PLANTIN, AND THE PLANTIN CELEBRATION.

As we go to press the citizens of Antwerp and numerous invited and uninvited guests are celebrating the Third Centennial Anniversary of the famous printer, Christopher Plantin. We propose to give an account of these festivities in our next issue, and in this to give our readers some account of the famous old bookmaker and the work he did.

Amongst other things, it has been arranged that the proceedings will include a book congress (conférence du livre), of which a provisional programme has already been drawn up. The subjects have been divided into three classes: the first includes questions as to the material of the book arrangements as to the coverings of official publications exchanged among different Governments, etc. The second class includes questions as to the publishing and sale prices of books, suppression of Customs duties on books, and an examination of the laws of various countries affecting publishers, editors, authors, copyright, etc. The third class includes library subjects, such as the international exchange of books, organization of public libraries, a uniform system of cataloguing, and cognate questions.

The city of Antwerp is not merely famous as a great art-loving city; it was also one of the early homes of printing, which has revolutionised the world. It possesses in the Museum Plantin-Moretus one of the most wonderful and interesting records of printing in its earlier stages to be found, perhaps, in the world. A recent visitor to Antwerp, writing in Chambers' Journal, says "by rare good fortune here we have the very home of Christopher Plantin, who may truly be called a 'Master Printer,' preserved to us. An old Dutch home, with its stately hall for receiving guests, its ordinary living-rooms, broad low staircase, open quadrangle, balconies, verandas, and all the many rooms and galleries where the printing-work was carried on. These are in no way apart from the house; they are not only under one roof, but are so much part
of the household life that it is difficult for any casual visitor to tell where the house proper ends and the printing establishment begins.

It shows very plainly that in those old days people had no wish to dissociate their work from their home and home-life, but lived in its very midst, with all their workpeople around them, in a truly patriarchal fashion.

Christopher Plantin was born at Tours about 1514; he was educated in Paris, and finally, after various chances and changes, settled in Antwerp, where he began life as a bookbinder; but an accident he met with caused him to turn his attention to his real vocation of printing. At this date, about 1550, printing, though not in its infancy, was sufficiently novel for congenial spirits to work at it with never-failing enthusiasm. No difficulties daunted them; no discouragements held them back; they had ideals which upheld them, and which, with unconquerable perseverance and manifold labours, they generally contrived to carry out, leaving to those who came after them not merely the actual works they produced as legacies of untold value, but examples of patience and stout-hearted determination, which have perhaps never been rivalled in the world's story. Such an undertaking was the great Polyglot Bible published by Plantin: the adventures and the difficulties he underwent in the years when it was being published would have daunted many a stout heart; but through peace and war, under suspicion of heresy, through money difficulties of the most complicated nature, brought on by Philip of Spain refusing to advance the money due to him, he struggled on for five weary years; till at length, in August, 1573, the magnificent work was completed. It consisted of twelve hundred and thirteen copies on paper of various qualities, and thirteen copies on vellum. Those who have read Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic* can realise the horrors of the years during which the Polyglot Bible was in progress.

A great fair was held at Frankfort twice a year at Lent and in autumn; and these fairs Plantin or his son-in-law, Jean Moretus, regularly attended for many years. At the Lenten fair in 1566, Plantin displayed specimen sheets of the Polyglot Bible; and soon after the Duke of Alva arrived in the Netherlands. Then followed a time of bloodshed and trial, hardly ever equalled in any country, when many brave and noble men laid down their lives for their country, including Counts Egmont and Horn, and when William the Silent gained deathless renown as the patriotic defender of his country.

During all these years, Plantin was working steadily on; and when the Polyglot Bible was completed, one of the thirteen copies on vellum was presented by Philip—who would not allow any one to have the vellum copies but himself—to the Duke of Alva with the famous inscription upon it: 'From the best of Monarchs to the best of Ministers.' This very copy, with this Latin inscription—most likely written by Arius Montanus, by whom it was presented to Alva—may now be seen in the British Museum, shewing little if any trace of the three hundred years which have passed since Plantin sent it forth to the world. An interesting and detailed account of the printing of this Bible, with the many difficulties Plantin had to encounter, the greed of Philip, and the troublous times in particular, was given in the Quarterly Review some little time ago.

The 'Hôtel Plantin,' as it used to be called, or the 'Musée Plantin-Moretus,' as it has been called since the city of Antwerp purchased it in 1876, stands in a small square, surrounded by commonplace houses...
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the fruits of their labours.

Philip—who would not allow any one to have the
twelve vellum copies but himself—to the Duke of Alva gave
the famous inscription upon it: 'From the hostel-
rage of the Thirteen, the Thirteenth is taken: may
it bring to light the light of learning!'
and shops, with a sort of market in the centre of the square, where country produce, second-hand furniture, pots and pans, and similar items, made up a very prosaic entourage. It seemed strange to pass from the dusty bustling market and the shrill voices of the Anversoises contending over a centime more or less for a bunch of pot-herbs, or disputing the exact value of a rickety chair, into the calm cool retreat of the Musée Plantin—to go from the petty cares and peaceful prosperity of to-day right back for three hundred years into an atmosphere of learning and culture, pursued amid the distracting anxieties of war, bloodshed, and cruelty.

Passing from the entrance hall through one or two rooms of no special note, we come to the great banqueting hall or reception room, adorned with the portraits on the walls, and the monograms, both carved and in stained glass, of Plantin’s daughters seem to have been composed of very solid fare indeed, in the shape of sucking-pigs, legs of mutton, game, &c., with fruit of all kinds and confectionery. Mussepain, or Marsipan, as it is now called, seems to have been held in as high favour three hundred years ago as it is now.

