

## NEUTRALS ON THE SEAS

Considering the fact that German raiders and submarines have already sunk two dozen neutral vessels in a war which is less than eight weeks old, it is not unwarranted to believe that there is just one reason why the City of Flint is at Murmansk today instead of at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. She flew the flag, not of one of the smaller European neutrals whose protests could be dismissed light-heartedly, but of a great Western Power which Germany was less willing to affront.

Certain facts in the case of the City of Flint are well established. She sailed from New York on Oct. 3 for British ports with a cargo described by our Maritime Commission as "typical of her usual cargo on this run." It included foodstuffs, cotton and some miscellaneous goods, all of which it was her right to carry under the Neutrality Act in its present form. Somewhere west of the British Isles she was intercepted by a German vessel, which seized her and took her into port, first at Tromsø, Norway, and then at Murmansk. Our Government does not challenge the right of the German Navy to intercept a neutral vessel, provided such a vessel is actually carrying contraband. It does, however, question the right of the German Navy to take the City of Flint into the port of a supposedly neutral nation, regardless of any contraband she might have carried, and to seek her internment there. Inquiries have been addressed by the State Department to both Berlin and Moscow. They may lead to a clarification of Russia's position vis-à-vis her partner in the conquest of Poland.

Meantime it is pointed out in Washington that it is the purpose of the Administration's cash-and-carry plan to avoid incidents of this kind by prohibiting American ships from entering the European "combat area." It is also pointed out that the City of Flint is not the only American vessel which has been intercepted by a belligerent, and that the British Government has held temporarily four or five of our merchant ships in British ports. But the point to be noted here is that these ships have been taken by the belligerent into its own ports, not into supposedly neutral territory, and that the British Government is simply following its practice in the last war of conducting an examination for contraband in the safety of a harbor rather than on the open sea. Our Government objected to this practice in 1914, but, so far as the record shows, has not found it to be an unreasonable procedure during the course of the present war.