

in this work of education. In America the employment of persons affected with venereal diseases in food-handling establishments is forbidden in many States, especially in bakeries, ice-cream establishments, and meat-shops; also in seventeen States provisions have been made to prevent the spread of syphilis in barber-shops by forbidding the exercise of the trade to persons with the disease, requiring the sterilization of tools and knowledge on the part of the barber of the most common manifestations of skin-disease, &c. In various States certificates showing the absence of communicable disease on the part of applicants are made a condition to the issue of a marriage license. In seven States the marriage of persons with venereal disease in a communicable stage is interdicted, while in Iowa the sterilization of syphilitic persons in public institutions is required. The matters mentioned are all important, and I propose in the regulations to protect the public health by forbidding persons affected with disease being employed in handling food or coming in contact with the public in any way that may spread venereal disease. I have now, during the short time at my disposal, made a general statement to the House regarding this important matter, possibly the most important subject I have ever spoken on in this House. I have referred honourable gentlemen to the remarkable proof that lies at hand regarding the condition of some of the men at our camps. I repeat that I cast no reflection on those men, because it so happens that the conditions under which they are living enables their condition in this matter to be at once known. I say that the men who in the camps have contracted this disease are probably quite as good men as the same number of civilians, and therefore that this disease which has shown itself in the camps has spread itself through the civilians of the country. I ask the House to understand that this great problem is not to be trifled with. While I am Minister of Public Health I am not going to allow the question of delicacy to close my mouth when I am dealing with problems of this kind, and if this House had been as full of women as it was in the earlier stages of the evening I would not have changed a word of the speech I have delivered. The only way we can deal with this matter will be by taking the gloves off. We must realize that instead of leaving it to be dealt with underground and hiding it from our eyes, like the ostrich which puts its head in the sand, the best thing is for us as public men and legislators to face it and try to grasp the trouble and deal with it. I am prepared to hear the opinions of honourable gentlemen with regard to the matter during the debate that will take place, and I assure them that every suggestion that can be made that will assist the Government in coming to a wise decision upon this matter will be considered carefully; but I do say without hesitation that it is a duty we owe to ourselves, it is a duty we above all owe to the unborn children of this country, that we should do the best we can to stamp this disease out. It may not be possible to do it in its entirety, but we must do all we can. And here I want to say, with regard to the possibility of the disease being planted in New Zealand from Egypt and other places, that I can assure honourable gentlemen that under the Public Health Department the most careful examination has been made with regard to every troopship, and there has been no case where a man has returned whose condition as a venereal patient has been made known to the Public Health Department where that man, even though he may ostensibly have appeared to be cured, has not been sent into quarantine until such time as we were sure there was no possibility of the Eastern forms of this disease being transplanted into this country. Possibly there may be some who have escaped. I have told the House that amongst those manifesting the disease at Trentham eleven were returned soldiers. It is just as possible for returned soldiers to get venereal disease after returning to New Zealand as any other soldier. I wish to give this assurance to the House, that all the information I have received is to the effect that there has been no evidence in New Zealand since the men started coming back of the grosser forms of venereal disease which afflict the East. I thank honourable members for the courtesy they have shown in listening to my speech. I have gone into this matter with the greatest care, and I desire to assure the women of this country that I recognize the responsibility which has been placed upon me, and to assure them that it will be my great desire to uphold the sacredness of the pure and virtuous womanhood of New Zealand.