

AN EXPLOSIVE NUT (HURA CREPITANS).

In the vegetable kingdom we find several varieties of fruit that are explosible by various natural processes, and they belong to several families. In the wise economy of nature the object of this bursting is to disseminate the seeds. Probably the most peculiar explosive fruit is that of the sand box tree (*Hura crepitans*) of the family of *Euphorbiaceæ*, which opens its fruit with a loud report, scattering the pieces in all directions. We present an engraving of this nut, an example of which was sent to the *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN* to see if a remedy for the explosive feature could be devised, so that it could be used as an ornament. Of course nothing can be done to prevent this explosion, except, possibly, to plate it heavily with some metal, as copper.

The tree is found in tropical America, the particular example under consideration coming from the Amazon River valley. The tree grows to be from seventy to one hundred feet high. The bark is smooth and yields a milky sap when tapped. The twigs are sometimes spiny and the leaves are often cultivated for ornament, from the West Indies to Brazil. If left to ripen on the tree, the nut explodes with a sharp report, when each of its curious compartments, numbering sometimes as many as sixteen, flies asunder, so that its seed, which somewhat resembles a pumpkin seed, drops out. Our engraving shows the condition of these ruptured cells. The nut has a dense woody fiber. The nuts stand exporting, and occasionally do not explode for several months. The pieces are thrown several feet when the explosion takes place. If the nut is kept in alcohol or water, it can be preserved for years. In the *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN SUPPLEMENT*, No. 1051, an explosive fruit of the genus *Justicia* is described. When they are thrown into water they explode with a loud report, so that what tends to preserve *Hura crepitans* proves fatal to *Justicia*. In

THE PLANTIN-MORETUS MUSEUM.

There is a solidity and an old time burgher flavor about Antwerp which impresses the visitor, notwithstanding the fact that it is now one of the busiest ports on the Continent of Europe. Many of the fronts of the houses are commonplace, and none more so than the unassuming exterior of one of them in the Place du

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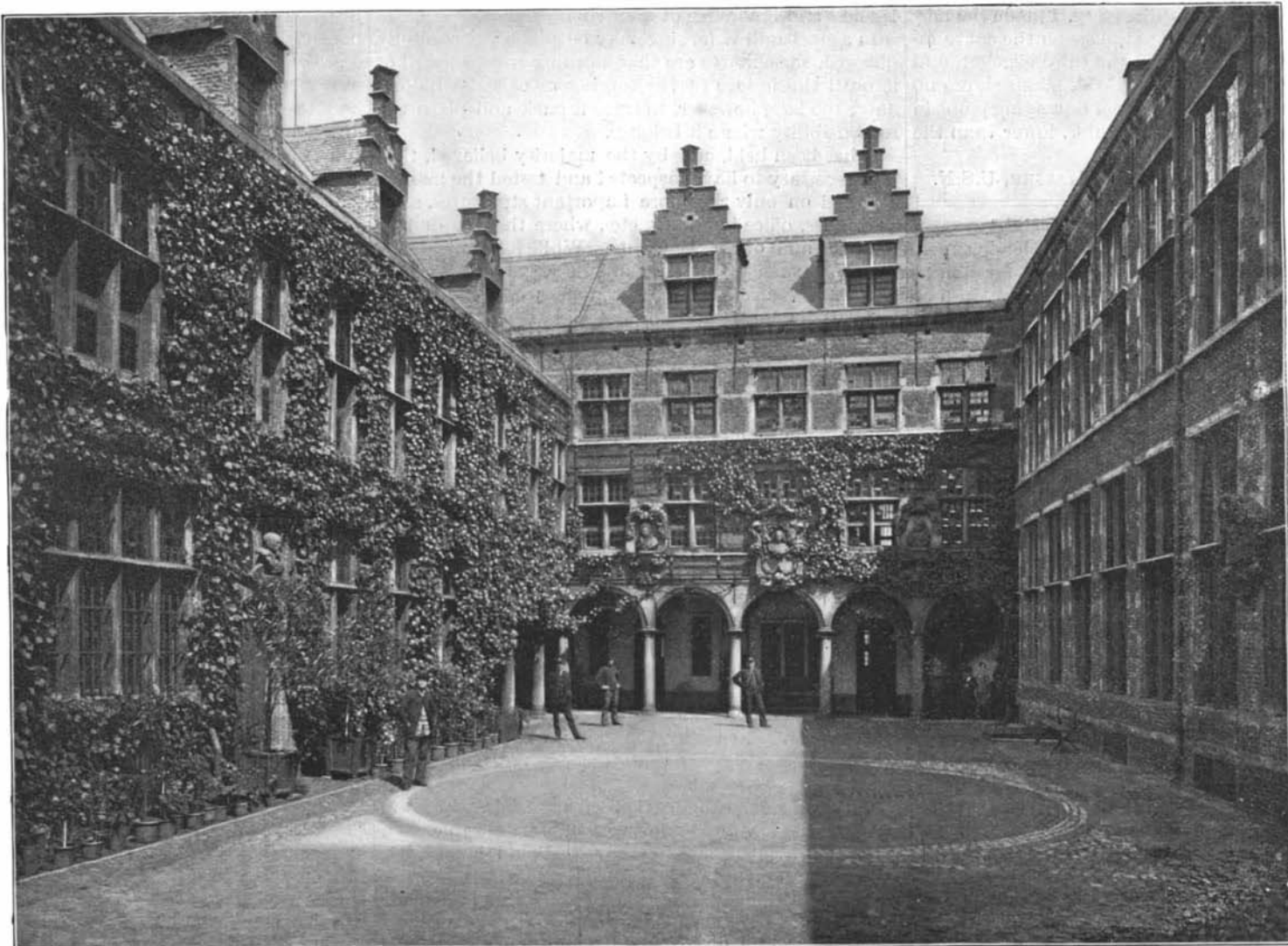
Vendredi, but, once within the portal, all is changed, and we stand face to face with one of the most exquisite monuments which the revival of learning has left to us. We stand in the courtyard of the Plantin-Moretus Museum—a museum devoted to one art, that of printing. In the buildings grouped around this courtyard, printing was carried on not only as a trade, but as art, for a period of three hundred and twelve years by a whole dynasty of editor-printers, the Plantin-Moretus. Happy has been their lot to escape the fate which overtook those more celebrated printers, Gutenberg, Aldus, Elzevir, who have left nothing behind but their books. To-day the museum is a complete exposition of the methods of work carried on from the time when the printer had begun to be a power in the world until the new order of things came in with the advent of power printing.

