

A NOTE ON EMBLEM BOOKS

ACCORDING to the Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of 'emblem' in the early seventeenth century was 'an object or a picture of one, representing symbolically an abstract quality, an action, a class of persons etc.', or 'a moral fable or allegory'. Emblem books have been rather a neglected branch of book lore save for a few scattered studies over the past eighty years, but their immense vogue and frequent production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries entitle them to some regard.

It is curious that the thin thread of emblem interest links three articles in our present issue. For the interpretation of emblems is decidedly one of the supports of the Baconians, and association and admiration bind the greatest of the emblem writers to the author of a little law book later described.

Not long ago a volume of Andrea Alciati's *Emblems*, 1566, was purchased from a local source. Already the library had several such volumes, but we had not regarded them as a class till now. As a whole, the group is small, but representative enough to allow of a useful examination of this kind of book, so completely characteristic of its age.

Alciati was a Milanese born in 1492, who was a famous jurisconsult, and widely known for his emblems and for his neatly turned classical, satirical, and sometimes witty stanzas in Latin which he appended to them. This became the accepted form for emblem books—an illustration with a related four or more lines of verse. His first known book was published in 1531 and this and others went through scores of editions in the next century or so. Although he was probably the best known of such writers, he is one of a veritable army of them, of whom Henry Green, the great authority of last century, listed 1300, compilers of over 3000 volumes of emblems.

Apart from its interest as a literary and occasional form, the emblem book evoked much pictorial and often artistic production. Famous engravers, many of whom are represented in the library, include Jost Amman, Theodor de