



ROBERT PECK.

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Our Portrait Gallery.

No. 3.—ROBERT PECK.



THE subject of our sketch occupies a prominent position among the publishers' bookbinders of to-day.

His capacious premises in Bartholomew Close are fitted with the most elaborate and complete machinery, thus enabling Mr. Peck to undertake every variety of work both as regards quality and quantity. His specialities in blocking are known throughout the trade, and for perfection of execution in this special line there are few others able to compete with him.

Mr. Peck is a gentleman of full business capacity, although he has seen many long years of work, and personally conducts the ever growing business which he himself has created. When calling upon him, our representative was most cordially received, and having overcome Mr. Peck's modesty as regards publicity, he was able to elicit the records of the house.

"This business was originally started by my father in 1834," said Mr. Peck; "His name was Thomas Peck, and he started in Cowper-street, City-road, as an ordinary bookbinder. Later on the business was removed to Hoxton-square, and then removed again in consequence of increase of business to Warwick-square, Paternoster-row. At that time it was a miscellaneous binder's, my father working at all branches of the trade. He died in 1857, and soon after that event, by reason of a steady further increase of business, larger premises were taken at 90 and 91 Bartholomew-close. The building was destroyed by fire in 1876 and then entirely rebuilt, being planned to suit the convenience of the business. Subsequently the premises on the opposite side of the square, Nos. 24 to 26, were added, and the two premises are still carried on."

"You turn out some high-class work by a special process," remarked our representative.

"Yes," replied Mr. Peck, "I think the superior quality of the work done here is very well known. Our special line is blocking, in what we call photergon, and it is very effective in its results."

"And what are your own recollections of book-binding?"

"I was brought up to the business in every branch and have sometimes worked three nights and days at a stretch. In those days we did certainly work most unearthly hours, and have often kept at it straight on the whole week through. My father did the binding and repairing for a London institution, and I remember there was very little machinery used then. The old plough was the chief feature. In fact there is no real hard work nowadays compared with

those times. Backing is certainly hard work, but blocking is nothing to compare with it. Then there was the old beating hammer: but the trade is entirely changed now."

"You are considerably assisted in the business by your son, Mr. Peck?"

"Yes, I have one son with me (Mr. Robt. H. Peck) who takes a deep interest in all the advanced stages of the work."

Mr. Peck, junr., here entered, and said he had now been with his father twelve years. He produced a cover—the latest novelty turned out by the house.

"I don't think there is any binder in England who has done anything like that before," said Mr. Peck, and our representative concurred.

The cover was a small one with an oval bevelled glass mirror let into the board. There was a gold beading around the glass and a well drawn, cleverly blocked figure stood gazing into it. The board was not of unusual thickness, and the whole was finished with much neatness. The title of the book is "Fortune's Mirror set in Gems," being verses by M. Halford.

"Have you turned out any long runs recently?"

"Yes, we have bound some books that have run into immense numbers—hundreds of thousands in each case."

At this point a number of most recently produced covers were thrown upon the table as specimens. In several instances the blocking of elaborately drawn pictures was very remarkable. A striking example represented a moonlight scene, with the silver moon rising and shedding its rays upon rippling waters and green banks. The photergon shades had been very dexterously blended in order to obtain this effect. It was the blocked portraits, however, that were the most impressive, the forms and faces standing out with the distinctness of an engraving upon white paper.

Upon our expressing a desire to run over the premises, Mr. Peck immediately led the way across the square, remarking on the way that he employed about three hundred men and women, and had introduced all the latest machinery. On the ground floor of the building all were very busy clearing up for the night: the huge glue pots had just ceased boiling and a steam hammer was resting from its labours. Mr. Peck, however, set this instrument to work, and for a few moments its heavy descents deadened all other sound. This hammer is used in the place of a nipping press, and for small work is certainly more effective. Repassing the entrance, Mr. Peck drew attention to a large frame of covers which was shown at the Agricultural Hall Exhibition about seven years ago. Passing into the basement, huge stacks of millboard were noticed, and in a small apartment a large stock of bookbinders' cloth in every shade was stored. Mr. Peck said many figured patterns had been tried in cloth but they somehow did not go, principally

