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The State-Wide Work of the Oregon Social Hygiene Society

The task of the Oregon Social Hygiene Society is to reach all of the people of the state with those few and simple facts concerning sex, reproduction and heredity, which the welfare of society demands that all the people should know. The society realizes that there is much yet to be learned in the field of social hygiene; on some aspects of the subject authorities disagree; on other aspects there are no authorities and systematic study is not even under way. Yet if the Society could reach all the people with the truths already known and at the same time stir in them adequate incentives to govern their conduct by their knowledge, the society would go contentedly out of existence. Its one great urgent problem, therefore, is widespread elementary education.

The work of the society was inaugurated at a mass meeting of citizens September 18, 1911, called by the Young Men's Christian Association of Portland. Interest in the meeting was developed in advance by the mailing of printed matter showing the need for action. An audience which overcrowded the hall responded. Officers of the state board of health, leading educators and business men took part in the program, and the need for a systematic campaign of education was convincingly presented. At a meeting held a few days later, the Social Hygiene Society of Portland, Oregon, was organized. A few weeks later \$1,500.00 was raised by private subscription to meet the immediate needs of the society. In January, 1913, the society became a state organization. and in February, 1913, the state appropriated \$10,000.00 for the years 1913 and 1914 for the support of its work. Since the first year the annual budget has been about \$12,500.00. This has been provided by both appropriations and subscriptions.

At the outset of its activities, the society prepared the way for the spread of truth by seeking to check the spread of falsehood. It was found that quack doctors were advertising extensively in Oregon newspapers and that they were distributing large quantities

of advertising circulars in an effort to exploit the ignorance of boys and men. The harm resulting was threefold—first, the advertisements spread misinformation and false ideas regarding sex life; second, they resulted in the payments of large sums of money for diseases which did not exist; third, they resulted in much worry and anguish of mind over disorders which were largely imaginary. The evil was brought to the attention of selected groups of physicians, business men, and women, and the cooperation of the Portland Ad Club and similar organizations was won. A strong public sentiment was quickly created. As a result, two of



Fig. 1.—AN ABANDONED MUSEUM OF ANATOMY

the leading papers of Portland at once eliminated all fake doctor advertisements and the other newspapers gradually followed their example. At the 1913 session of the legislature, a law was passed making it unlawful for any person to print or distribute in any manner the advertisements of quack doctors. The law has been rigidly enforced. As one of the results of this law, the Police Gazette, which carried twenty-one fake doctor advertisements, now prints for Oregon a special edition free from this objectionable advertising. This law has also made legal the removal of over four hundred sex medicine signs.

As a result of a strong public sentiment against quackery and the cooperation of postoffice authorities, district attorneys, sheriffs, mayors and city attorneys, the business of quackery has been virtually eliminated from the state of Oregon.

While it seemed important to shut down the quack establishments where men and boys of Oregon were getting misinformation regarding sex matters, it also seemed necessary to offer them a substitute for the quack office. Accordingly the advisory department of the society was established. Over six thousand men and

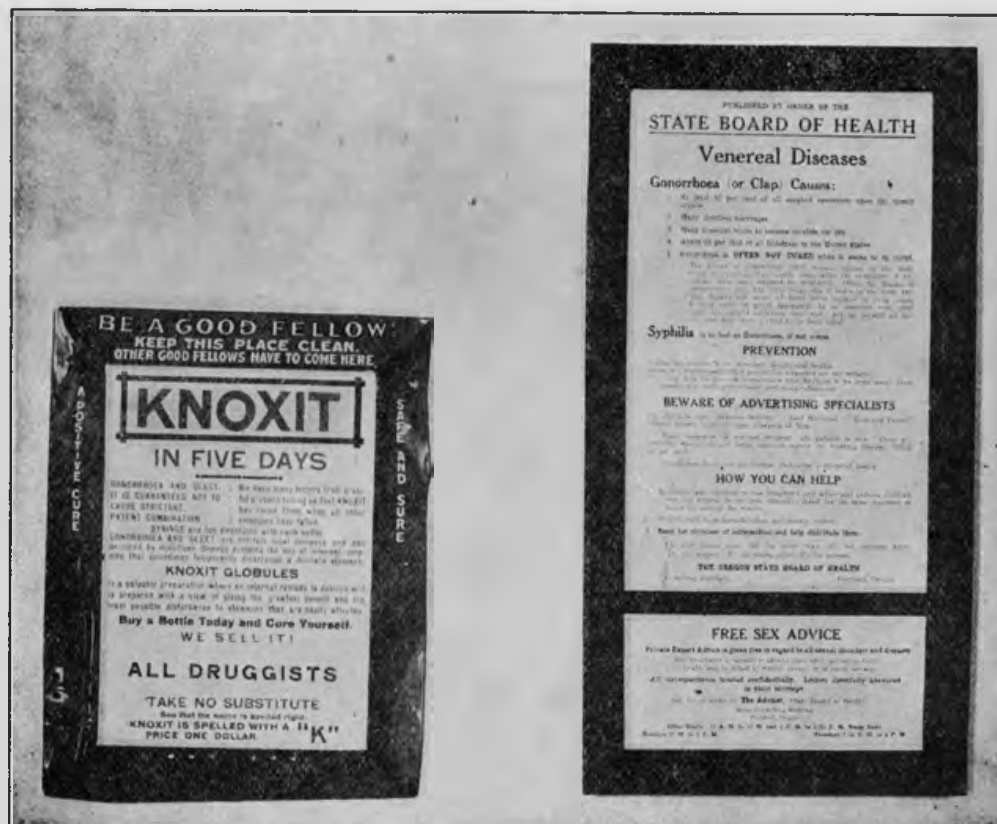


Fig. 2.—PUBLIC EDUCATION IN OREGON: THE OLD AND THE NEW

boys have applied for advice. About one-half have been boys and men whom the department has been able to help by counsel.

