INGES OF THE FLEET

RUDYARD KIPLING

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

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BY

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I

THE AUXILIARIES

The Navy is very old and very wise. Much of her wisdom is on record and available for reference; but more of it works in the unconscious blood of those who serve her. She has a thousand years of experience, and can find precedent or parallel for any situation that the force of the weather or the malice of the King's enemies may bring about.

The main principles of sea-warfare hold good throughout all ages, and, *so far as the Navy has been allowed to put out her strength*, these principles have been applied over all the seas of

the world. For matters of detail the Navy, to whom all days are alike, has simply returned to the practice and resurrected the spirit of old days.

In the late French wars, a merchant sailing out of a Channel port might in a few hours find himself laid by the heels and under way for a French prison. His Majesty's ships of the Line, and even the big frigates, took little part in policing the waters for him, unless he were in convoy. The sloops, cutters, gun-brigs, and local craft of all kinds were supposed to look after that, while the Line was busy elsewhere. So the merchants passed resolutions against the inadequate protection afforded to the trade, and the narrow seas were full of single-ship actions; mail-packets, West

Country brigs, and fat East Indiamen fighting for their own hulls and cargo anything that the watchful French ports sent against them; the sloops and cutters bearing a hand if they happened to be within reach.

THE OLDEST NAVY

It was a brutal age, ministered to by hard-fisted men, and we had put it a hundred decent years behind us when —it all comes back again! To-day there are no prisons for the crews of merchantmen, but they can go to the bottom by mine and torpedo even more quickly than their ancestors were run into Le Havre. The submarine takes the place of the privateer; the Line, as in the old wars, is occupied bombarding and blockading, else-

where, but the sea-borne traffic must continue, and that is being looked after by the lineal descendants of the crews of the long extinct cutters and sloops and gun-brigs. The hour struck, and they reappeared, to the tune of fifty thousand odd men in more than two thousand ships, of which I have seen a few hundred. Words of command may have changed a little, the tools are certainly more complex, but the spirit of the new crews who come to the old job is utterly unchanged. It is the same fierce, hard-living, heavy-handed, very cunning service out of which the Navy as we know it to-day was born. It is called indifferently the Trawler and Auxiliary Fleet. It is chiefly composed of fishermen, but it takes

in every one who may have maritime tastes—from retired admirals to the son of the sea-cook. It exists for the benefit of the traffic and the annoyance of the enemy. Its doings are recorded by flags stuck into charts; its casualties are buried in obscure corners of the newspapers. The Grand Fleet knows it slightly; the restless light cruisers who chaperon it from the background are more intimate; the destroyers working off unlighted coasts over unmarked shoals come, as you might say, in direct contact with it; the submarine alternately praises and—since one periscope is very like another—curses its activities; but the steady procession of traffic in home waters, liner and tramp, six every sixty minutes, blesses it altogether.

Since this most Christian war includes laying mines in the fairways of traffic, and since these mines may be laid at any time by German submarines especially built for the work, or by neutral ships, all fairways must be swept continuously day and night. When a nest of mines is reported, traffic must be hung up or deviated till it is cleared out. When traffic comes up Channel it must be examined for contraband and other things; and the examining tugs lie out in a blaze of lights to remind ships of this. Months ago, when the war was young, the tugs did not know what to look for specially. Now they do. All this mine-searching and reporting and sweeping, *plus* the direction and examination of the traffic, *plus* the

laying of our own ever-shifting mine-fields, is part of the Trawler Fleet's work, because the Navy-as-we-knew-it is busy elsewhere. And there is always the enemy submarine with a price on her head, whom the Trawler Fleet hunts and traps with zeal and joy. Add to this, that there are boats fishing for real fish, to be protected in their work at sea or chased off dangerous areas where, because they are strictly forbidden to go, they naturally repair, and you will begin to get some idea of what the Trawler and Auxiliary Fleet does.

THE SHIPS AND THE MEN

Now, imagine the acreage of several dock-basins crammed, gunwale to gunwale, with brown and umber and

oehre and rust-red steam-trawlers, tugs, harbour boats, and yaehts once clean and respectable, now dirty and happy. Throw in fish-steamers, surprise-paekets of unknown lines and indescribable junks, sampans, lorehas, eatamarans, and General Service stink-pontoons filled with indeseribable apparatus, manned by men no dozen of whom seem to talk the same dialect or wear the same clothes. The mustard-eoloured jersey who is eleaning a six-pounder on a Hull boat elips his words between his teeth and would be happier in Gaelie. The whitish singlet and grey trousers held up by what is obviously his soldier brother's spare regimental belt is pure Lowestoft. The eomplete blue serge and soot suit passing a wire

