

## LITERATURE, &amp;c.

## The British Magazines.

From Chambers's Edinburgh Journal.

## RENE MADEC;

A NARRATIVE OF REAL LIFE.

THERE lived at the quaint old town of Quimper in Brittany, about the middle of the last century, a boy of fifteen years of age, of a resolute character, a good natural disposition, and an active though uncultivated mind. He was an orphan, poorly clad, and but little cared for. He had an uncle who kept hack-horses for the use of travellers (for the then steep and rugged roads of Brittany were as yet unfrequented by the diligence or the *malleposte*), and the young Rene earned a scanty subsistence by running alongside of the animals, and bringing them back to his uncle when the journey was accomplished.

About the period to which we refer, however, this lad was sent on a somewhat more distant excursion than he had hitherto performed. A wealthy merchant hired the best pony to take him to Brest, which our travellers reached on the evening of the second day, just as the gates were about to close. The merchant, after giving his young escort a larger fee than he was accustomed to receive, dismounted at the best hotel in the town; whilst the barefooted boy, cracking his whip, and gaily singing one of his wild Breton songs, took his pony by the bridle, and went his way to a very poor tavern, where he knew that both man and beast were lodged at the cheapest rate. Just as he reached the door, he was accosted by a Norman jockey, who, after carefully examining his horse's points, offered to purchase the beast for a sum amounting to about £5 sterling of our money—at that time no inconsiderable price. Rene, however, laughed at the proposal; and having carefully rubbed down his pony, given it a deed of oats, and a shake-down of fresh straw, he took his place at a table around which were seated some half-dozen sailors, who had just enlisted on board a privateer, which was to sail in the course of the following day from the port of Brest. They were mostly, like himself, beardless youths; and while they washed down slices of salt pork with draughts of sour cider, they talked with glee of the fights they expected to have with the English, of struggles in which they were ever to come off victorious, and of the rich prizes they would be sure to take. These words found in Rene an eager listener: he soon retired to his horse's litter, the only couch he could afford; but sleep was that night a stranger to his eyelids. "Six years," said he to himself, "have I been following my uncle's horses on the high road, sometimes exposed to rain and snow, sometimes to the freezing wind or the burning sun; and then when I return home wet or weary, a miserable pallet and a few spoonfuls of soup are all the comforts which await me. And when I grow old, what is to become of me? It is true that my uncle owes me eighty crowns, my mother's legacy; but he is a hard man, and who knows whether he will ever give them to me?—perhaps he will say I have cost him as much in food and clothing. No: it is time I should do something for myself. I see that this Norman jockey wants my horse: he shall have it; but I will make him pay a fair price for it. My uncle will be very angry when he hears I have turned privateer: perhaps he will say I have robbed him; but I am sure that will not be true, since he owes me eighty crowns, and I shall only get thirty for the horse! We will not pretend to justify the course of reasoning by which our young Breton satisfied his conscience that his uncle's pony was in all honor and honesty his own lawful property: but suffice it to say, he was sincere in his own conviction that he was doing no wrong to any man.

The young Rene Madec (for such was his family name) had now formed his resolution. The most prominent trait in his character was, a firmness which no obstacle could shake when once he had come to a decision as to the course to be pursued. This characteristic was the turning-point of his destiny, as it will ever be of all those who are destined to fill any important part in the affairs of life. Rene, rising with the sun, found the Norman, as he expected, lingering about the tavern. The bargain was soon concluded, and Rene, after contemplating with an admiring eye his bag of silver crowns, hastened to a tailor who kept all the necessary articles for a sailor's equipment. Nothing was wanting to the perfection of his costume—neither the brass-buckled shoes nor the broad-brimmed hat: a pair of tolerable pistols hung from his woollen hat, and a hunting-knife was suspended to his side by a green cord.

Thus equipped, our young hero presented himself to the captain of the privateer, which was about to sail. The hardy seaman was struck with the resolute air of the young Quimperois; and his offer of service, couched in few words, and expressed in the dry, pointed manner peculiar to the true Armoric, as well as the frank and manly expression of his youthful countenance, pleased the sailor-chief, about to commence a career of danger and difficulty. Rene was accepted, and enlisted to his great delight as one of the crew of the *Epervier*. An hour after the agreement had been made, the young Madec was standing on the pier, carrying in a handkerchief, that hung suspended from his hunting knife, all his little store of earthly goods, which consisted in a few changes of linen, a primer, an ink-horn, and copy-book; for although he had been hitherto brought up in a

