

THE FREEDOM OF THE SEAS.

plodes on contact—first used on a large scale during the Russo-Japanese war. The drawback of the automatic mine is that it cannot (unlike the gun or the torpedo) discriminate between a legitimate or an illegitimate victim, between a belligerent and a neutral. Its introduction, therefore, formed a grave peril to neutrals, and would, if it were employed without restriction, seriously impair such freedom of the seas as remained to them. How did the rival views deal with this question?

Britain proposed that all mines should be illegal; or, if this could not be accepted, that they should never be laid in the open sea, but only in the territorial waters of the belligerents—in home waters for defence, in enemy waters for offence; that they should never be laid except in the waters facing naval ports, so as to leave trading ports open to neutral ships except when formally blockaded; and that they should be so constructed as to become harmless if they were swept from their moorings. Unanchored mines, she proposed, should be entirely prohibited; or, if licensed as a means of defence, to be thrown out by a retreating fleet, they should be so constructed as to become harmless an hour after being released. If these proposals had been accepted, they would have formed a very material safeguard for the freedom of the seas, and neutral ships would have been saved from a deadly peril against which no precautions are possible. Apart from the traditional restrictions of blockade and contraband, the seas would have remained safe and free everywhere except in the neighbourhood of the naval ports of belligerents. But Germany would have none of these restrictions. She insisted upon the right of laying mines in the open sea, though she accepted