious troubles of which during many years Antwerp had been the theatre, engendered nothing but bitter disappointments for the city. It lost a large number of the foremost among its in-



Plate 20.

**BED ROOM**

(1st floor.)

The hangings in this room are of genuine cordovan leather, the furniture dates from the XVIth century.



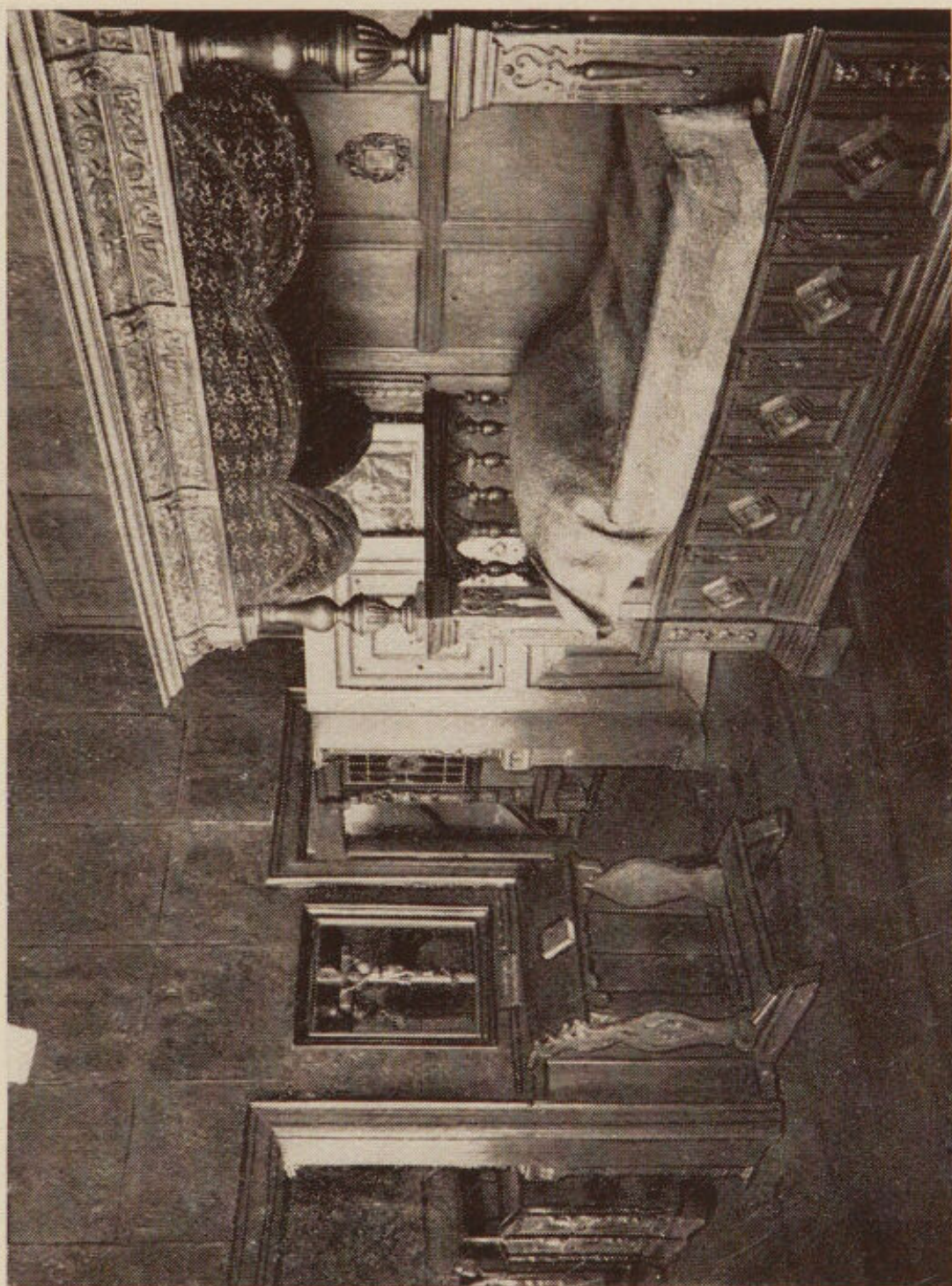








Plate 21.