state of total ignorance, he longed to acquire at least the rudiments of learning. He was soon joined by the captain, and they embarked together in a small boat, which brought them quickly to the *Epervier*. It was with joyous emotion that the young Rene beheld the gallant ship, every sail set, riding triumphantly over the waves. His heart beat high with hope, and he felt tempted to exclaim to her, "Remember thou carriest Madec and his fortunes!" Rene, by his alertness, soon became a favorite with the captain. In the course of a few weeks he had learned to read, and was, moreover, the most skillful hand on board at manœuvring the ship. During 18 months the *Epervier* pursued a career of unexampled success, and caused several severe losses to the English merchant service. In every engagement in which he bore a part, Rene distinguished himself by his bravery. Ever to be found by his captain's side when not actually employed in fulfilling his orders, he became, in fact, his master's body guard, and received more than one sabre-thrust which was destined for him. This devotion naturally melted the old seaman's heart towards the orphan boy, whom he treated as a son rather than as an inferior. But at length fortune seemed to weary of favoring the privateer: in a thick fog she encountered an English frigate, and after a severe struggle was forced to yield; but not until the brave captain and the greater number of his crew had fallen in the combat. Only seven of the young Bretons remained alive, and among these was Rene, who was found, covered with wounds, lying on the body of his captain, whose life he had vainly sought to defend. The *Epervier*, now re-named as the *Hawk*, was brought into Plymouth, and the seven prisoners, removed into a pontoon, were committed to the charge of a picket of four marines. Here Madec, favored by youth and a naturally robust constitution, quickly recovered from his wounds; and it was not long before his active mind began to devise means for procuring his own liberty and that of his companions. He had retained a few pieces of gold—his share of the prize-money obtained in their successful expeditions—and he one day persuaded a marine to purchase with this a few pints of grog for the poor prisoners, and also a treat for himself and his comrades. The latter could not but invite their liberal prisoner to partake with them of the feast he had provided at his own expense. The invitation was of course gladly accepted, and Rene seized an opportunity of drugging the grog which stood upon the table, and of which he himself was careful not to partake. Soon the four marines were wrapped in a profound slumber, and in a quarter of an hour they were shut up beneath the hatches which the prisoners had lately occupied, while these latter, as well as five Spaniards who had shared their captivity, stood free and armed upon the deck.

Madec now addressed the little band, telling them that much yet remained to be done before they could look upon their liberty as secured. He proposed to them to swim to a small boat which lay near at hand, and had been confided to the keeping of a single cabin boy, to row in her to the *Hawk*, which lay at anchor in the bay, surprise and overpower the few sailors who had the charge of her, and thus take possession once more of their old ship. This plan met with universal approbation. The life of the little cabin-boy was spared, after he had been terrified into silence by the threat of receiving a pistol-shot through his brain if he uttered a single word.

The sailors in the *Hawk*, believing themselves attacked by a far superior force, surrendered at discretion, with the loss of only a single life. They were handcuffed, and thrown into the hold; the anchor was raised, the sails set, and by sunrise they were beyond the reach of pursuit. The ship was well provisioned for a long voyage. The little company breakfasted next morning with joyous hearts, and unanimously elected Madec as captain of the good ship *Hawk*, swearing to obey him implicitly in all things. After making several prizes in the equatorial seas, and having received an accession to his crew in the person of some merchant sailors, whom he had saved from shipwreck during a storm, Captain Madec began to turn his thoughts towards Hindoostan. It was in the year 1770: the whole of Bengal was rapidly yielding before the victorious armies of Great Britain; Negapatam and Delhi had already become tributary; and Hyder Ali, the king of Mysore, trembled on his throne. Madec burned with the desire to distinguish himself in this new field. But he had no sooner turned the Cape of Good Hope than a mutiny broke out among his men, who, enriched by their past successes, wished to return to their native land to enjoy the fruits of their toils and perils. His energy and decision of character, however, quickly put down every outward expression of discontent, and order reigned once more on board the *Epervier*. At last they reached the Coromandel coast. Madec went in person, followed by fifty of his crew, to offer his services to Hyder Ali. They were gratefully accepted; and in more than one encounter the little band and their gallant chief signally distinguished themselves. During these days Madec formed a friendship with a Mahratta prince, a vassal of Hyder Ali, in whose palace he was often permitted to enjoy a few days of repose in the intervals of peace, while his battalion was quartered in the neighboring villages. This nabob had an only daughter, beautiful, guileless, and gentle, but an ardent admirer of all that was truly great and noble. Her hand was eagerly sought by numerous native princes, who frequented the court of Hyder Ali; but, to her father's surprise, she preferred the brave Armorican be-

fore them all. He might have said, as Desdemona's lover did of old—

"She loved me for the dangers I had passed, And I loved her that she did pity them. This only is the witchcraft I have used."