Before examining this printers' paradise in detail, let us pause for a moment to trace its history and that of

many superb examples of his art. He was stabbed one night, so that he was incapacitated from carrying on his trade. In 1555 he printed, or possibly only published, his first book; the next year four more, and so on, until his ability as printer and publisher was fully recognized. All went well until he printed an alleged heretical prayer book. This caused him to retire to

Paris for a few months. The matter was adjusted so that he was enabled to return, and with the help of borrowed capital he soon turned out an astonishing number of books. In four years he published over two hundred works, which would be considered phenomenal even in our modern publishing world. His business enlarged so he was obliged to take in a number of additional houses, so that, notwithstanding the fact that his successors altered and rebuilt some of the houses, the buildings remain very much as he left them. He obtained the royal patronage of Philip II, of Spain, and was assisted by that monarch to print the Royal

Polyglot Bible in four languages, a work in eight volumes. This was at that time the largest and most expensive work which had ever issued from the press. Plantin lost heavily on this book, but was recouped by being given a monopoly for the printing of mass books and prayer books for the Spanish dominions. He suffered many reverses, as when his establishment was sacked in 1576. He died in 1589, leaving a considerable fortune. All his family had been impressed into the service, and his son-in-law, John Moerentorf, whose name was Latinized into Moretus, succeeded him. The policy of the house was now somewhat altered, for while Plantin had set authors at work and really caused the works to be written, his successors adopted the more modern course of printing the works which were brought to them. The property was restricted by a curious clause in Plantin's will, that the property should be transmitted to the child who should show the greatest capacity for continuing the business

**COURTYARD OF THE PLANTIN-MORETUS MUSEUM, ANTWERP.**

either case the explosion may probably be referred to the tension on the hard fiber.

BEER is being bottled now in Germany in siphons that hold fifteen, twenty-five, and forty glasses. When drawn the beer is said to be as fresh as if drawn from the wood.

its founder, Christopher Plantin. He was born at Tours in 1514, studied in Paris, and finally went to Antwerp in 1550; here, for the next thirty-nine years, he struggled nobly with many reverses and laid the foundations of one of the most celebrated printing houses in the world. He first established himself as a worker in leather and as a bookbinder, producing

according to the ancient traditions of the house. For centuries the family prospered, owing to this provision and the monopoly which they enjoyed. In the last century the office lost prestige and became simply a manufactory of religious books, and at the beginning of this century the Spanish privilege was lost, and the printing office practically ceased to exist. At times only a