

neutrals, compelling them to refuse to trade with England. Louis XVI's Minister, de Vergennes, also devised a Continental System by the law of July, 1778. He promised the neutrals " free ships free goods," on condition that they would compel England to recognise the principle. He withdrew the favour from the Dutch, until they were forced to insist on a one-sided interpretation of the Treaty of Westminster of 1674, which led them into war with England. In both cases " free ships free goods " was the strategic formula by which, under the guise of " free commerce," world-dominion was to be obtained. As Mahan says, the neutral carrier " was the key of the position."¹

The broad principle on which England's action against the neutrals has been based is to prevent their assistance in any form reaching the enemy, whether that assistance took the form of carrying the enemy's coasting trade, assisting him in carrying on his colonial trade, carrying the enemy's goods to his ports, or creating a shore depôt through which goods passed to the enemy overland.

The subsidiary points specially dwelt on in this essay are: (i) that treaties do not, as a rule, establish general principles of International Law; the enjoyment of the privileges created by them are limited to the parties who have entered into them; (ii) that the trade by which assistance is rendered to the enemy is carried on by individual merchants and shipowners, and not by neutral States; (iii) that the laws of neutrality affect Governments, not individuals; and although attempts have often been made to prohibit trade with the enemy, even in contraband, or with blockaded ports, the trading instinct is so strong that they have failed. There is no other solution of the difficulty than the recognition of the fact that this trade is carried on subject to the risk of seizure by the belligerent.

So much emphasis has been laid by the Germans on

¹*Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*, Vol. II., p. 354.