

The Lessons of Great Fires.

After every great disaster entailing loss to life, property or prestige, those affected thereby display wonderful activity in the search for the causes which contributed to bring such suffering upon them. We may, therefore, reasonably expect to hear of lots of lessons to be learned from the terrible conflagration of last week. However, as a rule, there are only two truths which loom up prominently above the smouldering ruins of a place like Hull. One of these is for the underwriter to consider, and the other is a question for the general public. The former, as he reflects upon the losses incurred by his company, will, at least for a time, be impressed with the necessity of exercising greater caution in the selection and placing of risks, and the latter will perhaps be led to insist that every fire department shall keep pace with the growth of the place it is intended to protect.

When Jack Comes Home Again.

The part played by the sailors in the defence of Ladysmith has not been forgotten by the people of Portsmouth and Plymouth. After his triumphal march through Durban, Jack returned to his ship without any delay, as if lending the soldiers a hand had been simply a bit of a diversion, a pleasant change from walking the deck of H. M. S. "Powerful" with bare feet, waiting for the boatswain to pipe the watch below. Since then the gallant defenders of Ladysmith have been sniffing the salt wind gratefully, homeward bound to the Channel of old England. This rapid return to the sea, after fighting shoulder to shoulder with Tommy Atkins, inspires the following quotation—

"And as soon as he's hit where he's told to hit, and somebody's said 'Well done,'
He turns with a click to the right a-bout, and trundles away with his gun."

When the story of the present war in South Africa is told, we hope full justice will be done to the men who, on land or sea, can always be relied upon to do their duty in a quiet, steady, fearless fashion calculated to make everyone rejoice "when Jack comes home again." Britons have good reason to honour the Naval Brigade, and we are glad to note that, since the sailors' arrival in port, they have been splendidly entertained by their grateful countrymen.

Insufficient Insurance.

It is comparatively easy to talk and write glibly of the evils of over-insurance, and to condemn in no measured terms, from a moral point of view, the companies for being lax in making proper examination into the value of the risks which they accept; but, while there are doubtless cases here and there by which the companies suffer through a fraudulent misrepresentation of the value of stock, extremely difficult of proof after a fire, we are convinced that the loss to the companies from this source of "moral" hazard, as it is called, while large, bears a very small proportion to the loss

arising from insufficient insurance in Canada. It is not only in the smaller towns, where, if a fire occurs, one is struck by the small amount of insurance as compared with the value of the property destroyed; but even in the large cities we find merchants and shopkeepers who are looked upon as shrewd business men carrying an insurance so paltry in proportion to the value of their stock that a moderate fire means a total loss to the insurance companies, the excuse being that they, the merchants, cannot afford to pay for more insurance. Besides this short insurance there is always a very large amount of property not insured at all, and the consequence is two-fold, namely, that the income of the insurance companies is very much less than it ought to be, and the rates necessarily much higher than they would be if the conditions were otherwise; for, of course, the premiums required to meet losses which are largely total must be greater than if those losses were partial.

The Spion Kop Despatches.

The latest English papers enable us to judge of the effect produced in London by the publication of Lord Roberts' now celebrated Spion Kop despatches. The effect of the outspoken censures passed by Lord Roberts have not disturbed, it is said, the trust of the soldiers and regimental officers in the Generals named by the Commander-in-Chief; but it has been accepted as an intimation that incompetence or carelessness on the part of commanding officers will no longer be shielded from a false sense of professional solidarity. The "Financial News" (London, Eng.), of the 9th ultimo, does not hesitate to say that the slovenly and happy-go-lucky methods of some officers have flourished largely because their seniors lacked moral courage to censure in Lord Roberts's whole-hearted fashion. It adds, "such despatches as his will stiffen the tone of the Army, by showing that there is disgrace to be dreaded as well as rewards to be won. Incapacity or laxity in an officer is as disgraceful as want of courage in the rank and file, and we must not exact a higher standard of conduct from the men than from those who lead them. What we have most to deplore in Lord Roberts' memorable comment on Spion Kop is not the fact that it has been published to the world, but that there was occasion for it to be written. Its publication may go far to prevent the recurrence of such an occasion."

While regretting the shattering of reputations, we must not overlook those which have been established or raised, and the present war in South Africa has given the British Empire conspicuous examples of the one as well as of the other.

ADMIRAL DEWEY'S WORDS.—I want to say that the one man who stood at my back during those trying days at Manila was an Englishman, but for his support, and the moral courage he inspired me with, I don't know what would have happened. I refer to Sir Charles Seymour.