REPRISALS

What is the difference between attack and reprisals? For all the world except Germany the obvious answer is that attack comes first. It all depends at what point of the sequence you care to begin. Germany commenced to submarine enemy vessels before the so-called blockade was instituted by Great Britain. In December, 1914, von Tirpitz announced the intention of the German Government to continue such action,—not because England was trying to starve Germany, but simply for general purposes of frightfulness. Then came the Scarborough and other raids, and the assertion by Britain of the principle that grain must not be allowed to pass through the war zone unless it could be clearly shown that it was destined for consumption by non-combatants. To this Germany replied by her naval order of February 5th, 1915, intimating that she would seek to destroy every enemy vessel in the area of war, even though she might thereby do harm to the persons and cargoes of neutrals. She might even sink neutral vessels themselves. The immediate reply to this was the famous rescript from Washington, declaring that "the United States would be constrained to hold the Imperial German Government to a strict accountability for such acts of their naval authorities and to take any steps it might be necessary to take to safeguard American lives and property." Then came the sinking of the Lusitania, since when Germany has wasted much diplomatic ingenuity in arguing that this outrage was a "reprisal," which would have been quite legal if no neutral passengers had "come to grief" on the occasion. Neither in Berlin nor in Washington has any stress been laid on the fact that over a thousand non-combatants who were not American citizens went down in the Lusitania; from which we may infer what a hash Germany and the United States would make between them of the "freedom of the seas" if the matter were left in their keeping!

Later horrors may be passed over without notice. What is stirring England now is the question how far it may be right to retaliate in kind, especially in regard to air-raids.