

**HEAT'S MODERN LANGUAGE
SERIES: EPISODES FROM
ALEXANDRE DUMAS'S MONTE-
CRISTO: LE CHÂTEAU D'IF**

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ALEXANDRE DUMA & I. H. B. SPIERS

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ALEXANDRE DUMAS'S
MONTE-CRISTO

LE CHÂTEAU D'IF

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INTRODUCTION

OF the writers of fiction some hold up the mirror to nature, others point a moral, others again are content to adorn a tale. Among the last Alexandre Dumas *père* — as he is called in distinction from his no less famous son — is in the very first rank. We must turn to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or to *The Arabian Nights* for stories of adventure so universally popular as *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, *Les Trois Mousquetaires* and *Les Frères Corses*.

The reasons of this popularity are not far to seek. "No man," says Macaulay, "is so great a favourite with the public as he who is at once an object of admiration, of respect and of pity." Slightly modified, this statement accounts for the literary position of Alexandre Dumas. He was unreservedly admired for his brilliant gifts of imagination, the inexhaustible fertility of his invention, the transparent clearness of an easy yet gallant style. In spite of many shortcomings in his character, the man was respected who made no effort to gloss over these shortcomings, who, absolutely frank and open about himself, was so warm-hearted and generous to others that no distress ever appealed to him in vain. And at the same time his

very weaknesses, faithfully reflected in his writings, the over-weening but never aggressive vanity, the unmethodical ways of a man who was the soul of irregularity and remained childlike to his dying day (his son used to say: *Mon père est un grand enfant que j'ai eu quand j'étais tout petit*), the historical inaccuracies and many inconsistencies in his tales, due to hasty composition, and so obvious that he who runs must detect them: all these brought him nearer to the great mass of his readers in the imperfection of common humanity, and moved a smile of kindly indulgence.

At the age of twenty he was left alone to support his mother, to whom he was ever the best of sons. With some fifty francs in his pocket he bade farewell to Villers-Cotterets, a small town in North-Eastern France where he was born in 1802, and made his way to Paris. Through the interest of a friend of his father's he obtained a position as secretary in the employment of the duc d'Orléans. Attending to his clerical duties during the day-time, he devoted a large part of his nights to dramatic composition. His first attempts were refused by various theatres. At last the success of a couple of short comedies, written in collaboration with sundry friends, confirmed his unswerving belief in himself (1826). He immediately sent for his mother to join him and share his rising fortunes. He threw himself heart and soul into the romantic movement of which Victor Hugo was the standard-bearer, made thirty thousand francs out of his play *Henri III et sa Cour* (1829) and was henceforth independent, although far too unbusinesslike and

lavishly generous ever to be free from pecuniary embarrassments.

For years his production was enormous, even allowing for the collaboration of countless friends and disciples. Over forty miscellaneous prose-works, many of them of great length, were published under his name, including the charming *Impressions de Voyage* (1836). In addition to these he wrote, or at any rate fathered, no fewer than fifty plays, several of which met with an enthusiastic reception, notably *Antony* (1831) and *La Tour de Nesle* (1832); but they have now almost entirely fallen into oblivion.

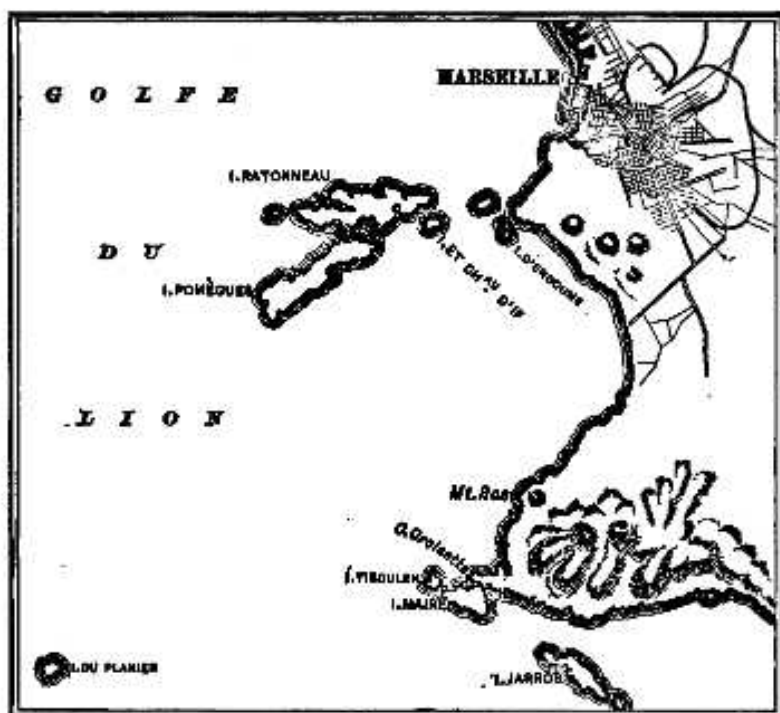
For a time he earned upwards of two hundred and fifty thousand francs a year. But his extravagance and unsystematic habits, added to foolish attempts to play a political part, helped to ruin him, and he died in poverty in the house of the son he dearly loved — calling him *mon meilleur ouvrage* — at Puits, near Dieppe on the English Channel, just as the invading armies of Prussia were approaching (Dec. 5th, 1870).

It is as the king of entertainers that Alexandre Dumas holds a unique place in the literature of the XIXth century. A recent census in the French hospitals showed that no books are so frequently as his found under the pillow of the sick-bed. Nor are the most cultivated minds insensible to his fascination. Robert Louis Stevenson declares that "Dumas approaches perhaps nearest of any modern to the Arabian authors in the purely material charm of some of his romances. The early part of *Monte-Cristo* is a piece of perfect story-telling; the man never breathed who shared these moving incidents without a tremor."

It is this early part of *Monte-Cristo* that has here been condensed for class use. The present edition consists of about one-twentieth of the whole story, but it contains those incidents that have made the fortune of the book. They form an episode of intense dramatic interest, complete in itself, which is calculated to excite and hold the interest of the student.

I. H. B. SPIERS.

PHILADELPHIA, 1900.



MAP OF THE FRENCH COAST SOUTH OF MARSILLES.