Madec married the gentle Marie, for this was the name by which she was baptised into the faith of him whom she had chosen as the partner of her life. Twice, before they quitted Hindoostan, she became a mother, and Madec's cup of happiness seemed full even to overflowing.

But he was not destined long to remain in undisturbed enjoyment of the tranquil bliss of domestic life. War broke out afresh between the English and the Mahratta princes. The valour and prudence of the sailor-chief more than once turned the scale in favor of Hyder Ali; and he had a considerable share in raising the siege of Pondicherry, which was carried on by the English in 1781. This deed accomplished, he felt that he had done good service to his country, and that his time of rest was come. He decided at once on returning to his native land. He wrote to his wife to join him, bringing with her their children and their wealth. He discharged his followers, after bestowing upon them large rewards; and gave his ship to Tippon, who had succeeded his father Hyder Ali the preceding year. Madec awaited the arrival of his wife and children in Pondicherry, and in the meantime the governor of that place forwarded a full account of the important services he had rendered his country to the cabinet of Versailles. After a tempestuous voyage, during which much of his wealth, consisting as it did in bales of merchandise, was thrown into the sea, to lighten the ship during two fearful storms, the man who, thirty years before, had run a ragged, bare-footed urchin after his uncle's hacks, and thankfully gathered up the few sous which the liberality of the rider saw fit to bestow upon him, once more entered the town of Brest, bearing a name celebrated throughout the kingdom, with a beautiful wife and two lovely children, and laden with jewels, pearls, and Cashmere shawls of the costliest texture—the value of which was then so little known in France, that they were used as swaddling-clothes for the little nursing who was about to enlarge the domestic circle of Rene Madec. He had also been accompanied from India by *ayahs* or waiting-women, who were devoted to their gentle mistress; by two faithful Mahratta servants; and by Joseph Sylcock, the English cabin-boy, whose life he had spared at the time of his escape from Plymouth, and who now would have suffered himself to be cut to pieces rather than that a hair of his master's head should be injured. He no longer sought the little wayside tavern, but, accompanied by this large, and at that period, wonder-stirring train, went to the hotel of the Grand Monarque, which was frequented by the admirals and chief authorities of the place.

He found at Brest a letter awaiting him, dated in the month of December in the preceding year (1782), and sealed with the royal arms of France. It emanated from the minister of Foreign affairs, and expressed a wish on the part of Louis XVI. to see M. Madec as soon after his arrival as possible, at the palace of Versailles, that he might convey information to his Majesty with regard to the state of French interests in the East Indies. Madec lost no time in obeying the commands of his sovereign. He threw himself into a postchaise with his faithful English valet, and travelling night and day, in sixty hours reached Versailles. On announcing himself at the palace, he was quickly ushered into the royal presence. Louis received him with gracious cordiality, and motioned to him to be seated; for the unaffected dignity of his manner, and a humility which was free from the slightest shade of servility, prepossessed the monarch immediately in his favour. After a conversation of some length, the king dismissed the gallant captain, saying to him at the same time, as he rose to depart, "Sir, I am well aware that to you I am indebted for the preservation of a place which is of the utmost importance to the commerce of my subjects; I know that you have fought bravely beneath the banners of your country; my minister will hand to you a patent of nobility, which I have this morning had much satisfaction in signing; and here is my cross of St. Louis, which I henceforth authorize you to wear upon your breast." As the monarch thus spoke, he presented to the brave Breton the insignia of valour, adding with royal grace, "I desired to see you, sir, and my wish has been gratified. Return to the bosom of your family, be happy, and do not forget your king!"

Madec kissed the hand of his sovereign, and retired. All this may seem a mere trifle in the present day; but in the year 1782 a presentation at Versailles was no inconsiderable honor. The report of this interview soon reached the ears of the good people of Brittany, who rejoiced in the favor shown to their countryman. The Armorican, without even bestowing a thought on the gay city of Paris, which he had never yet seen, once more took his place in his postchaise, and having promised his wife not to be absent from her more than eight days, turned his horses' heads towards Brittany.

