

“Whence did the ships of Canada derive the right to do in 1886 that which they had refrained from doing for more than ninety years? Upon what grounds did Her Majesty’s Government defend in the year 1886 a course of conduct in the Behring Sea which she had carefully avoided ever since the discovery of that sea? By what reasoning did Her Majesty’s Government conclude that an act may be committed with impunity against the rights of the United States which had never been attempted against the same rights when held by the Russian Empire.”¹

These words of Mr. Blaine present the grievance of the United States against the depredations of British vessels in Behring Sea.

A fever of popular excitement lends to the weakest national claim an apparent, yet unreal, strength. Only by allaying this fever can we rightly detect the real strength underneath. Like all controversies respecting the national domain, the Behring Sea dispute has called forth an abundance of bluster. A claim asserted by the Government of the United States, but uncertainly at first, has been borne aloft on the shoulders of its people into a position of dangerous prominence. Only by laying aside all prejudices, particularly the patriotic, and examining this controversy in the cold, clear light which international law and history shed upon it, can we hope to gain a correct view of its merits.

U. S. REVISED STATUTES.—“SECTION 1954. The laws of the United States relating to customs, commerce and

¹ No. 9, 1890. Let. Blaine-Pauncefote, Jan. 22, 1890. This and the succeeding references given by number to which 1890 is added, refer to the President’s message of July 23, 1890, 51st Cong., 1st Sess., House of Representatives H. Doc. No. 450.