

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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SEVENTY-NINTH LEGISLATURE.

HOUSE

NO. 373

Ordered, the Senate concurring, that there be printed 500 copies of the speech of Dr. Phillips of Bar Harbor, given in the House, Wednesday, February 26 for the use of the legislature.

CLYDE R. CHAPMAN, Clerk.

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND
NINE HUNDRED AND NINETEEN

Remarks of Mr. Phillips of Bar Harbor on Act relative to the marriage of persons having Syphilis.

Mr. PHILLIPS of Bar Harbor: Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the House:

It is with something of trepidation that I encroach upon the few moments of time your courtesy has loaned me.

I must ask you in speaking of this subject to grant me full consideration for my lack of experience in public speaking and supply in the larger wisdom belonging to many of you in public affairs the lack belonging to me. But assuredly you may believe me, however my words may stumble in saying it, that with all the intensity of my being I believe that awful wrong to which I refer and protection from which for future generations I im-

plore at your hands needs the weapons of defense that this legislature can give and should receive the remedy within our power to bestow.

I wish to say here that the amendments which keep from these patients the publicity of exposure by public record such as is given to other contagious diseases as smallpox, etc., has been done at the suggestion of the highest official medical authority in the United States. As is also the change that causes the State Department of Health to prescribe the methods of diagnosis and places the reporting of patients (so craven as to ignore the suggestion of the physician) to the health officers in the town or district in which the patient resides. Consequently no man except those so vile as to ignore everything decent and right need fear any exposure whatever and these need all they can get.

Among the awful diseases of ancient and modern civilization whose strangling power has wrecked thrones are cancer, tuberculosis and syphilis. It is the latter nurtured by false concern over publicity that has swept thousands into disaster, that I have begged a few moments of your hurried time to discuss. In this presence among men of affairs not ignorant of the methods by which this reeking and filthy virus enters into the destruction of the race it is not needed that I rehearse them in detail.

It may not be amiss, however, if I state a few facts proven by scientific research.

Syphilis in the one who primarily contracts it is under proper conditions practically curable. So far as the purpose

of this bill is concerned, in most of its inherited forms it is absolutely incurable. Further, as is now well authenticated, the symptoms of inherited syphilis are so different, so manifold, that it is frequently unobserved. The blindness, the hardened brain cells, the locomotor ataxias, the imbeciles, the hundreds of symptoms meaning disease and death to offspring often are unchallenged and unseen in its inherited form. There is but one blessing among them all, the abortions it produces. For the purpose of which I advise it is sufficient to know that the sins of the father are visited unto the children of the third and fourth generation.

It is awful, horrible beyond measure. The healthy, ambitious, courageous youth, reaching forth into the glory of fighting manhood, smashing against this bulkhead of ruin and shame. This is not fancy; it is as true as the living God. It should be said, it is right that it should be said, that other ways than the common one may convey syphilis and often does. When I call to your attention the fact that every country burying place, every hamlet which has its sacred and hallowed spot, has among its graves always its share that never should have been, had a law like this which I advise been in power. I am not talking sentiment but facts that nothing can blot out. It stands, this accursed disease, as in past ages reaping with its sickle from the wisest and best. It knows no rank or title. It hangs its sign of death at the door of the highest in power and wisdom as often as the ignorant and poor.

Believe me, I am not blaming the man who contracts this

disease more than his neighbor whose good fortune alone enables him to escape, but no man knowingly and no man ignorantly need under this law make this wicked mistake. If it were my purpose to stir your emotions by recital of cases, if I chose to make this argument one of sentiment rather than of cold logic I surely might stir some of you to action.

May I mention one case. In the neighboring county where I live is a young man, comparatively, 45 or 50 years old, to whom I have been asked by many of you to carry messages of good will when I see him—which is a splendid habit, by the way, of this House. I met him on the train only a week ago and I carried the messages that many members of this House sent. I hope I will never see him again. He stood there with a hand on the shoulder of his son, being led wherever he would go, stone blind forever, through no fault of his own.

This great war that is destined to lift the world over many centuries of progress has not failed us here. The underworld, the diseased world, with its appalling dangers the war has opened to our view, has also revealed the need of the surgeon's knife here, and we must cut and cut deeply if the rotting ulcer is to be removed.

I have no faith in that medical ethics that covers crime or worse than crime that will not betray a victim of sin but will betray the babe at its mother's breast, that will not betray the man with his drawn dagger who folds his robe of self righteousness about him as the victims fill their untimely graves,

that would not betray Judas but would betray his Lord and Master.

I judge no man's conscience save my own. I am not here to question your right of judgment. Far be it from me to pose as keeper of your duties to God or man but for me, knowing the awful history of these things, the deaths and living deaths along this trail, where men and women perish, or worse than perish, in generation after generation, through no fault of their own. The pallor of disease with its entailing unhappiness where their natural right is health and happiness, where one in ten of men and women go to untimely graves by some man or woman's sin. If I knowing this and more should fail in voice and vote to protect these unborn generations then God in Heaven have mercy on my cowardly soul.

The argument often used to put this grave and great issue aside has been to wait until the larger centers and states passed upon it. Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen of the House: Nearly a century ago some genius with prophetic vision wove into the warp and woof, into the texture of our state, a motto not yet, thank God, betrayed. "I direct." From the conduct and voice of every son and daughter in this state whose names are to stand immortal in its annals cowardice has had no part. From King to Milliken, our present Governor, whose name is courage, cowardice has had no part. In every field in which men have stood apart from their fellows cowardice has had no part. In literature and science, in every branch that helped to make our state great, cowardice has had no part. May we hope our motto will not fail us today in the hearts of

our people may it still stand secure, never successfully assailed.

I hesitate, Mr. Speaker and Gentlemen, to take your hurried time for further discussion but this pitiless enemy of mankind must be slain. Its accursed power must be wiped from the kingdom of man. Let us marshal every force in our state that shall help to make clean and pure every life and every home within the boundary of its splendid domain. (Applause.)