down a hatch is Glasgow as far as you can hear him, which is a fair distance, because he wants something done to the other end of the wire, and the flat-faced boy who should be attending to it hails from the remoter Hebrides, and is looking at a girl on the dock-edge. The bow-legged man in the ulster and green-worsted comforter is a warm Grimsby skipper, worth several thousands. He and his crew, who are mostly his own relations, keep themselves to themselves, and save their money. The pirate with the red beard barking over the rail at a friend with gold earrings comes from Skye. The friend is West Country. The noticeably insignificant man with the soft and deprecating eye is skipper and part-owner of the

big slashing Iceland trawler on which he droops like a flower. She is built to almost Western Ocean lines, carries a little boat-deck aft with tremendous stanchions, has a nose cocked high against ice and sweeping seas, and resembles a hawk-moth at rest. The small, sniffing man is reported to be a "holy terror at sea."

HUNTERS AND FISHERS

The child in the Pullman-car uniform just going ashore is a wireless operator, aged nineteen. He is attached to a flagship at least 120 feet long, under an admiral aged twenty-five, who was, till the other day, third mate of a North Atlantic tramp, but who now leads a squadron of six trawlers to hunt submarines. The

principle is simple enough. Its application depends on circumstances and surroundings. One class of German submarines meant for murder off the coasts may use a winding and rabbit-like track between shoals where the choice of water is limited. Their career is rarely long, but while it lasts moderately exciting. Others, told off for deep-sea assassinations, are attended to quite quietly and without any excitement at all. Others, again, work the inside of the North Sea, making no distinction between neutrals and Allied ships. These carry guns, and since their work keeps them a good deal on the surface, the Trawler Fleet, as we know, engages them there—the submarine firing, sinking, and rising again in unexpected quar-

ters; the trawler firing, dodging, and trying to ram. The trawlers are strongly built, and can stand a great deal of punishment. Yet again, other German submarines hang about the skirts of fishing-fleets and fire into the brown of them. When the war was young this gave splendidly "frightful" results, but for some reason or other the game is not as popular as it used to be.

Lastly, there are German submarines who perish by ways so curious and inexplicable that one could almost credit the whispered idea (it must come from the Scotch skippers) that the ghosts of the women drowned pilot them to destruction. But what form these shadows take—whether of "the *Lusitania* Ladies," or humbler

stewardesses and hospital nurses—and what lights or sounds the thing fancies it sees or hears before it is blotted out, no man will ever know. The main fact is that the work is being done. Whether it was necessary or politic to re-awaken by violence every sporting instinct of a sea-going people is a question which the enemy may have to consider later on.

II

THE AUXILIARIES

The Trawlers seem to look on mines as more or less fairplay. But with the torpedo it is otherwise. A Yarmouth man lay on his hatch, his gear neatly stowed away below, and told me that another Yarmouth boat had "gone up," with all hands except one. "'Twas a submarine. Not a mine," said he. "They never gave our boys no chance. Na! She was a Yarmouth boat—we knew 'em all. They never gave the boys no chance." He was a submarine hunter, and he illustrated by means of matches placed

at various angles how the blindfold business is conducted. "And then," he ended, "there's always what *he'll* do. You've got to think that out for yourself—while you're working above him—same as if 'twas fish." I should not care to be hunted for the life in shallow waters by a man who knows every bank and pot-hole of them, even if I had not killed his friends the week before. Being nearly all fishermen they discuss their work in terms of fish, and put in their leisure fishing overside, when they sometimes pull up ghastly souvenirs. But they all want guns. Those who have three-pounders clamour for sixes; sixes for twelves; and the twelve-pound aristocracy dream of four-inchers on anti-aircraft mountings

for the benefit of roving Zeppelins. They will all get them in time, and I fancy it will be long ere they give them up. One West Country mate announced that "a gun is a handy thing to have aboard—always." "But in peace-time?" I said. "Wouldn't it be in the way?"

"We'm used to 'em now," was the smiling answer. "Niver go to sea again without a gun—*I* wouldn't—if I had my way. It keeps all hands pleased-like."

They talk about men in the Army who will never willingly go back to civil life. What of the fishermen who have tasted something sharper than salt water—and what of the young third and fourth mates who have held independent commands

for nine months past? One of them said to me quite irrelevantly: "I used to be the animal that got up the trunks for the women on baggage-days in the old Bodiam Castle," and he mimicked their requests for "the large brown box," or "the black dress basket," as a freed soul might scoff at his old life in the flesh.

