


## *The Etymology of the word Rum.*

*By N. Darnell Davis.*

UM was wholly unknown to Englishmen until its manufacture was established, if not discovered, in Barbados. In the latter part of the seventeenth century it had not only become well known, but was, indeed, a fashionable drink, and it is recorded that the ill-fated Duke of MONMOUTH, when he was being taken as a prisoner to London in 1685, after the fatal field of Sedgemoor, took at Romsey, while remaining in the saddle, a hot glassful of rum and eggs, apparently on account of a cold from which he was at the time suffering.\* It is of the word Rum, however, rather than of the use of the spirit so called, that this paper will treat.

When the planters of Barbados, somewhere between 1640 and 1645, learned to distil spirit from the juice of the sugar-cane, they called the new liquor "KILL-DEVIL."† The French who, according to the Abbé RAYNAL, learned the art of making sugar from the English,‡ adopted the name in the corrupt form of *Guildive*,§ a word of which the derivation has hitherto puzzled the philologists of France, and amongst them the learned LITRE himself who, in his famous *Diçtion-*

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\* Roberts' "History of the Southern Counties," p. 466.

† Ligon's "History of Barbados," p. 27.

‡ "History of the East and West Indies"—English translation, London, 1777—book XIV, vol. IV, p. 307.

§ Labat's "West Indies," 1724, vol. II, pp. 135, 321 and 322.

ary of the French Language, writes as follows of its origin :—

GUILDIVE (ghil-di-v') *s. f.* Nom qu'on donne dans les îles de l'Amérique, à l'eau-de-vie qu'on tire des gros sirops de sucre et de l'écume des premières chaudières. On dit aussi tafia. L'eau-de-vie qu'on tire des cannes est appelée guildive; les sauvages et les nègres l'appellent tafia, LE P. LABAT, *Nouv. voy. aux îles fr.* t. III, p. 410.

— Etym. Ce passage du P. Labat prouve que *guildive* est né parmi les colons français, tandis que *tafia* appartient aux sauvages. M. Roullin a fait quelques conjectures supposant que *guil* représente soit *guiller*, fermenter, soit *giler*, terme populaire, pour jaillir, et *dive*, forme corrompue de *diable*. Mais, dans ces cas où tout renseignement historique manque, on ne sait jamais si quelque circonstance spéciale, quelque nom propre ne sont pas cachés sous le mot qu'on veut expliquer.

While the French long retained this name for the *eau-de-vie* of the West Indies, the English had by 1660 substituted RUM for KILL-DEVIL. In enquiring how the new form of appellation came into the language, there seems strong reason for coming to the conclusion that as in the case of the word *cab*, which has been cut off from its original, *cabriolet*, and of tar from tarpaulin,\* which was Jack-Tar's earlier designation, so RUM has been clipped from RUMBULLION.

The earliest notice of drink as being made in Barbados appears to be that by JAMES HOWELL, who, writing on the 7th of October, 1634, to Lord CLIFFORD, says, "in the Barbado island the common drink among the English is *mobbis*, made of potato roots."† In the earli-

\* Christopher Jeaffreson, writing from London, on the 12th September, 1683, to John Steele, one of his white servants on St. Christopher's Island, says of some surfeit-water which Steele's wife had presented to the Young Squire, for use during his recent voyage to England from St Kitts, that he thought it "too good for the Tarpollions at sea," so he had preserved it for use ashore.—"A Young Squire of the Seventeenth Century;" London, 1878, vol. II, p. 69.

† Familiar Letters, 10th edition, London, 1737, p. 364.

est laws of Barbados of which copies are preserved in the British Museum, as in an Act of 1655, liquors manufactured in Barbados are described only as "this country's spirits,"\* and it is not until the 29th of April, 1668, that an Act to prevent the selling of "Brandy and RUM in Tippling houses" near the broad paths and highways within the Island, specifies the West Indian spirit by its present name.

In the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, is a manuscript entitled "A *briefe* description of the Island of Barbados." It is undated, but from internal evidence it must have been written about the year 1651. In describing the various drinks in vogue in Barbados, the writer says: "The chief fudling they make in the Island is "*Rumbullion alias Kill-Divill*, and this is made of "sugar canes distilled, a hot, hellish, and terrible "liquor."

In a News' Letter from Leyden, dated 23rd February, 1652, and published in No. 90 of *Mercurius Politicus* for the week from the 19th to the 26th of February, 1652, there is a report of the latest intelligence from Barbados, which includes the following statement: "He that brings these tydings to us saith "the English Lord WILLOUGHBY there, that governs for "the King, or rather for himself, hath strengthened all "the ports and avenues there, as Carlisle, Spike Bay, " &c. So that part by the Brandywine wherewith we "have furnisht him, the spirits of *Rombullion*, which our

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\* Spirits used to be called "comfortable waters," and "strong waters" in the reign of James I. When a poor country person begs for spirit now-a-day at the rich man's door, for some one who is sick, he asks by a general term for some "comfortable stuff."—Roberts' "Social History of the Southern Counties," p. 445.

“ men there make him, and other good hopes we give  
“ him, he becomes very valiant.”

