

## MARE LIBERUM.

for neutrals. It has been, for three centuries, one of the most vexed and difficult problems of international law to determine the limits within which freedom of movement may be restrained by belligerent action, and it must be recognised that during the course of these long arguments, Britain, as the strongest naval power, has been led to assert belligerent rights which have been widely repudiated by neutrals. But during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries international law arrived at certain broad principles as to the rights of belligerents in war, and therefore as to the qualifications upon the freedom of the seas which might reasonably be imposed upon neutrals. Without going into technical details, these broad and generally accepted principles may be defined as follows:—

(1) A belligerent may rightfully endeavour to destroy or hamper the sea-going commerce of his enemy by seizing or sinking his ships wherever found. But in doing so he must (a) safeguard the lives of all non-combatants, and (b) respect neutral property carried on the enemy ships.

(2) A belligerent may rightfully seal up a part or the whole of his enemy's coast-line by means of a "blockade," and for this purpose may seize or destroy neutral vessels endeavouring to reach the blockaded ports. But he may only do this legitimately if his "blockade" is effective—that is, if it is carried out by a naval force so powerful as to make access to the blockaded ports manifestly impracticable except by sheer luck. Failing this, all his actions in an incomplete blockade are illegal. He may not, of course, blockade a neutral port or coast-line. But he may prevent the ingress or egress of contraband through neutral