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 somberly:

“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, cankering pain.

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