

**FRANCIS DRAKE: A  
TRAGEDY  
OF THE SEA**

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Francis Drake: A Tragedy of the Sea by S. Weir Mitchell

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**S. WEIR MITCHELL**

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FRANCIS DRAKE

*A Tragedy of the Sea*

BY

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## PREFACE

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THE difficulty of realizing to-day the feelings and motives of the men of another era is well illustrated in the incidents on which I have based the dramatic poem of "Francis Drake." In the poetical telling of it I have adhered with reasonable fidelity to the somewhat varying statements given in "The World Encompassed" (1628), Hakluyt Society, No. 16; the extracts of evidence as to the trial of Doughty from the Harleian manuscripts, in the same volume; Barrow's life of Drake; and an admirable but brief biography of the great sea-captain by Julius Corbett, in English Men of Action. I have had neither desire nor intention to make of this strange story an acting drama. Doughty, as he is drawn by Mr. Corbett, must have been, as he says, an Iago of rare type. A scholar, a soldier, a gentleman of the Inner Temple, more or less learned in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, he seems

to have had great power to attract the affections of men. That he betrayed his friend's trust, and was guilty of mutiny, and even of contemplating darker crime, appears probable, although as to the details of this sad story we know little, but small fragments of the evidence given on the trial having been preserved. The historian, more than the poet, may well be perplexed at the nobler characteristics which appear in this singular being on the approach of death. It is here that the judgments of to-day fail us before the account of the quiet, cheerful talk<sup>1</sup> at dinner while the headsman waits. An immense curiosity fills us as to what was said. Then, there is the sacrament taken with Drake, the final embrace, the remarkable words of quotation from Sir Thomas More,<sup>2</sup> omitted in the play, and at last the axe and block.

<sup>1</sup> "They dined, also at the same table together, as cheerfully in sobriety as ever in their lives they had done aforetime; each cheering up the other, and, taking their leave, by drinking each to other, as if some journey only had been in hand." (*World Encompassed*, p. 67. Hakluyt Society's edition.)

<sup>2</sup> Doughty is credited in one account of his death with saying to the executioner, when about to lay his head on the block, "As good Sir Thomas More said, 'I fear thou wilt have little honesty [i. e. credit] of so short a neck.'"

Except as to one anachronism, which I leave the critics to discover, the main events of this dramatic tale are on the whole historically correct. It is likely that the part played in the poem by the chaplain would be justified, had we all the evidence. His disgrace later in the voyage throws light upon his conduct at the trial. It is worthy of note that there is no woman in this tragic story.

BAR HARBOR, 1892.



FRANCIS DRAKE

A TRAGEDY OF THE SEA

TIME, 1578.

*Off the coast of Patagonia. On board the Pelican, the Elizabeth, and the Plymouth.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

FRANCIS DRAKE, *Admiral.*

THOMAS DOUGHTY, *his friend, a gentleman venturer.*

FRANCIS FLETCHER, *Chaplain.*

JOHN WINTER,

LEONARD VICARY, } *Captains.*

WILLIAM CHESTER, }

SEAMEN.

GENTLEMEN.

## FRANCOIS DRAKE

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*Deck of the Elizabeth. Fleet in the offing.*

JOHN WINTER. THOMAS DOUGHTY.

*Doughty (coming aboard).* Good-morrow,

Winter. Still the winds are foul.

I would they blew from merry England shores.

*Winter.* I would they had not blown you to  
my ship.

None are more welcome elsewhere. Strict com-  
mands

Forbid this visiting from ship to ship.

*Doughty.* These orders are most wise, — I  
doubt not that ;

Yet must I learn that any here afloat

Is master of the gentlemen who venture

Their ducats and their lives. Let him make laws

To rule rough sailors ; they are not for us.

*Winter.* Yet one must be the master. Ill it  
were

If, drifting masterless, this little realm

Of tossing ships obeyed not one sure helm.  
I shall best serve you if I bid you go.

*Doughty.* The Pelican is twice a league away.  
'T is time the several captains of the fleet  
Should learn how little mind the seamen have,  
Ay, and the gentlemen, to hold our course.  
Now, were we all of us of one firm mind,  
This cheating voyage should end, and that full  
soon.

This in your ear. Did I dare speak of Leices-  
ter — [*Winter recoils.*]

*Winter.* Have you a mind to lose us both  
our heads?

I would not ill report you, but your words  
Sail near to treason, both to Queen and friend.  
I understand you not.

*Doughty.* Nor always I myself.  
I pray you but this once be patient with me.  
My actions shall not lack support in England.  
If I might dare say all, you best of any  
Would know the admiral has no better friend.  
The ships decay; the sailors mutiny;  
Before us lies a waste of unknown seas;  
Methinks authority doth beget in men  
A certain madness. Think you if we chance