

IRISH DRINKING RULES.

By James Collins.

Tarbert is a small Irish town on the banks of the Shannon River. In 1959, I took my mother back to Ireland to visit with her family that she had not seen since the mid-1920s. Her brother was one of the two police officers in the town of Tarbert, County Kerry. At the end of our first day, my uncle decided to take me to the pub to get some Irish culture and to drink some Guinness. We were having a lovely time until the owner of the bar announced at 11 PM that the bar was about to close and all the tourists had to go home. I rose and reached for my jacket, but my uncle reached up, grabbed me by the sleeve, and pulled me down into my seat.

"Now just where you think you're going," asked my uncle Dan.

"The bartender said it was time to leave, I figure we'd just go."

"This is Ireland, not like your big New York City," smiled Uncle Dan. "The rules here are little more lax."

The last of the tourists left; the lights went off; the bartender wiped down the bar and yet he still served Guinness on a regular basis. Nobody commented and I asked no questions.

Just after midnight, there came a tap at the window. I looked out to see the other police officer smiling and beaming as he tapped on the window with his nightstick. He waved; tipped his hat and walked on up the street. Everyone in the bar responded with a wave and a big "hello."

To say the least, I was a little confused. In New York, the police officer would have come in; arrested the bartender serving after hours; and written tickets for all the after-hours drinkers. Here it seemed the police appeared to be blind.

I asked my uncle Dan, "He knows we're here, why doesn't he come in and arrest us?"

"Because the lights are out," nonchalantly responded my uncle.

"But he knows we're here. He stopped; knocked on the window and waved to us."

"Yeah, he knows we're here but everything is fine."

"Isn't it illegal to serve drinks after 11 PM?"

"Yes, but the lights are out."

"Let me get this straight, it's against the law to drink after 11 PM. We are in here and he knows it but it's all right because the lights are out."

"That's exactly right."

"How does shutting off the lights make everything right?"

"If the lights are out, it indicates we're closed. So as far as he's concerned we're not here."

"But if the lights were on. He would come in and arrest us is that correct?"

"Ah then, we would be trying to stick it up his nose and he would be duty bound to come and arrest us. But since the light is out, we are showing him full respect; the bar is effectively closed and all's well with the world."

We were the last to leave the pub at about two in the morning and we had a wonderful time. I got a chance to imbibe with Guinness and learned of some of the vagaries of Irish law. In the Irish countryside, the law may be the law, but it is subject to a lot of unusual and unexpected interpretation.

THE END