

T. M. HEALY

*On Bicycles: A Speech*

Excerpted from **The Portable Irish Reader**, 1946

July 7, 1898

I am aware of that, but we are now dealing with an important matter upon the Report stage. I do say that if this is to be considered the Bill ought to be recommitted, and notice given to us so that we could have an opportunity of discussing this penal clause in Committee. We should have some information in advance from the Government as to whether they intend, if they do intend to accept this proposal, as I am afraid, from the ominous silence of the Chief Secretary, and the fact that he brought in a Bill of the same mischievous character a year ago, that we have some grounds for a lurking suspicion that he is going to accept it. We should have notice of it, for this reason. The first thing I would suggest is that after the word "bicycle" to insert the words "or carriage." We could then discuss the entire question of vehicular traffic, which is practically what it amounts to. The cyclist has just as much right to be protected from being run down in the dark as a carriage. Why should I be run down in the dark by a carriage which carries no lamps, or by a car that refuses to carry anything? Carriages with indiarubber tyres are become very popular, and they are becoming noiseless like bicycles; therefore, I think it is essential, if this law is to be applied to one section of the community on wheels it is only right to apply it to all sections. We have had no notice of this because I do not think a penal clause has ever been proposed at the Report stage of a Bill without some notice to the House of the intention of the Government to accept it. That is one my objections, but there is another. I object to the people of Ireland being fined £100,000 for the benefit of Birmingham manufacturers. There are something like a quarter of a million bicycles in Ireland, and lamps are made at Birmingham, and no lamps are made in Ireland, and no bells are made in Ireland. Now, I believe that no bicyclist, unless he is a fool, rides without a bell, but, generally speaking, lamps are not necessary in Ireland. I would not object to this proposal so much in the case of Dublin or Belfast, and I would not object to cyclists being compelled to carry lights if it is also made to apply to the grocer's cart and the milkman's cart, as well as to every cyclist. But so far as the the general country is concerned, you might go ten miles without meeting a car, a cart, or anything whatever, either on wheels or on legs, in many of the remote parts of the country. Therefore, to legislate for Ireland, as a whole, as if it was all to be treated upon the same basis, is, in my opinion, an absurdity. There may be a case for it in Belfast and Dublin, but there certainly is no case whatever for it in a great many of the rural districts of the country. But in addition to these points I think this view should be considered. If a man is driving a car, or a cart, he is not often injured in case of accidents, although his horse may be injured; but the bicyclist is nearly always injured if anything runs into him. He is riding at his peril, and that is far more than can be said of the man on the car or cart. If you consider the way in which bicyclists are treated as a rule by those in charge of cars or carriages, I venture to say that the necessity for regulations is in the opposite direction, for the danger is rather the other way about. On the magisterial bench in Ireland there seem to be a number of old gouty gentlemen who themselves are unable to ride, and they seem to have the very strongest prejudice against any cyclist who happens to be brought before them, and this

Amendment will give them a chance of coming down on cyclists in general with a very severe voice. As a matter of fact I do not think that there has been any invention of recent years, for men and women, which has given such excellent and healthy enjoyment to the population. Certainly, as I understand it, this clause might fairly take up five or six days, if it is to be considered in a proper spirit and from a thorough point of view. Why, every line of it is reeking with matter upon which Amendments ought to be moved. If the Government are determined to shut out every other type of vehicle from their consideration, and confine this law to bicycles, then, of course, we shall have a very enjoyable afternoon. But I would ask the Government to remember this: we brought before the House in the Committee stage the very important question of traction engines, and we pointed out that there was some necessity for some provision being made in regard to the cutting up of roads by traction engines, and we showed how, in the country of Cork, a road was thrown out of use from this cause, because the grand jury were unable to do anything more to the road. It appears that a pneumatic tyre is to be put under a penal law, while you allow a traction engine to cut up the roads with impunity. It does appear to me that this is a class of traffic which requires regulating, and you do not propose to give favourable consideration to an Amendment of that kind. This proposal has nothing whatever to do with the scope of the Bill, and it is proposal to transfer from the grand jury for their existing powers entirely new legislation, not germane to the Measure of the Government, and which ought to be introduced in a special Bill dealing with the subject.

(From *Hansard*, Vol. 61.)