

MARE LIBERUM.

These restrictions obviously impair in a serious degree the freedom of the seas in time of war, especially during a war between great trading states. Accordingly, during the present century, a serious effort has been made to reduce this restriction, and to increase the freedom of the seas even in time of war. It was at the Hague Conference of 1907 and the subsequent Naval Conference of London in 1909 that these attempts were most systematically developed, mainly on the motion of Britain. The subject was found to be extremely difficult, and a great variety of opinions emerged. But we may broadly distinguish three main points of view in these discussions, the British, the German, and the American. The British aim was to reduce the restrictions upon neutral trade to the maximum possible extent consistent with the maintenance of the chief offensive weapon of a naval power—the weapon of attack against the trade of its enemy. The German aim was, as far as possible, to disarm the stronger naval power while leaving to the weaker naval power every weapon of offence or defence, without regard to the rights of neutrals. The American aim was to abolish all restrictions upon sea-going trade, belligerent and neutral alike, in time of war, save only the carriage of contraband; thus depriving sea-power of its chief weapon of offence. Each of these three programmes was in effect advocated as a means of enlarging the freedom of the seas, and thus this phrase came to bear very different interpretations. It is worth while to consider the rival proposals, and their probable effects; though none of them was completely successful.

One of the reasons for a reconsideration of the rules of naval warfare at this date was the introduction of a new naval weapon, the automatic mine, which ex-