On the way he came to a resolution, which, in the case of many, would have been as unwise as it was singular. He determined on fixing his abode at Quimper, the very town in which he had served his uncle as stable-boy, and where he would of course be surrounded by his poor relations. Yes; he had yearned after old Armoric even in a far-distant land; and now he was not minded to turn a deaf ear to the claims of duty and of the town which gave him birth. He had

faith in himself and in his fellow citizens; he believed that he should be able to win their esteem by his own character and conduct, without the adventitious advantages of birth and rank.

The first act of the new noble, therefore, on his return to Brittany, was to purchase the mansion of the Bassemaison family, situated in the most airy quarter of the town of Quimper. He had no sooner furnished and fairly taken possession of his new abode, than he invited all his relatives, without exception, to partake of a family festival beneath his hospitable roof. His uncle and former master was not among the number then assembled; he had been dead for some years: but his widow was present, and looked on in silent amazement at the luxury which surrounded the once ragged and neglected stable-boy. When all had assembled, and examined with mingled curiosity and wonder the scene of comfort and splendour with which they were surrounded, so unlike anything which had hitherto been known in this remote, old-world region, M. Madec rose and thus addressed them:—"My good friends, I pray you to remain seated, for I have but few words to say to you, and we will afterwards feast merrily together. My wife and daughter will join us at the dessert, and drink your healths, for we all unite in wishing you well, and desire with all our hearts to give you some proof of it. Heaven has prospered me in all my labors, and in all my undertakings. I think it but fair that you should share in the blessings which have been bestowed so abundantly on me. There are here present nine heads of families; for each I have deposited a sum of ten thousand livres with Monsieur Gazon the banker. The amount should have been yet larger, were it not for the losses I experienced on my homeward voyage. I feel fully persuaded you will all make a good use of this money. You may rest assured, my good friends, that you will never find me indifferent either to your joys or to your sorrows. In the one case you will ever find me ready to share your happiness—in the other, always come to me as to a friend; and if there be a means of alleviating your troubles, you may depend on my doing all that in me lies to help you; for I can never forget that we are branches of the same root, and that I, too, have known what it was to struggle with poverty and distress. I have now one word more to say to you, which I am sure you will have the wisdom to take, as it is meant, in good part: Providence having raised me to a rank in life superior to that in which I was born, and my associates being consequently of a class with whom intercourse would in general be burthensome rather than otherwise to you, your own good sense will at once show you that our circles of society must be different. We should otherwise be a cause of mutual embarrassment, and in the end our friendship would be sure to suffer. It is best for us, therefore, at once to come to the understanding that we shall each remain in our own circles, and choose the society which best accords with our habits and our tastes. But at the same time I cannot sit down without assuring you that, in saying this, I by no means intend to imply that this social meeting is to be our last. Far otherwise! With the blessing of God, I expect soon to see another little one added to my family, and then I trust that a christening feast will once more unite us as one family round this table."

These words, spoken with a kindly frankness not untempered with dignity, were received by the good peasants with a murmur of approbation. "He is right," said the elder ones; "ma foi, he is quite right; we should only be in each other's way: it would not suit us at all to be invited to meet the Marquises of Tintenia and De Cheffoutaines, or the Counts of Bottlivu and Kerstrat, who are now among the list of his visitors. We never could venture to shake these great lords by the hand, or even to offer them a pinch of snuff."

The dishes were now handed round, the wine circulated freely, and the good Bretons, who had never seen such a feast before, were well pleased with their entertainment. Dessert was placed on the table, and with it appeared Madame Madec and her daughter Lisa, who was a lovely brunette, just entering her thirteenth year. They saluted the assembled circle with cordial kindness, and in return their health was drunk, perhaps somewhat noisily; then that of M. Madec: nor was that of his little son forgotten, though he was yet too young to be admitted to the family banquet. The party soon afterwards broke up, but every word that had been said was duly retailed the next day to the whole neighborhood, and M. Madec's conduct met with universal approbation. Welcomed by the oldest and most distinguished families of the neighborhood, and receiving them at his house, he never neglected one of his humble relatives—he was never exposed to the unworthy fear of being reproached with his origin, which rather became to him, in the eyes of all who knew him, an additional title of honor and respect. He shortly afterwards purchased the estate of Prat Arras, about a league from the town, and an elegant equipage bore him daily along the road which he had so often traversed barefoot. And yet, notwithstanding his rapid elevation of fortune, not one was ever known to envy him a position which he had acquired by his merits, and which he graced by his benevolence. The son of his own works, he was never known to utter a boasting word. Born in the most obscure class of society, no unworthy pride or trivial vanity ever caused him to wound another, or to forget himself.

A third and a fourth child were born to him, and each time the same invitations were issued.