

The Admiralty minute on the late serious disturbances in the Naval Barracks at Portsmouth, and on the Courts-martial held in connexion therewith, was issued yesterday, and was read in the House of Commons by Mr. ROBERTSON. It will be remembered that eleven stokers in all were put upon their trial on various charges, that one of them, MOODY, was sentenced to five years' penal servitude, that eight others were sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from eighteen months to six weeks, and that the remaining two were acquitted. At a subsequent Court-martial held on LIEUTENANT COLLARD, who was in command of the men on the afternoon of Sunday, November 4, when the first disturbances took place, that officer was found guilty on the charge of committing an act to the prejudice of good order and naval discipline "in ordering one single man to go on the knee in order to reprove him contrary to the custom of the service." This took place in November, 1905, and LIEUTENANT COLLARD was sentenced to be reprimanded accordingly—a sentence which is noted by the Admiralty in their minute without farther comment. As regards the sentences on the stokers, their Lordships have decided, in consideration of all the circumstances and also of the evidence given at the subsequent Courts-martial, to modify the sentence passed on the stoker MOODY by reducing it from five years' to three years' penal servitude; and in the case of Stoker DAY, who was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment, they have decided to remit six months of the imprisonment in view of the fact that one of the three charges against him was not clearly proved.

The sentence passed on MOODY by the Court, though severe and almost exemplary, was not regarded as excessive by the general opinion of the naval service. MOODY was found guilty on the charge of having on two successive days incited stokers in the barracks to join in a mutinous assembly. This is a very serious charge indeed, and no one who values the discipline of the Navy can doubt that when fully proved, as in this case, such a charge must needs entail very severe punishment on the culprit. Nevertheless, we shall see, as we examine the minute further, that their Lordships are of opinion that in this deplorable occurrence there were some extenuating circumstances. The outbreak of November 4 was, they say, unpremeditated, and certain causes contributed to it for which, as they plainly imply, the officers in charge of the barracks were in no small measure responsible. These causes are stated to be " (1) a feeling of resentment on the part of the stokers caused by the misuse of the 'drill order' 'on the knee' ; (2) retention of the stokers on parade on the Sunday afternoon during rain, and the subsequent want of judgment shown in dealing with them ; (3) the want of proper supervision and control in the canteen." As to the second disturbance on November 5, which is justly pronounced to have been of a more serious nature, since it was accom-

panied by a contemporaneous riot outside the barracks, their Lordships affirm that it would not have occurred "had those in authority taken precautionary measures to prevent a recurrence of the disorder of the previous day." Thus though the men were gravely to blame and have been severely punished for their mutinous and riotous conduct, yet it was impossible for the Admiralty in considering the sentences passed upon them to overlook the fact that such conduct might never have been displayed—certainly not on the second and far more serious occasion—if the officers in authority had not proved wanting in firmness, judgment, tact, and discretion. A drill order was misused and thereby invested with something of a penal character. The men were inconsiderately kept in the rain and afterwards dealt with injudiciously; there was no proper supervision and control in the canteen; no proper precautions were taken to prevent the recurrence of a disturbance, originally unpremeditated, and not entirely devoid of provocation. Having regard to all these circumstances we cannot doubt that their Lordships are well advised in reducing the sentence passed on Stoker MOODY from five years to three. The paramount requirements of naval discipline are vindicated, but at the same time the weight of such extenuating circumstances as there were is duly admitted.

At the same time the Admiralty have dealt firmly and faithfully with the officers whose shortcomings they have pointed out. COMMODORE STORFORD—an officer of high repute who enjoys the respect of the whole naval service—is adjudged to have failed to deal with the disturbances with firmness and resource. He is therefore relieved in his appointment as senior officer of the barracks. COMMANDER DRURY.

LOWE is adjudged to have failed in the performance of his duties as executive officer and is accordingly superseded. COMMANDER MITCHELL, the commander for gunnery duties, is also to be relieved in his appointment for having failed to exercise proper supervision by allowing a drill order to be used for other than drill purposes. These are no light punishments. They must affect very seriously the future prospects of the officers thus heavily censured, even if they do not blight their careers altogether. But naval discipline is inexorable and it must be applied inflexibly and impartially to all ranks of the service. As to LIEUTENANT COLLARD, he has already been reprimanded by a Court-martial, and their Lordships in duly noting this fact would seem to have intimated not obscurely that he must display better judgment in the future if he is to retrieve his position in the service. No one can have failed to note that in the midst of a certain slackness of discipline and control revealed by the whole course of the inquiry into these deplorable occurrences LIEUTENANT COLLARD stands out as an officer who tried to do his duty, though he displayed grave lack of judgment in its discharge. His misuse of a mere drill order by converting it into something like a penal order is not to be defended or excused. But the fault of his superiors who neglected to censure and correct his lack of experience and judgment in this respect is a far graver one and is very properly visited with far heavier censure and punishment. It will be noted with satisfaction that directions have already been given by the Admiralty that the drill order "on the knee" is not henceforth to be used for other than drill purposes, and LIEUTENANT COLLARD will clearly understand from this that, however excellent his intentions were, his methods were questionable. At the same time he is entitled to the sympathy of all right-thinking men in the scandalous and unprecedented deluge of calumny and premature criticism to which he was subjected even while his case was still pending before a Court-martial. His spirited protest against that treatment and his manly defence of his conduct deserve to be remembered in his favour even by those who agree with the Admiralty that his judgment on more than one occasion was misguided and his action ill-advised.