

**SIR
FRANCIS DRAKE**

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Sir Francis Drake by Julian Corbett

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JULIAN CORBETT

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BY
JULIAN CORBETT

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CHAPTER I

THE REFORMATION MAN

OF all the heroes whose exploits have set our history aglow with romance there is not one who so soon passed into legend as Francis Drake. He was not dead before his life became a fairy tale, and he himself as indistinct as Sir Guy of Warwick or Croquemitaine. His exploits loomed in mythical extravagance through the mists in which, for high reasons of State, they long remained enveloped, and to the people he seemed some boisterous hero of a folk-tale outwitting and belabouring a clumsy ogre.

And that our Drake might David parallel,
A *mass* of Man, a gyant he did quell.

So punned a west-country Protestant; and even now the most chastened explorer of pay-sheets and reports cannot save his imagination from the taint of the same irrational exultation that possessed the Admiral's contemporaries. The soberest chroniclers reeled with unscholarly gait as they told the tale, and the most dignified historians made pedantic apology for the capers they felt forced to cut. From his cradle

to his grave the story is one long draught of strong waters, and the very first sip intoxicates. Peer into the mists that fitly shroud his birth and all is dark, till on a sudden the veil is riven with an outburst of Catholic fury. Then, while the flash of the explosion illuminates the scene, a small party of desperate Protestants are seen flying for their lives, and in their midst a blue-eyed, curly-haired child, scarce out of babyhood, who is Francis Drake.

So Reformation set her seal in his forehead at the outset. It was in the year 1549, when Edward the Sixth was king, and on Whitsunday the new service-book was to be read for the first time throughout the realm. To the fervent simplicity of the west-country folk, to whom the mass was the beginning and the end of religion, it was as though Christ were being banished from the earth, and ere the week was out all Devon and Cornwall were in a blaze of religious riot. In the heart of the conflagration lay Tavistock, where still green memories of the kindly monks added fuel to the flames. Little mercy was there in the shadow of the old abbey walls for active partisans of the new order. About the great centres of trade there was now growing up on the ruins of the Middle Ages a party democratic in politics and religion, the nucleus of the revolutions to come, and of such was little Francis's father, Edmund Drake. He had once been a sailor they say, and that is not unlikely. For his kinsman, old William Hawkins, like his father before him, was a great merchant and shipowner of Plymouth, and, first of all Englishmen, had sailed to the Brazils in King Henry's time. Now, however, Edmund Drake had taken his place among