In volume 2 of General LEFROY'S interesting *Memorials of the Bermudas*, the following record is given of an order made on the 27th of November, 1660, at the Assizes :—

(1) John Moclurie an Irishman haueing presumptuouslie vndertaken to deliuer a caske of *Rumbullian* to the Gouvernors Negroe woman Sarah Simon to keepe, if not to retaile the same for his aduantage, and thereby haueing occasioned great disorder and drunkenesse amongst the Gouvernors Negroes and others, and the same *Rumbullian* haueing bin discouered by Mr. John Bristoe, Marshall It is vnanimously Ordered that the same shall be sould and the produce thereof be bestowed vppon the Scochman latelie wounded by Matthew Makennie for his maintainance.

In a foot-note, the painstaking editor of the *Memorials* observes respecting the word *Rumbullian* : “ This word “ cannot be traced. It is not now known in Bermuda “ or the West Indies, as far as the writer has inquired.” The trade carried on between Barbados and the Bermudas from the earliest settlement of the former colony would account for the presence of Rumbullion in the latter islands, at that period. Indeed, so far back as the month of May, 1653, the following presentment with regard to the importation of spirits from Barbados was made at the assizes by the Grand Inquest of the Bermudas :—

Wee the grand Inquest taking notice of the great quantity of strong Drinkes wh are brought into these Islands from the Barbadoes to the great impoverishment of the Inhabitants & alsoe for the increasing of prophanes amongst us, do desier that yf there may not be any restraynt nor prohibition hereof that then such a price may be sett for selling yt that may discourage any person to bring yt or send yt hither, as 4s. the gallon and that yt may not be lawfull for any for to sell yt dearer that shall come hereafter.

The earlier name of Kill-Devil\* seems to have survived in North America for some years, as GEORGE WARREN in his *Description of Surinam*, which was published in London in 1667, says, in his account of the *Commodities* of that Colony: "Rum is a spirit extracted from the "juice of Sugar-canes, commonly twice as strong as "brandy, called Kill-devil in New England, whither it is "sold at the rate of twelve pounds of sugar per gallon."† So early, however, as the 3rd of July 1661, the word Rum is used in the Orders of the Governor and Council of Jamaica ‡ to which colony many Planters had by that time removed from Barbados, carrying with them their skill in sugar-making; and, by 1675, not only had the word itself come into use in the Bermudas, but it was even found necessary to pass a Law there on the 23rd of June in that year to prohibit the making of "unwholesome liquor called Rum," under a penalty of £20 for each offence.

As regards the word RUMBULLION§ itself, HALLIWELL, in his *Dictionary of Archaic and Provincial Words*,

\* Writing in the reign of Queen Anne, Oldmixon says:—"Rum, "which is the Kill-Devil mentioned by Ligon; and a mean spirit, that "no Planter of any Note will now deign to drink; his cellars are better "furnished." (p. 133). In another place (p. 137), he tells how the gentlemen of Barbados of that day disposed of Madeira: "Some of them "have drunk their five and six bottles a day, and held it on for several "years. Sweating is an admirable relief to them in this case and has "been practised by many with success."—"The British Empire in "America;" Second Edition, London, 1741.

† Osborne's Edition of the Harleian Collection of Voyages and Travels: London, 1745, vol. II., p. 927.

Mr. Edward Eggleston, the American Antiquary, writing of the *Meats and Drinks* of the North American Colonists, at that period, says: "Rum or Kill-Devil, as it was everywhere called, was rendered plentiful "by the trade with the West Indies and by the New England stills."—See "The Colonists at Home", p. 884; "Century Magazine." April 1885.

‡ Calendar of State papers, Colonial series, 1661 to 1668, p. 42.

§ Akin to Rumbullion, apparently, is the word Rumballiach, respect-

gives it as a Devonshire word meaning, *A great tumult*; and, as many of the settlers in Barbados, at the time when Sugar-making was being established in that Island, came from Devonshire, it was no doubt due to some far-seeing West-countryman that the cause of so much strife\* among men was so fitly named. There was probably an intermediate stage in cutting down the word, as Sir WALTER SCOTT, a great finder out of disused terms, describes in the 39th chapter of *The Pirates*, HAWKINS the Boatswain, and DERRICK the Quartermaster, as regaling themselves with a "can of rumbo;" and, in the *History of New York during the Revolutionary War*, mention is made of some patriots having indulged in RUMBO, which, in a footnote, is explained to be "a kind of strong punch made chiefly of Rum." But is not the original word preserved to us, almost in its integrity, when Jack-tars speak of their grog† as RUMBOWLING?

ing which Dr. Jamieson in his *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, writes thus:—

RUMBALLIACH [gutt.], *adj.* 1. Stormy, applied to the weather, Roxb.

2. Quarrelsome; as, "a *rumballiach* wife," a woman given to brawls: *ibid.*

This word has greatly the appearance of a Gael. one. But I find none that have any resemblance. Isl. *rumba* has precisely the first sense,—which seems to be the primary one; *procella pelagica*, Halderson. Shall we suppose that this term has been compounded with *alag*, in pl. *aloeg*, *dirae fatales*, expl. by Dan. *forhekselse* *inchantment*; q. *rumbaaloeg*, "a storm at sea raised by the weird sisters," or "by enchantment?" As used in the second sense, it might thus denote one agitated by the furies, as in Isl. *At vera i aloegum, furiis agitari.*

\* It is not the use, but the abuse, of Rum that is bad. Medical men regard good Rum as one of the most wholesome of all spirits.

† In Chambers's *Etymological Dictionary*, 1876, this term is stated to be derived from 'Old Grog', a nickname given by the sailors to Admiral Vernon, who first introduced it, because he used in bad weather to wear a *rogram* cloak.



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