### RECEPTION ROOM

This room is no longer open to the public. It is a picturesque example of a XVIth century living room.



habitants, who went over to calvinism. The Van Boerles, Keynsens, De Mouchérons, Gooses, Papenbroecks, and a great number of other men of letters, scholars, merchants and manufacturers deserted the borders of the Scheldt to go and follow their religion in Holland. Their talents, their spirit of enterprise and their energy were lost for Antwerp.

The financial difficulties with which Spain had to cope, as also the ever increasing political insufficiency of that country were fatal to the port of Antwerp. The town had followed the Iberian peninsula in its glorious course to riches and power in the XVIth century, and now it likewise shared the fate of Spain in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries in the sombre days of her decadence.

When in 1648 the Scheldt was closed by the Treaty of Munster, Spain had not the power to prevent this measure, which in a very short time brought about the ruin of the town.

Judging by the luxury still displayed in Antwerp in the first half of the XVIIth century, one would never have supposed that for this city a period of economic decline had set in which was fatally to lead to complete ruin.

In the years of Albert and Isabella the people still throve on the riches garnered in bygone days; the death-throes of the poor old metropolis were hidden under the artistic glory of the School of Rubens,



Van Dyck and Jordaens. The sun went down in a splendour of purple and gold, but he went down for a long, long night!

Ever since 1585 a spirit quite different to the one to which Antwerp had owed its greatness in the XVIth century, had made itself felt, and Antwerp became one of the outposts of catholic orthodoxy reigning supreme throughout the country. It is at Antwerp that the Catholic-Reformation movement, as a rule called the Counter-Reformation, reached its acme.

Any scientific activity outside the Catholic Church had become an impossibility. Of the spirit of humanism, its tolerance, its accessibility for all intellectual initiative, nothing remained than the cult of the Latin word and of the stoicism of Seneca christianized by Justus Lipsius.

The reign of the Archdukes was purely confessional. Through all the manifestations of life flowed a current of exclusive catholicism; Church discipline had become far stricter, especially after the Synod at Mechlin in 1607, and methodically introduced all the reforms prescribed by the Council of Trent; all the intellectual and artistic powers worked together at firmly establishing and spreading the articles of the Catholic faith. The XVIIth century became a period of active piety with a strongly marked tendency to an ascetic mysticism that fed itself at medieval



sources, that throve on the Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis and on the piety of Spanish authors as Juan a Cruce and St. Teresa. At Antwerp, as throughout the country, many conventual brotherhoods opened schools and instituted charitable works of all kinds. Chiefly the Jesuits distinguished themselves by a restless and fruitful activity. Their schools attracted the youth of the higher classes and so gave to the whole of this epoch a character of christianized humanism. Their Congregations of the Holy Virgin brought together the middle and lower classes; Antwerp alone possessed four such sodalities with a very large number of members, among which were Rubens, Van Dyck, and the choicest spirits of the population. It is then that Antwerp got to be called the town of Mary, and that the Norbertian canon Wichmans, making use of a rather surprisingly mundane comparison, called the Virgin the " Marchioness of Antwerp ".

Art also was mainly at the service of the Church. Only in that domain did Antwerp witness the perfect development of the Renaissance spirit. Humanistic ideas were banished from literature and science, but accepted in art. In the XVIIth century the whole pleiad of Antwerp engravers worked at illustrating the pious books of the Jesuits. The Wierickxes, the Collaertses, the Galles and so many others were inspired by holy subjects which often had been sugges-



ted by the priests. The baroque style of Michelangelo's " Epigoni " became the style most cherished by the Church. The art of Rubens and his School reached the brilliant apotheosis of the Catholic faith that the Jesuits had led to glory, and when the prince of Flemish painters, with a plenteousnes of terse allegories and with his unequalled taste for gorgeous decoration designed his " Triumph of Faith ", he made a striking symbol of the triumph of the Counter-Reformation at Antwerp.









## THE WORK OF THE MORETUS

---

Jan Moerentorf or Moretus, the immediate successor of Christopher Plantin, was above all else a scrupulous, industrious business man. At the age of fourteen he was already serving his future father-in-law and continued to do so with an unswerving faithfulness praised by Plantin himself on more than one occasion; the young man conducted the shop and the book-selling until in 1589, when after Plantin's death he took the management of the whole business in hand.

Jan Moretus, like Plantin, was an excellent scholar and possessed literary tendencies to which he sometimes gave expression, notwithstanding his numerous business occupations.

