

5-o'clock-tea letters from Warden Cooper. The first of the series complained that the Warden and the Inspector, who had travelled three thousand miles for the purpose of inspecting a great institution, were in their correspondence paying no attention whatever to the 300 prisoners, not even to the extent of mentioning them in the correspondence, but were filling up page after page with what they saw at the 5 o'clock teas—how many pieces of cake were taken by ladies at the tea table, and whether or not the ladies took cake every time it was offered to them. That correspondence was going on then, and that is what sorely touched the social tea Superintendent and induced him to send the series of abusive and destructive letters immediately following that hymn of praise.

Warden Cooper answered this letter on the 31st of October. I find certain parts of his answer on pages 252 and 253 of the report. The answer is not solely to the letter of the 7th, but is based also on Superintendent Hughes' private and confidential letters about the cake-eating incident. Warden Cooper naturally became annoyed at that and finally, perhaps with more courage than discretion, asked Superintendent Hughes to mind his own business and make no further reference to the women and families of the staff in the official correspondence. Cooper finished his reply to Superintendent Hughes in this way, as set out in page 252 of the report:

For a Warden to reach his greatest efficiency, he must not only have the support of his superior, but it must be generally known that he will be upheld unless proven to be in the wrong. Without that support and common knowledge of it, his prestige is diminished and his difficulties increased. But when he finds he is officially censured upon conclusions based upon insufficient premises and that there are recorded against him statements which have no foundation in fact, he is robbed of the confidence necessary to handle his staff and the inmates committed to his charge for detention and reformation. No subordinate can act freely when he feels his actions may be misconstrued and he may be given the reverse of the benefit of the doubt.

During the two weeks which have passed since receiving your letter, I have endeavoured to free myself from this feeling, but cannot do so.

I therefore respectfully ask that this correspondence be forwarded to the Honourable the Minister for his consideration and that I be permitted to communicate directly with him on matters arising out of these letters, and on other subjects affecting the Penitentiary administrations.

I would also ask that should the Honourable the Minister then deem an investigation necessary, that it be conducted by one other than an official of the Penitentiaries' Branch.

Yours faithfully,

H. W. Cooper,  
Warden.

Superintendent Hughes made a simply furious rejoinder to this respectful request from a man whom he had threatened with dismissal in a private letter, saying in effect: "Unless you bring these two women together, and compel your wife to accept on cordial terms this other woman, I will remove you; I put you there." "I put you there," he says, and perhaps it is true that the Civil Service Commission has nothing to do with appointments under Superintendent Hughes. "I put you there," he says, "and I will remove you unless you bring this about." That is what caused Cooper to say: "If my position is menaced, I ask the right to appear personally before the Minister and to plead my case." Surely the man had a right to do that without being abused for it. The result of this appears at page 254, under date of December 8, 1927, as a Memorandum from Hughes to the Honourable the Minister of Justice. As I have sized it up, this one letter contains nine or more absolute misrepresentations or direct falsehoods. I say that on the basis of my own knowledge and with a full sense of my responsibility as a member of this honourable House; and the unfortunate Cooper does not know to this day what the contents of this letter were.

In the meantime, during those months while the acrimonious correspondence had been going on, something had been happening out in British Columbia. There was a carpenter-instructor named Robertson there, an official for about one year. The reference to this is on page 164. He was charged with leaving his post without authority. The Warden telegraphed to Ottawa the circumstances and recommended that this officer be dismissed, because in his opinion a fine would have no beneficial effect on Robertson. He also asked that the names of two eligible persons be sent to him from a list submitted a few months previously, so that he might replace him.

I might say that the man had left his post in the ward, leaving fifteen convicts, four or five of whom were lifers, entirely unattended. This was a defiance of one of the strictest rules of the institution, namely, that no one should leave his post without written authority from his superior officer, who of course would have power to replace him.

Cooper sent down the full particulars with his report, and also the evidence that he had taken from the Chief Keeper and the Chief Trade Instructor, Allan. The latter was in the confidence of Superintendent Hughes. He has been spoken of, and still is, in terms of the highest confidence, and I believe he is