

WAR PRISONERS HAVE RIGHTS.

Humane Treatment Guaranteed Them Under Hague War Regulations.

Already large numbers of prisoners have been captured by all the belligerent powers. In England, at this moment, there are Germans who have been taken prisoners—“prisoners of war”. The rights and disabilities of prisoners of war have been very thoroughly defined by The Hague war regulations, and the treatment of such prisoners, as prescribed by those regulations, is now binding on the powers. Altogether, these prisoners — and there will still be large numbers of them captured by all the powers before the war is over — will not have quite such a hapless time as might be supposed.

In each belligerent state a bureau of information relating to prisoners of war has to be instituted at the commencement of hostilities. This bureau has to be kept informed with regard to each, individual prisoner in its country's hands—where he is imprisoned, when he is liberated on parole, of his escape, of his admission into a hospital, of his death, or, generally, of any material particulars with regard to his treatment. It is also charged with the duty of receiving and collecting all valuables and effects left by prisoners who have died in hospital, and of forwarding them to those entitled. Letters and valuables sent to prisoners have to be delivered to them free of all postal duty, and gifts and relief in kind have to be delivered to them free of all duty of entry and free of railway charges. Societies for the relief of prisoners of war have to be afforded every facility, compatible with military requirements, for the discharge of their task.

Prisoners of war must be humanely treated. Their personal belongings remain their own property, while their imprisonment must only be of such a kind as is indispensable to satisfy. They may be set to work either for the government of which they have become the prisoners, or for private subjects of that government, but their tasks must be neither excessive nor concerned with military operations, and they must be paid the ordinary rate of pay obtaining in the country where they are prisoners, for the work they do. There is an obligation on every government to maintain its war prisoners.

If they are insubordinate they may be disciplined. But if they escape, when not on parole, and are recaptured after rejoining their army they must be punished for their escape. If, however, they have been liberated on parole, and are recaptured in arms against the government which has liberated them, they can be tried and punished. A prisoner cannot be compelled, against his will, to accept his liberty on parole, nor is a government obliged to accede to a prisoner's request to be set at liberty on parole. Newspaper correspondents and others who, though not belonging to an army, are yet following it, have to be treated, if they fall into the enemy's hands, as prisoners of war, provided they can show a certificate from the authorities of the army they were with.