

CORRESPONDENCE

RUM-RUNNING.

TO THE EDITOR OF BLACKFRIARS

SIR,—May a British subject (and a Catholic), resident at present in the U.S.A., venture to offer what he is convinced is the true explanation of the application of the term 'rum-running' to the collective activities of those engaged in circumventing the outrageous Volstead Act, to which your contributor refers as a 'mystery' in the article, 'The Ethics of Rum-Running,' in January BLACKFRIARS?

It is merely the most recent and most notorious instance of a vulgarism so antique and so common in this country as to be entitled to be considered a national use of applying the word 'rum' to wines and every form of spirits—practically including beer, etc.—which falls under the condemnation and ban of the new Manichees.

Let me quote here a passage from that delightful and admirable American classic, *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table*, by the late Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, of Boston and Cambridge, Mass. [To emphasise what I said of its antiquity, I quote from my own copy, which is dated 1866 (Ticknor and Fields), but I observe on the fly-leaf the following: 'Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1858, by Oliver Wendell Holmes, etc., etc., which, I take it, was the date of the first edition.]

Here is the passage, p. 219:

'Here I was interrupted by a question which I am very unwilling to report, but have confidence in those friends who examine these records to commit to their candor.'

'A person at the table asked me whether I "went in for rum as a steady drink?" His manner made the question highly offensive; but I restrained myself, and answered thus:

'Rum I take to be the name which unwashed moralists apply alike to the product distilled from molasses and the noblest juices of the vineyard. Burgundy in all its sunset glow is rum; champagne, 'the foaming wine of Eastern France,' is rum; hock, which our friend the Poet speaks of as

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'The Rhine's breastmilk, gushing cold and bright,
'Pure as the moon, and maddening as her light,'

is rum. Sir, I repudiate the loathsome vulgarism as an insult to the first miracle wrought by the Founder of our religion. I address myself to the company,' etc., etc., for a full page more ;

but this is sufficient to establish my point that wine, spirits, *et hoc genus omne*, were vulgarly known as 'Rum,' in the United States nearly a century ago.

So wrote an American Gentleman, and man of letters, of that time ; and I am sure such of his kind as are left would both assent to the fact and echo his sentiments now.

Sir, believe me,

Your obedient servant,

R. T. NICHOL.