Plantin praised him for his knowledge of languages, and his correspondence clearly shows how well informed he was of the humanist literary movement, and how deep was the interest he felt in the great scholars of his time and in their work. His letters lack both the elevated moral sense and the pithy, telling style we admire in Plantin's epistles, but still he some-



times used a pleasing way of writing, with the cool understanding and compensating humour of one who feels his superiority but is none the less kindly disposed towards his inferiors.

Jan Moretus chose the Flemish language for his literary essays, and so he deserves a special place in the history of Flemish literature. Though Jacob Moerentorf, Jan's father, had been born at Lille, he was a Fleming, and Flemish was the language spoken in his home. The Flemish bible printed by Willem Vorsterman (1531) which by the superscription is shown to have been father Moerentorf's personal property, also sufficiently proves that Flemish was the language most familiar to him.

When looking for a suitable place for Jan Moretus in the generally accepted classification of classic Flemish literature, then by degrees we find he fits in best in the sphere of thought of Flemish Renaissance at the time of its growth.

Under the influence of the French pleiad a love for one's own language was called into being. The beauties of the Latin style and language stimulated our men of letters to try and match them in Flemish were it only in translations.

This is the time of Plantin's and Kiliaen's dictionaries (1573-1574) which gradually roused the people to realize that their mother-tongue could become the equal of Latin; the time had come to devel-



op a new technique of prosody, while the most daring, such as Jan van der Noot and others, with talent and already with a very clear sense of the root of the matter, will oppose the Renaissance ideal of Petrarca and Ronsard to that of the old and dwindling rhetoricians.

We can still more accurately define the place of Jan Moretus in Flemish literature by naming him beside the three well-known writers Jan van Hout, Jan de Gruytere (Janus Gruterus) and Dirk Volkertszoon Coornhert, whom he knew personally and with whom he shared a great admiration for and attachment to Justus Lipsius, who was one of the most eminent inspirers of humanistic life in the Low Countries, at Antwerp as a friend of the Plantin-Moretus family, and as a greatly honoured professor at Leyden first and later at Louvain, Jan Moretus translated into his own language the so highly praised, beautifully written book of Lipsius : *De Constantia libri duo* (1584). No less a man than Coornhert himself, one of the founders of modern Netherlandish prose, was so highly pleased with the translation by Moretus, that as soon as he had got thoroughly acquainted with the work, he gave up all further translating of Lipsius' works and declared his entire approbation of the language of Moretus. Jan Moretus gave another instance of the interest he felt in the literature of his country, by translating the "*Eerste Dag*" (First Day)



of the "*Première semaine de la Création du Monde*" (First week of the Creation of the World) by Guillaume de Salusse Sr du Bartas. It is the oldest of the five complete or fragmentary translations known in this language, of a work which in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries was so widely popular in the provinces of the Low Countries.

Under the management of Moretus the new spirit, which became predominant after the capture of the town by Farnese, soon became manifest in the Plantin printing establishment. Without neglecting the technical perfection and the artistic worth of the book, Plantin at all times had been chiefly concerned about the scientific qualities of his publications. He had always endeavoured to publish books of an advanced scientific character, and as much as possible disclosing new horizons. This aim got modified when it became Moretus's. He troubled less about the contents than about the aspect of the book. It was no longer a scientific instrument as a first consideration, but a work of art. In this respect Jan Moretus was a pioneer. Thanks to the co-operation of some of the best engravers to be found in Antwerp between 1590 and 1620, such as Philips Galle and his two sons, Theodor and Cornelis, his two sons-in-law Adriaan Collaert and Charles Mallery, Bolswert, Boel, De Gheyn and others, he managed to produce some really very beautiful, typographically artistic work. The most



important reformer of the Plantin book in the sense of the Antwerp XVIIth century High-Renaissance, was however Balthasar Moretus I.

In his old age Plantin himself had been able to rejoice in the promising culture of this second son of Jan Moretus. In effect, it was at the fireside of Jan Moretus that the old arch-printer found most comfort in the sorrowful closing years of his life. There he saw his grandchildren, the hope of the race, growing up to manhood, and watched their education with the greatest concern.

Melchior was the eldest son; he studied at Douai and at Louvain and was ordained a priest in 1598, but shortly after he went out of his mind and dragged out a miserable existence until his death.