The second daughter, Martine, married a young man called Jean Moretus, who was such a valuable coadjutor to Christopher Plantin that, besides becoming his son-in-law, he took him into partnership; the firm thenceforward became known as Plantin-Moretus; and Plantin affectionately calls him ‘a second self.’

Moretus and his wife most likely lived on in the ‘Hôtel Plantin’ after the death of Plantin, as we hear that Raphelengien and his wife lived in a house near the Cathedral, and Moretus is buried in one of the chapels of the Cathedral.

The floor of the hall is of the finest parquet, dark with age, and polished till it is as smooth as glass.

There are a row of windows on one side of the hall, looking out, not on the dusty square, but on a large quadrangle, gay with shrubs and flowering plants in pots and with a veranda on one side overgrown with a vine—evidently a very old one, from the thick gnarled stalks—covered with clusters of purple grapes. The wall of the quadrangle above this veranda was covered with a most luxuriant wisteria in full bloom, running far up the side of the house. A magnificent chimney-piece and wide open fireplace fill up one end of the hall; and the furniture consists of one or two beautiful inlaid tables and old oak cabinets and chairs. Leaving the hall by another door, we go up the low broad old-fashioned staircase, and in the rooms above we find many curious and quaint things. Great china jars and wondrous punch-bowls, jars, cups, and goblets, with lids of old blue Nankin china; rare bits of dragon china in pale yellow; wonderful tea-sets in curious

and their respective husbands. Plantin had five daughters, of whom he was both fond and proud; and we are told that in early childhood he taught them to read and write so well that they were able to help in correcting the proofs from the printing-house ‘in whatever language or writing it was sent to be printed.’ He adds also that he had taken pains to have them taught to work well with the needle, and to assist their mother in all her household duties. The eldest girl, who was called Marguerite, was specially famed for her fine writing. She married a very learned man called Raphelengien, whose services were of immense value to Plantin in revising and editing learned works. Among the Plantin papers there remains an account of the expenses incurred at Marguerite Plantin’s wedding. A hat, rings, and other ornaments were purchased by the bridegroom; the bride’s dress was of Lille ‘gros grain’ silk; and the wedding feast
...and in stained glass, of Plantin's daughters...
shades of green; and dainty priceless bits of egg-shell china, all show the traffic which was carried on between Antwerp and the East in these old days. There are old oak cupboards, where Dame Plantin, no doubt, had wonderful stores of the fine linen for which the Flemish were so justly famed; beds with embroidered coverlets in silk and satin; high-backed chairs and tabourets, all so wonderfully fresh and bright and clean, that it is hardly possible to realise their advanced age.

A cord drawn across the upper stair checked the advance of the curious, and we passed back through these ‘living-rooms,’ to use an old phrase, to what must ever be the great attraction of the place to all who love books—namely, the printing-house.

As has been said before, it is hardly possible to tell where the private rooms end and the printing establishment begins, so closely are they united.

There is one little nook, a sort of projecting wooden balcony, from which it was evident Plantin could have overlooked several of the rooms and galleries of the printing establishment, and which was doubtless made for this purpose. Imagination pictures him sitting here with his little daughters around him, teaching them as he did, and keeping an eye likewise on all that was going on around him; and it may have been here that he compiled the Flemish Dictionary which made him famous as an author as well as a printer, and which definitely fixed the national language of the Netherlands.

Time fails to tell the curious and interesting contents of the printing-house; they require to be seen to be thoroughly appreciated. There are specimens of the various kinds and varieties of type used not only in the great Polyglot Bible, but in the famous Missals and Service Books printed by Plantin, as well as the printing presses themselves. The tables at which the proof-correctors sat are still to be seen; there are huge old presses filled with engravings, etc., and long show-cases filled with open specimens of the beautiful Missals and Service Books; and also the original copper plates with etchings. The library is full of fine and valuable books, and endless documents relating to the business of the firm. Rubens, who was an intimate friend of Plantin, engraved many frontispieces for books and other illustrations, and these form not the least interesting part of the collection.

Coming through some part of the printing-house into the quadangle, we walked along the grape-clad veranda and re-entered the great hall for a last look. The windows were open; the warm summer air filled the room; all was quiet and still. Imagination pictured Marguerite Plantin rustling across the polished floor in her bridal ‘gros grain.’ Rubens must have sat at

that very fireplace talking with Christopher Plantin, and perhaps discussing new designs for the ornamentation of the Psalter and Breviary. The spare form of Arius Montanus, Philip’s confessor, and the editor of the Polyglot Bible, seems to glide in at one of the side-doors; Dame Plantin goes to and fro, busy with her household cares, or sits spinning at her little ebony wheel. Raphelengien sits in one of the deep window recesses buried in thoughts of his beloved books. Jean Moretus, bright and busy, hurries in from the printing-house. All pass before us as in a dream called up from the far-back past. The old house has passed through many a changeful year and witnessed many a scene of joy and sorrow. It remains a monument, perhaps unique, in its perfect preservation, and in the picture it brings before us of the daily life of the old Master Printer and his family three hundred years ago.
When the moment of separation begins, so closely are they united.

She is one little nook, a sort of projecting wooden nook, from which it was evident Plantin could have read the books that were there, and perhaps discussing new designs for the binding in her bridal 'gros grain.' Rubens must have waited

that very fireplace talking with Christopher Plantin, and perhaps discussing new designs for the binding in her bridal 'gros grain.' Rubens must have waited

The Bookbinder's Shop—Plantin Museum, Antwerp.