

# **CAPTURE IN WAR ON LAND AND SEA**

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Capture in war on land and sea by Hans Wehberg & John M. Robertson

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**HANS WEHBERG & JOHN M. ROBERTSON**

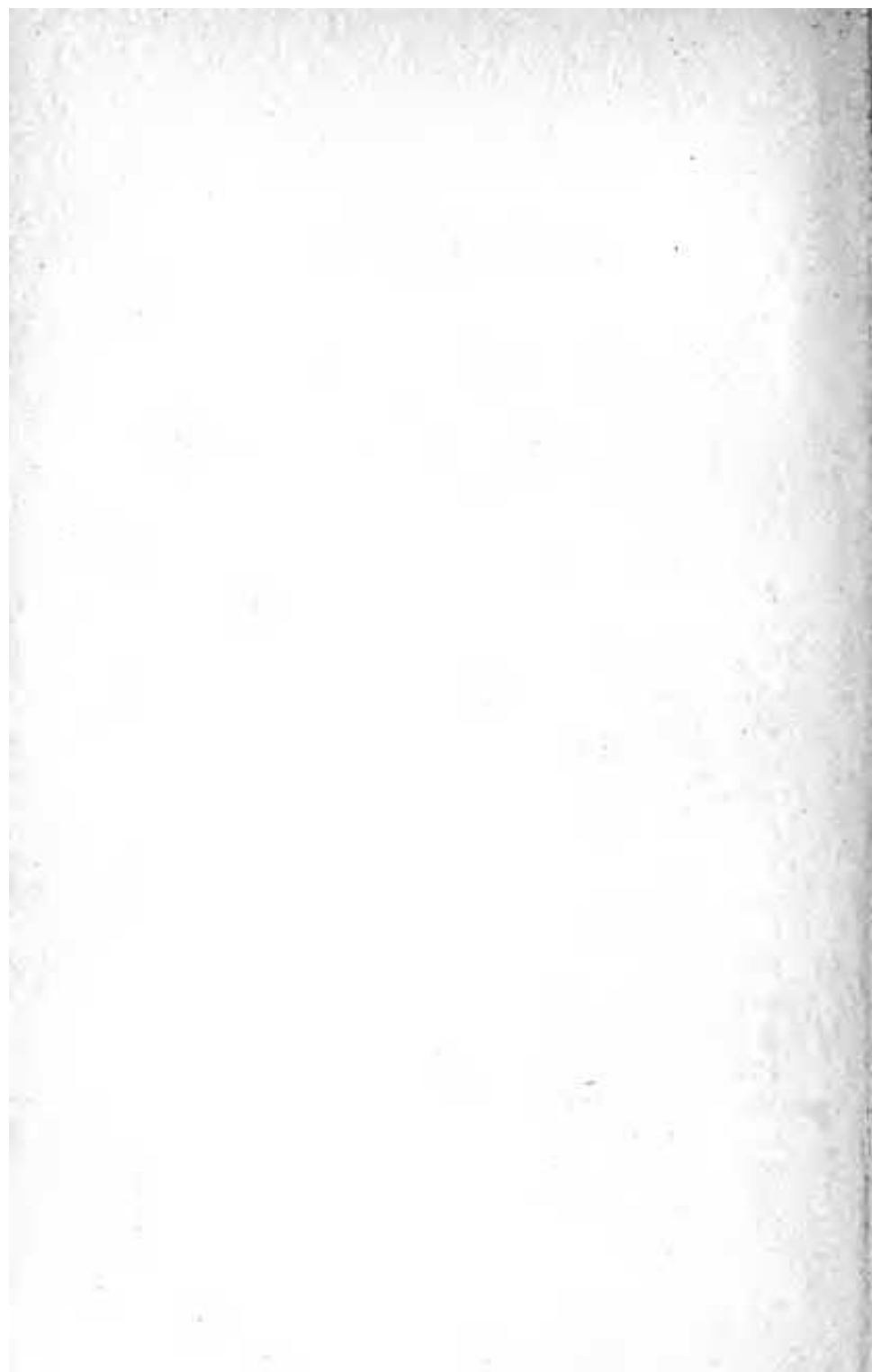
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## INTRODUCTION.

