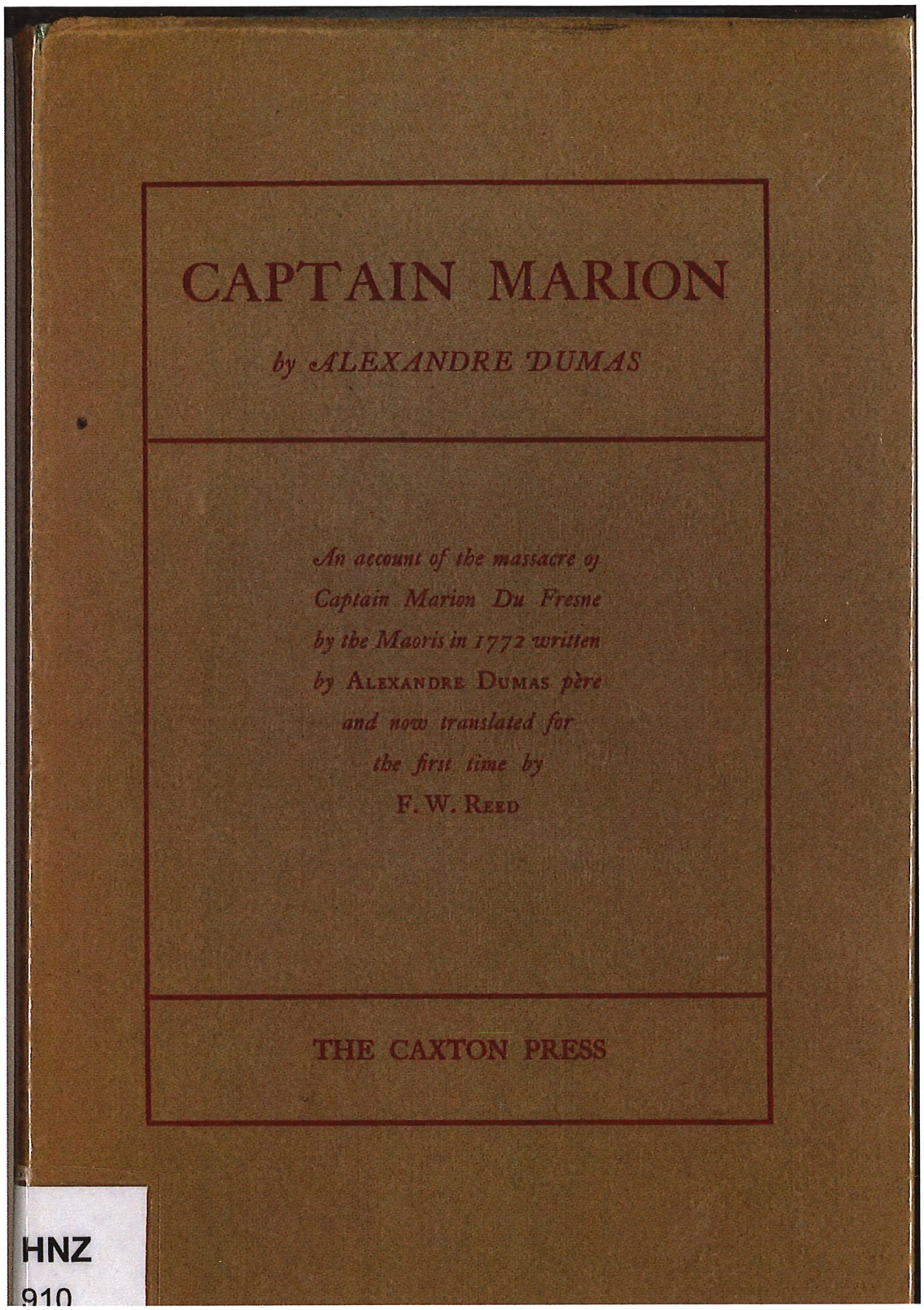
Dumas, 1949



CAPTAIN MARION

by ALEXANDRE DUMAS

An account of the massacre of Captain Marion Du Fresne by the Maoris in 1772 written by ALEXANDRE DUMAS *père and now translated for the first time by*

F. W. REED

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CAPTAIN MARION is the story of the killing of Captain Marion du Fresne by the Maoris of North Auckland in 1772.

It was written by Alexandre Dumas as one of four pieces under the title of *Drames de la Mer*, and seems to be largely based on Crozet's log. This translation, the only one in English, is by F. W. Reed, the Dumas authority, and it now appears in print for the first time. Mr Reed also contributes a most interesting introduction on the subject of Dumas and his little-known writings on early New Zealand.