Soon after the society became a state organization, steps were taken to extend the work thruout the state. Secretaries were sent to the larger cities and towns. Conferences of leading citizens were held and local promotion committees organized. During the first five and one-half years, over one hundred and thirty cities and towns were reached. Several of these towns are far removed from railroads. For instance, Lakeview was reached by an automobile ride of one hundred and seven miles, much of the way being

over mountainous country. The exhibit was taken to Burns, seventy miles, by an auto truck. For the meeting there, several of the saloons closed. Said a prominent citizen: "It was the most extraordinary meeting ever held in Burns." In five days only seven meetings were held; but they necessitated six hundred and ninety-five miles of travel by train and two hundred and forty miles by automobile.

Early in the work of the society, several weeks were given to the preparation of a placard of instruction to be posted in men's lavatories, in hotels, poolrooms, comfort stations, Y. M. C. A.'s, railroad stations, day coaches on railroads, business houses and



Fig. 3.—A SECTION OF THE EXHIBIT

similar places. After numerous revisions, a placard was decided upon, of which over two thousand three hundred copies have been placed thruout the state. The placard is printed in red and black ink on a card six by twelve and one-half inches, and is framed behind glass in a substantial black oak frame.

A public exhibit, consisting of charts, photographs, cartoons, and descriptive text, has been another effective means of education. The attendance at the exhibits of the Oregon society has been over one hundred and thirty-five thousand. The cost to the society at some points has been less than two cents per person. Recently a special exhibit for boys has been prepared. It has been heartily indorsed by school principals, school board members, business men and others.

Business firms in Oregon have cooperated with the society in arranging talks for employed men. These, for the most part, are conducted on the time of the company, tho often the time runs over into the employees' time. A total of about four hundred talks have been given in business houses, which have cost employers hundreds of dollars in loss of time. Employers cooperate gladly



Fig. 4.—HOUSE TO HOUSE WORKER AT NEWBERG

because they realize the importance of the work. Meetings have also been held for labor unions, business men's clubs, business colleges, church clubs, and many other organizations.

More than two hundred meetings have been held for parents. The society has always advocated the education of children thru their parents whenever possible. Immediately after organization, two series of parent meetings were conducted, which reached virtually every school center in Portland. At nearly every part of the state reached by the society, mothers' meetings have been held.

Nearly eight thousand houses have been reached by women calling from house to house for the purpose of leaving circulars and explaining their use to mothers. This work seems to be much appreciated.

A few persons, not understanding the aims of the Oregon society, have thought that the society wishes to introduce sex instruction in some wholesale manner into the public schools.



Fig. 5.—LECTURE AT CAMP WITHYCOMBE, CLACKAMAS

Members of the society realize, perhaps better than others, the folly of asking immature, untrained teachers to impart the facts of sex to young children. The society hopes that in the course of time teachers will be found in the colleges who, with the necessary background of biology, psychology and physical education, can teach the facts of sex in all schools as an integral part of larger subjects. The society realizes, however, that this can be done only by specially prepared teachers.

The society has adopted a few safe emergency measures for the protection of adolescent boys and girls who are getting out into the world unprepared to meet sex temptations. At several points in the state talks for small groups of adolescent boys are being held, after notices have been sent to their parents. Almost never has there been any objection to these talks.

Essential to the safe conduct of various kinds of meetings conducted by the society has been the training of speakers. Great



Fig. 6.—OFFICER OF OREGON SOCIETY ADDRESSING MEN IN CAR SHOPS

care is exercised in the selection of men and women to speak for the society. It is found that some persons wishing to do this work are unfitted for it.

The society has cooperated with the Oregon National Guard and with the United States army by giving lectures and circulars to its members. During the summer of 1916 and the spring of 1917, extensive work was done in this field.

Barbershop proprietors use bound volumes of circulars in their places of business and report that they are much appreciated by their patrons.

A committee of druggists has cooperated effectively with the society in the distribution of cards among druggists of the state, warning men regarding the seriousness of venereal diseases and advising them to get competent treatment from honest physicians. A total of about eight hundred thousand pamphlets of all kinds have been distributed.

It is certain that the economic gain alone, due to curbing the spread of venereal diseases, and the consequent increase in the number of days per year of productive labor of Oregon men and women has amounted to many thousands of dollars. The additional economic gain to the state, due to the extermination of highly successful quacks, has certainly not been less than \$100,000.00. Considering nothing but the immediate gain in dollars and cents, the returns to the state upon its investment in social hygiene education have been enormous. It is difficult to see how any state can afford not to make such an investment.

More important than these economic gains are the moral gains. Evidence is accumulating to show that loose standards of sex life have been rejected for new standards, that freedom from disease is being demanded by young men before marriage, that venereal disease is becoming less prevalent, and that boys are growing into manhood with higher ideals of honor and fidelity to future wife and children.

A list of other circulars published by the Society may be had free of charge.

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