THE appeal made by the valuable work of Dr. Wehberg to British readers may be said to direct itself mainly to one of the two great classes into which, as regards military matters, they may be roughly divided. On one side is the multitude, still lamentably large, whose reflection on the problem of militarism begins and ends in sheer pride in the parade of power. Such minds have a brilliant exponent in Mr. Rudyard Kipling, whose zest in all the paraphernalia as well as the psychology of carnage is such that the hope of international peace appears to be for him, as for Von Moltke, "not even a beautiful dream." To such intelligences, the life of training for slaughter is "the lordliest life on earth"; and the spectacle of drilled hosts and monstrous fleets is a source of keener pleasure than they can derive from any ideal of a reign of peace and reason. Further, they are ministered to by the simple dialectic of Tennyson, to the effect that the evils of the life of peace are somehow mended or minimised by vast



explosions of the brutality and misery of war. With most of that order of thinkers it is scarcely worth while to debate. Their bias is fixed.

In another great division may be classed not only the active strivers for peace between nations—not even now a very large body—but, happily, the mass of reasonably-minded men, who, realising how frustrative of social good and how menacing of international evil is the enormous and ever-increasing expenditure of the nations on armaments, wonder perplexedly whether nothing can be done to stay it. It may be hoped that this mixed body of non-militarists is the larger mass of the two specified; and that the limitation of the political eloquence of one of our political parties, in respect of this problem, to the theme of “need for defence” does not mean a universal preference in that party for the attitude of armed distrust over one of rational understanding. Outside of Sir Edward Grey's own party, there appears to be not a little acquiescence in his avowal that, unless the growth of the burden of universal militarism can be arrested, civilisation must break down under the strain. It is to men who realise the danger, while unable to see their way to remove it, that the work of Dr. Wehberg offers its pregnant suggestion.

That suggestion is, in brief, that naval

armaments in particular are largely the outcome of the risks and the consequent fears set up by the continuance of the principle that in naval warfare the belligerents are free to capture each other's commerce. Herein, as his book will make clear to the reader, naval warfare has failed to undergo the control now laid by common consent upon land warfare. In the latter, booty for booty's sake is disallowed by the military codes of all the civilised Powers. It is important to have the fact made generally known; for the brilliant author of "Sea Law and Sea Power," Mr. T. G. Bowles, continues to make the misleading assertion that in war on land private property is "at the absolute mercy of any military commander," and that those who propose the abandonment of booty-right at sea lay down their doctrine only for sea-wars. The anomaly lies exactly the other way. The civilised Powers are under agreement to respect private property in land wars. An army may take food, stores, and bullion where it needs these for its maintenance; but it may not seize the goods of non-combatants by way of mere plunder. With navies it is different. Naval warfare is latterly so rare that the usage is not present to the common consciousness; but if a war should break out in these days between two or more Sea Powers, they would at once

proceed to capture each other's merchant ships and retain or sell them and their cargoes.

It is naturally upon this ground that the appeals of the British and German Navy Leagues for more warships are mainly founded; and the first step towards any rational understanding on the subject must be the recognition by the reasonable public in both countries that each has ground for apprehension. True, Germany need not under any circumstances fear an invasion by Britain; while insular Britain, with her small army, may fairly plead a special need for naval defence. But as regards commerce, the situation is pretty even. Even if Germans were not spontaneously concerned to defend their growing commerce, the avowals of English statesmen no less than the vaunts of English warmongers would awaken them to the fact that a war between them and us would mean the risk of the capture of their merchant marine. Thus the German Dreadnoughts are as perfectly justified as the British Dreadnoughts which preceded and have followed them. They are defences for the German ports and for commerce in the North Sea; and to regard them as built for purposes of aggression is to substitute fantasy for common-sense.

Britain, on the other hand, may well claim on the same principles to be guarding