

TO SUPPRESS IMMORALITY.

NO DOUBT ABOUT MISSION OF THE MOUNTED POLICE.

Col. Wood, Commanding the Force in the Yukon, Writes an Interesting and Enlightening Letter to the Rev. Dr. Sinclair as to Conditions There.

If any doubt remains in the minds of people in eastern Canada of the earnest desire of the Government and of the officers charged with the administration of the law in the Yukon to keep the camp clean it should be set at rest by a letter, dated June 3, from Colonel Wood, the assistant commissioner of the Territory and commandant of the Mounted Police, to Rev. Dr. Sinclair of Dawson, who has sent a copy to the Presbyterian Church Department of Social and Moral Reform, of which Dr. George C. Pidgeon is Convener.

Colonel Wood writes:—
 "I beg to acknowledge the receipt of yours of the 30th of May, and would state that I am responsible for the enforcement of the criminal code in the Yukon Territory and have full powers to take proceedings against anyone infringing the provisions thereof. As you particularly mention gambling and prostitution, I may state that my instructions are to suppress these as well as any other evils.

"As regards the difficulties peculiar to Dawson and White Horse in enforcing the laws, it must be remembered that neither of these towns have laws dealing with offences which the code does not reach. All cities and towns in other parts of Canada have their own particular laws governing the city, or town, as the case may be. Should an evil or undesirable condition arise which is not covered by the laws of the Dominion, the City Council can, in a moment, pass a by-law dealing with the matter. In Dawson and the Yukon generally, if the code does not cover an offence, or reach a sore spot, nothing can be done until Parliament meets and passes an amendment. It is true the Yukon Council can legislate upon certain matters, but this body only meets once a year.

"As an instance I might refer to the dance hall now running in Dawson. The Crown Prosecutor writes, in answer to a request for advice on this matter as follows: 'I am of the view that it is very questionable whether a dance hall kept for the purpose of dancing purely and simply, although resorted to by persons of lewd or evil reputation, would come within any section of the criminal code. The legal adviser and Police Magistrate concur in this opinion. The Yukon Council abolished the ordinance permitting dance halls on licensed premises, but the dance hall in question is not on licensed premises (though immediately next door and separated from one only by a thin partition).'

The letter deals at some length with the attempts to remedy immoral conditions and continues:—

"I have written Ottawa requesting that the code be amended so as to cover dance halls and illegal co-habitation, also that the clause referring to loose women be made more explicit. No doubt my request will be granted, as hitherto every assistance has been given me in such matters. From Commissioner Henderson I have also received hearty support in everything concerning morality in the Yukon.

"It must be remembered that a great improvement has taken place since 1901. Dawson was then a wide open town, open gambling was permitted, dance halls flourished, and immoral and dance-hall women, numbering some one hundred and fifty (150) were located on every street, but principally near where the postoffice now is. That a great change has taken place I think no one will deny. Gambling has been practically stamped out, though, of course, at this time of year, when the clean-up is in progress, miners will, even yet, get together and have a game. Until last August dance halls were allowed in licensed premises by an ordinance of the Yukon Council. Since the withdrawal of this privilege two have been opened in unlicensed premises, but only one still exists; this one, I trust, will have to close before long. At present a constable is constantly present during the hours the hall is open to see that no liquor is sold and that there is no immorality.

"We have here a different class of people to deal with from those inhabiting other Canadian towns. The great majority in Dawson are foreigners who are accustomed to the lax enforcement of the laws usual in American cities. Only two or three days ago a deputation of business men called on the acting commissioner to protest against the action of the police in attempting to drive the immoral women out of town. They complained that it was hurting their business!

"As regards gambling every effort is made by the police to put a stop to it. Nevertheless it does break out in town and on the creeks at odd intervals, but it is suppressed as soon as discovered. The few policemen not remaining are too well known to be able to catch the guilty parties. In order to do so we have to employ 'spotters' and in a community such as this it is hard to get men to be relied-upon. However, we do our best and I think any fair-minded person will admit that we have been fairly successful.

"If imprisonment without the option of a fine was the penalty for the keeper of a gambling house our work would be easier. As it is, the fines impose do not act as a deterrent."