

A SCRAP OF ALTAR-CLOTH

(Found in the famous Basilique of "The Leaning Virgin and Child" at Albert.)

A few tattered inches of velvet,
A fragment of filth, if you please,
But I'd wear such a gage in my helmet
Were I a Plantagenet or Guise,
And strike for the grime and the glory that gem it
As for Cross and the Fleur de Lys.

Dingy and tarnished, its sable
In the foul sable shadows had lain
Of the outrage that once was the Table
In a desolate, desecrate fane,
While Hell's Pentecost raised its impious Babel
'Gainst the shrine of our Lady of Pain.

Lambent gold yet flickered the runing
That told how Christ His Peace
Shall prevail despite Sword and its schooling;—
And alily the spilled battle-lees
From the goblet that brimmed when the year was at nooning
Whispered yet at the walls of Pys.

And ever the Queen c. . . heaven
Leaned low, ineffably meek,
O'er her city, plundered and riven,
From her painted basilique;
And ever swept upward the souls unshriven,
And were shrived by a Baby weak.

And Our Lady looked out on the city,
And Our Lady looked out o'er the plain;
And her eyes were as stars for pity,
And her eyes were as pools for pain;—
But the Babe at her breast smiled down on the city,
And pledged the promise again.

Then, the pledge winged over the torment,
And out through the rain and gloam,
And down the road as a portent—
The road that is called Bapaume—
And its pinions fluttered the murk a moment,
And whispered to us of Home.