

THE FREEDOM OF THE SEAS

BY

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The Freedom of the Seas is a phrase which has been much used by Germans for the purpose of injuring the British Empire. Freedom is a word which we all love, and the phrase seems to denote something which is admirable, which we should establish if we do not possess it now; and by saying that they were fighting for it the Germans suggested the idea that it does not exist now. In addition to the Germans, who talked of it because they wished to injure Great Britain, some Americans and a few English people have declared themselves supporters of "The Freedom of the Seas."

But what does the Freedom of the Seas mean when we turn it from a set of words to a definite idea? A country has the right under International Law to control the waters close to its shores, usually termed territorial waters. Outside of territorial waters the oceans and seas are the special property of no one Power, and ships can move across the open sea subject only to the control of the State to which they belong. The ships of any State may navigate the ocean, transport men, carry goods; fishing is open to all. A Power, for instance, can oblige its own ships to conform to certain regulations—say as to load-line, number of crew, or wireless equipment—but it cannot insist upon the ships of other States conforming to these regulations. That is what most of us understand by the term Freedom of the Seas. But the phrase during the late War was interpreted in other and widely different senses.

For the most part the Germans demanded "The Freedom of the Seas" without saying very precisely what they meant by it. A few of them, however, did go into particulars. Thus, in 1917 Professor Heinrich Triepel, in a book entitled *Die Freiheit der Meere un der Künftige Friedensschluss*, said: "There is, however, another 'Freedom of the Seas' which consists of something very different from paper stipulations. It is the freedom of the seas from the tyranny of England. . . . Let it be our business to acquire sea-power; then we shall have a free sea also. Let it be our business that this war makes England smaller and ourselves bigger. Let it be our business to gain naval bases overseas." Count zu Reventlow, early in 1918, wrote much to the same purpose in the *Berlin Deutsche Tageszeitung*: "What we understand today by this doctrine is that Germany should possess such maritime territories and such naval bases that, at the outbreak of war, we should be able, with our Navy ready, reasonably to guarantee ourselves the command of the seas."