Balthasar, on the contrary, was endowed with a brilliant intellect, and in 1614, a few years subsequent to his father's death, he found himself at the head of the printing business. As a boy even, he had written exceptionally clever Latin letters to his brother at Douai, and also occasional verses of which both the father and grandfather were extremely proud. He wrote Latin "*actiunculae*", that is short dramatic scenes in which he acted with his brothers at family parties at home, sometimes under the guidance of their professor of Latin Levinus, Schenkelius and Rumoldus Verdonck. Balthasar frequented the school of the latter, behind the Cathedral, where is now the



Melkmarkt; there he met P. P. Rubens, a fellow-pupil, with whom he formed a lasting friendship. In 1592, shortly after the return of Lipsius to Belgium, Balthasar I went and stayed at the house of the famous professor at Louvain, where he followed his course of Latin. He remained there until 1594, and had learnt to write Latin with an ease and a purity which could not but ensure him a place among our best Neo-latin men of letters.

It is in Bathasar Moretus' time, that P. P. Rubens began lending a helping hand in getting up the books printed on the Plantin presses, and the combined efforts of the typographer and the painter created the most perfect specimen of a beautiful XVIIth century Antwerp book. Between 1608 and 1645 Rubens designed a large number of frontispieces and ornaments of all kinds for missals, breviaries and scientific works. Among these are the complete edition of Seneca in 1615, the "*Crux Triumphans*" by Bosius in 1617, the "*Justitia et Jure*" of Lessius, the "*Obsidio Bredana*" of Herman Hugo, the works of Goltzius in 1645, etc.

Rubens's frontispieces do not only serve to embellish the books, but they also aim at giving on the first page a synopsis of the context by means of all kinds of allegories and symbols borrowed from the mythology and emblematic literature of the Renaissance. Rubens was uncommonly resourceful in this domain and



managed to leave the stamp of his splendid decorative art on this kind of work.

The praises of the Plantin presses continued to be heralded throughout the XVIIth century. Their work was lauded as in the time they were new, and they were still visited as one of the wonderful sights of Antwerp, by all travellers of note, kings and princes who were spending a few days at Antwerp. In 1631, it was the Queen-mother, Marie de Medici, who honoured Moretus with a visit in the company of the Archduchess Isabella Dela Serre; the Queen's historiographer gives a grandiloquent report of that visit in the work he devoted to the travels of Marie de' Medici in the Low Countries.

Some years later it was the Prince-Cardinal, Don Ferdinand of Spain who on the occasion of his Entry in the town also visited the workshop of Moretus. This time it was Philippe Chifflet, prior of Bellefontaine and chaplain of the oratorio of Isabella, who in his *Diarium* on all that happened at Court between 1633 and 1636 expatiated on what the Prince Cardinal had seen in the establishment of Moretus : " It had the aspect of a small republic, " writes Chifflet. " Forty workmen found their regular daily employment there : compositors, printers, proof-readers, wood- and copper-engravers, and letter-founders, all had their work cut out for them. " On that occasion Chifflet tells how the excellent wood-engraver



Christopher Jegher, under the very eyes of the Prince Cardinal finished his portrait of which Rubens had made the project and E. Quellinus had executed the design.

The Moretus presses in the first half of the XVIIth century were exceptionally active. In 1609 Jan printed for 85,000 florins of books in one year and in 1637 Balthasar did business for a total of 115,000 florins. Their best work bears the unmistakable stamp of the spirit of the Antwerp Counter-Reformation with its predilection for grandeur. Their book production is a very characteristic subdivision of the Antwerp High-Renaissance art.

Ever since 1641 the printing-establishment stood under the management of Balthasar Moretus II, brother of Balthasar I, who died unmarried. This successor also was very meritorious. It is to him that Joost van den Vondel dedicated the fine ode " De Druck-kunst " (The Art of Printing) in which he is represented as a general in the midst of his army in battle array :

Hy treedt, gelyck een veldheer, daer  
In 't midden van zyn legerschaer,  
Bereit ten slage, in haer vierkanten,  
En weet zyn legers net te planten.  
Hij monstert zyn verminckten uit,  
En trage krijgslie, moe van buit



Te halen, met hun stomp geweer;  
En vult de leege vaendels weer  
Met jongens, kloeck op hunne stucken,  
En fiks om lustigh los te drukken.

(He marches as a general with his army arranged in squares around him, and he knows just where to place his men; he picks out the maimed and lagging warriors with their stumpy muskets, weary with getting in spoils; he fills in the empty spaces with younger men sticking th their guns and ready to fire away.)

Vondel does not confine himself to this clever, playful allegory, but in Balthasar II he also praises the ancestral hereditary virtues and speaks of Antwerp printing of which the fame had spread even to China.