Besides the limited edition of 400 copies priced at fifteen shillings there are 150 copies on hand made paper, in full buckram, at a guinea.

fifteen shillings

These ships were the *Mascarin* and the *Castries*, arriving from Van Diemen's Land and commanded by Captain Marion, an officer of the French India Company. He was completely unaware of what had happened at the time of de Surville's voyage. Moreover all this coast, though explored three years before by Cook, was as yet scarcely known.

On the 16th of April, 1772, he cast anchor in a poor roadstead of the island of Te-Ika-a-Maui, that is to say on the northern part of New Zealand. That night the ships narrowly escaped being cast ashore. So hastily did they get under way that they were compelled to leave their anchors, promising themselves to return and recover them later. In fact, they arrived back on the 26th of April, and on the following 3rd of May anchored in the Bay of Islands, near Cook's Cape Brett. Scarcely was this accomplished than three canoes were seen paddling towards the ship. There was a gentle breeze and a delightfully calm sea. All the sailors were on deck, full of curiosity regarding these men barely come forth these three years from the mists of the unknown.

One of the canoes carried nine men. It drew near the ship, and immediately a few trinkets were flung to those who manned it, inviting them to come on board. For a moment there was hesitation, then they appeared to decide, and shortly the nine men were on deck.

The captain received them, took them to his cabin, and offered them some bread and liqueurs. They ate the bread with obvious pleasure, but only after Captain Marion had first tasted it before them. As for the liqueurs, contrary to other natives of the south seas, they only sampled these with repugnance, some even spitting it out and not swallowing it. An endeavour was then made to discover what articles attracted them.

pusillanimous not to take advantage of this good-will on the part of the inhabitants. Thus one morning, on Te Kuri's invitation, they landed. Yet precautions had not been neglected. The long-boat, well armed, included a detachment of soldiers and was commanded by Captain Marion and his lieutenant, Monsieur Crozet. After this first excursion they travelled all over the bay, counting within a small area some twenty villages, each of which contained from two hundred to four hundred inhabitants. Moreover, as soon as the French approached, leaving their whares empty all came to meet them; women, children, warriors and old men. Then, just as on the ships, they began by the gift of presents, after which they gave the islanders to understand that they were in want of timber. At once Te Kuri and the other chiefs invited Monsieur Marion and Monsieur Crozet to follow them, and walking ahead of the little troop led them a couple of leagues into the interior, almost to the edge of a forest of magnificent cedars (kauris), from which the officers at once selected the trees they needed.

That very day two-thirds of the crews laboured, not only at felling the trees, but also to form tracks over three hills and across a swamp which would require to be passed in order to transport the spars to the sea. In addition some huts were erected on the sea-shore at the spot nearest to the workshops. These huts formed a kind of store-house, to which every day the vessels sent their long-boats loaded with provisions for the workers.

Thus three posts had been established on land, one being on the island in the harbour. This was both the hospital for the sick and the forge where they made the iron rings for the spars and the hoops for some casks which were to be repaired. Ten men fully armed,

could have induced this sadness never before noticeable in him. Whatever causes came into his mind, the veritable, the actual reason escaped him.

Finally, the next day, June 12th, about one o'clock, Captain Marion had his cutter armed, descended into it, and took with him two young officers, Messieurs Lettoux and de Vaudricourt, a volunteer and the master-at-arms of the ship. Some armed men accompanied them.

The small troop consisted in all of seventeen persons. Te Kuri, another chief, and five or six natives had come that day, showing more affection than ever, to invite Monsieur Marion to eat oysters at Te Kuri's hut, and to cast a net in that part of the bay situated beside the village where he lived. They left with both French and natives in the captain's boat.

That evening did not see Monsieur Marion return. This event, which should have frightened everyone, it being the first time such a thing had occurred, produced only a slight effect upon the ship's company. Understanding with the natives was so perfect, and their hospitality was so well known, that no one was disturbed at the absence. They believed, as was probable, that Monsieur Marion wished next day to visit the work at the shops, which was already well advanced, and had slept on the ground to be nearer and to repair at daybreak to the kauri forest where, as has been seen, the third post was.

Next day, the 13th, without being induced by the slightest feeling of disquietude, the commandant of the *Castries,* Monsieur Du Clesmeur, sent his long-boat to fetch the wood and water necessary for the day. There was an agreement between the two ships that each in turn would undertake this labour and this was the day on which it fell to the *Castries.* The long-boat left at five o'clock in the morning.