

THE ONE BLACK STAIN

Sir Thomas Doughty, executed at St. Julian's Bay, 1578

*They carried him out on the barren sand where the
rebel captains died;
Where the grim gray rotting gibbets stand as Magellan
reared them on the strand,
And the gulls that haunt the lonesome land wail to the
lonely tide.*

*Drake faced them all like a lion at bay, with his lion
head upflung:
"Dare ye my word of law defy, to say that this traitor
shall not die?"
And his captains dared not meet his eye but each man
held his tongue.*

*Solomon Kane stood forth alone, grim man of a somber
race:
"Worthy of death he well may be, but the court ye
held was a mockery,
"Ye hid your spite in a travesty where Justice hid her
face.*

*"More of the man had ye been, on deck your sword to
cleanly draw
"In forthright fury from its sheath, and openly cleave
him to the teeth—
"Rather than slink and hide beneath a hollow word
of Law."*

*Hell rose in the eyes of Francis Drake. "Puritan knave!"
swore he,*

*"Headsman, give him the axe instead! He shall strike
off yon traitor's head!"*

*Solomon folded his arms and said, darkly and
somerly:*

*"I am no slave for your butcher's work." "Bind him
with triple strands!"*

*Drake roared in wrath and the men obeyed, hesitantly,
as men afraid,*

*But Kane moved not as they took his blade and
pinioned his iron hands.*

*They bent the doomed man to his knees, the man who
was to die;*

*They saw his lips in a strange smile bend; one last
long look they saw him send*

*At Drake, his judge and his one-time friend, who dared
not meet his eye.*

*The axe flashed silver in the sun, a red arch slashed
the sand;*

*A voice cried out as the head fell clear, and the
watchers flinched in sudden fear,*

*Though 'twas but a sea-bird wheeling near above the
lonely strand.*

*"This be every traitor's end!" Drake cried, and yet
again;*

*Slowly his captains turned and went, and the admiral's
stare was elsewhere bent*

*Than where cold scorn with anger blent in the eyes of
Solomon Kane.*

*Night fell on the crawling waves; the admiral's door
was closed;*

*Solomon lay in the stenching hole; his irons clashed as
the ship rolled.*

*And his guard, grown weary and overbold, laid down
his pike and dozed.*

*He woke with a hand at his corded throat that gripped
him like a vise;*

*Trembling, he yielded up the key, and the somber
Puritan stood up free,
His cold eyes gleaming murderously with the wrath
that is slow to rise.*

*Unseen, to the admiral's cabin door went Solomon
from the guard,
Through the night and silence of the ship, the guard's
keen dagger in his grip;
No man of the dull crew saw him slip in through the
door unbarred.*

*Drake at the table sat alone, his face sunk in his hands;
He looked up, as from sleeping—but his eyes were
blank with weeping
As if he saw not, creeping, Death's swiftly flowing
sands.*

*He reached no hand for gun or blade to halt the hand
of Kane,
Nor even seemed to hear or see, lost in black mists
of memory,
Love turned to hate and treachery, and bitter, cunker-
ing pain.*

*A moment Solomon Kane stood there, the dagger
poised before,
As a condor stoops above a bird, and Francis Drake
spoke not nor stirred,
And Kane went forth without a word and closed the
cabin door.*