Nevertheless in spite of all this it was at that time that the decline of the Plantin printing-house set in. However meritorious the management, no one could prevent this establishment sharing the fate of all the others of the town when the general crisis came and made itself felt with an increasing force in the XVIIth century, and more especially at Antwerp, after the conclusion of the Treaty of Munster.

Balthasar II and even more so his son Balthasar III had grown used to leading the life of wealthy gentlemen. St Loyens refers to this way of living in a petition he sent the King in the name of the Moretus family : " They live ", he writes, " in a very wealthy



way, with carriages, horses and domestics, according to the customs of the nobles of this country... and leave the work of the presses and the sale of books to those that they charge with it. "

Themselves very rich already — Balthasar II was worth two millions — they made rich marriages which introduced them into the best society of Antwerp, of which they adopted the uses and customs. They still remained worthy and clever merchants, very anxious to uphold the fair name they bore, but theirs was no longer the dream of that highly gifted man, the founder of their house; theirs had become a dream of worldly grandeur, and they hoped to be raised to the nobility.

The education that Balthasar II gave his son leaves no doubt on the matter. A " Règle journalière " (Daily Rule), which Balthasar III, when a boy, was to observe, and which still exists among the archives of the Plantin-Moretus Museum, plainly shows in the daily duties it prescribes, the threefold preoccupation of the father.

Besides the traditional piety of the race, he wanted to instil into his son the old love for the printer's trade. But especially, by making him observe all kinds of ceremonial rules and courtesies he wished to prepare the lad so that he might one day take a place and hold it with honour among the highest of the town.

Young Moretus was even sent to Paris to reside



at a French nobleman's house, M. Le Gay, Seigneur of Morfontaine, to there acquire an aristocratic polish and learn the French language. The Moretus were not disappointed in their expectations. Their dream was realized in the person of Balthasar III. In 1692 he was raised to the nobility by Charles II, King of Spain, and shortly after he was granted the privilege to carry on his printing business "without hindrance by the Maxims and Rules of Heraldry". This privilege was one granted by kings only to painters and sculptors, cannon founders, gun-powder makers and... printers.

One can very well understand the desire of the Moretus to be raised to the nobility. This being accessible to fortune and merit, as was the case in the Low Countries in the XVIIth century, the Moretus family had as good a claim to it as any other distinguished family of the period. Had they not, besides, money and property, that which renders a noble race most sympathetic : a renown whereon they justly prided themselves and which imposed heavy duties on them? They too had begun to form dynasties; they had ancestors whose memory they revered and whose effigies they had had perpetuated by the most gifted artists in a kind of family pantheon : the beautiful inner-court and the halls of their grand mansion, their castle, in fact, whence they fought the world, not with sword and spear, but with the peaceful but no



less glorious weapons of knowledge and art. They had conquered an honourable place in the aristocracy of scholars and patricians, and if now they wanted to have their social rise publicly confirmed by obtaining a blazon and titles of nobility, then we, with our modern, democratic principles, need not systematically and unconditionally declare such a wish to be an instance of family pride, of megalomania and love of ostentation.

After 1696, the year of the third Balthasar's death, we have still a whole series of this race succeeding one another at the head of the Plantin printing business : Balthasar's widow until 1714, her son Balthasar IV, until 1730; Jan Jacob Moretus, until 1757; Frans Jan Moretus until 1768, his widow Maria Borrekens until 1797; her three sons Jacob, Lodewyk and Frans in partnership until 1808; Lodewyk, Frans, Xaveer Moretus until 1820; Albert, Frans, Hyacinth Moretus until 1865, and Edward Jozef Hyacinth Moretus until 1876.

It is this highly-strung family pride which made it possible to realize that unique wonder, that real miracle of piously keeping together all that Plantin and his succeeding generations had accumulated in the ancestral home; the instruments that had served for the work of the hands and the brain as also all the sumptuous treasures of art that help to embellish life. Plantin and the first Moretus kept everything that



had occupied a place in their lives, because they were actuated by the individualistic Renaissance feeling that they were outstanding people. The later members of the Moretus family did it out of family pride. In both cases it proved in the result a benefaction conferred on Antwerp, Belgium and thinking mankind in general.

The same feeling animated the last owner of the Plantin House, Edward Moretus, when declining the most tempting foreign offers; he showed a disinterestedness and an attachment to his own town and country, which enabled Antwerp to convert the ancient family patrimony into a public Museum unique of its kind throughout the world.









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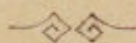


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