"A COMMON SWEEPER"

My sponsor and chaperon in this Elizabethan world of eighteenth-century seamen was an A. B. who had gone down in the *Landrail*, assisted at the Heligoland fight, seen the *Blücher* sink and the bombs dropped on our boats when we tried to save the drowning ("Whereby," as he said, "those Germans died gott-

strafin' their own country because *we* didn't wait to be strafed"), and has now found more peaceful days in an Office ashore. He led me across many decks from craft to craft to study the various appliances that they specialize in. Almost our last was what a North Country trawler called a "common sweeper," that is to say, a mine-sweeper. She was at tea in her shirt-sleeves, and she protested loudly that there was "nothing in sweeping." "'See that wire rope?" she said. "Well, it leads through that lead to the ship which you're sweepin' *with*. She makes her end fast and you make yours. Then you sweep together at whichever depth you've agreed upon between you, by means of that ar-

rangement there which regulates the depth. They give you a glass sort o' thing for keepin' your distance from the other 'ship, but *that's* not wanted if you know each other. Well, then you sweep, as the sayin' is. There's nothin' *in* it. You sweep till this wire rope fouls the bloomin' mines. Then you go on till they appear on the surface, so to say, and then you explode them by means of shootin' at 'em with that rifle in the gallery there. There's nothin' in sweepin' more than that."

"And if you hit a mine?" I asked.

"You go up—but you hadn't ought to hit 'em, if you're careful. The thing is to get hold of the first mine all right, and then you go on

to the next, and so on, in a way o' speakin'."

"And you can fish, too, 'tween times," said a voice from the next boat. A man leaned over and returned a borrowed mug. They talked about fishing—notably that once they caught some red mullet, which the "common sweeper" and his neighbour both agreed was "not natural in those waters." As for mere sweeping, it bored them profoundly to talk about it. I only learned later as part of the natural history of mines, that if you rake the tri-nitro-toluol by hand out of a German mine you develop eruptions and skin-poisoning. But on the authority of two experts, there is nothing in sweeping. Nothing whatever!

A BLOCK IN THE TRAFFIC

Now imagine, not a pistol-shot from these crowded quays, a little Office hung round with charts that are pencilled and noted over various shoals and soundings. There is a movable list of the boats at work, with quaint and domestic names. Outside the window lies the packed harbour—outside that again the line of traffic up and down—a stately cinema-show of six ships to the hour. For the moment the film sticks. A boat—probably a "common sweeper" —reports an obstruction in the traffic lane a few miles away. She has found and exploded one mine. The Office heard the dull boom of it before the wireless report came in.

In all likelihood there is a nest of them there. It is possible that a submarine may have got in last night between certain shoals and laid them out. The shoals are being shepherded in case she is hidden anywhere, but the boundaries of the newly-discovered mine-area must be fixed and the traffic deviated. There is a tramp outside with tugs in attendance. She has hit something and is leaking badly. Where shall she go? The Office gives her her destination—the harbour is too full for her to settle down here. She swings off between the faithful tugs. Down coast some one asks by wireless if they shall hold up their traffic. It is exactly like a signaller "offering" a train to the next block. "Yes," the Office re-

plies. "Wait a while. If it's what we think there will be a little delay. If it isn't what we think, there will be a little longer delay." Meantime, sweepers are nosing round the suspected area—"looking for cuckoos' eggs," as a voice suggests; and a patrol-boat lathers her way down coast to catch and stop anything that may be on the move, for skippers are sometimes rather careless. Words begin to drop out of the air into the chart-hung Office. "Six and a half cables south, fifteen east" of something or other. "Mark it well, and tell them to work up from there," is the order. "Another mine exploded!" "Yes, and we heard that too," says the Office. "What about the submarine?" "*Elizabeth Huggins* reports . . ."

Elizabeth's scandal must be fairly high flavoured, for a torpedo-boat of immoral aspects slings herself out of harbour and hastens to share it. If *Elizabeth* has not spoken the truth, there may be words between the parties. For the present a pencilled suggestion seems to cover the case, together with a demand, as far as one can make out, for "more common sweepers." They will be forthcoming very shortly. Those at work have got the run of the mines now, and are busily howking them up. A trawler-skipper wishes to speak to the Office, "They" have ordered him out, but his boiler, most of it, is on the quay at the present time, and "ye'll remember, it's the same wi' my foremast an' port rig-

ging, sir." The Office does not precisely remember, but if boiler and foremast are on the quay the rest of the ship had better stay alongside. The skipper falls away relieved. (He scraped a tramp a few nights ago in a bit of a sea.) There is a little mutter of gun-fire somewhere across the grey water where a fleet is at work. A monitor as broad as she is long comes back from wherever the trouble is, slips through the harbour-mouth, all wreathed with signals, is received by two motherly lighters, and, to all appearance, goes to sleep between them. The Office does not even look up; for that is not in their department. They have found a trawler to replace the boilerless one. Her name is slid into

the rack. The immoral torpedo-boat flounces back to her moorings. Evidently what *Elizabeth Huggins* said was not evidence. The messages and replies begin again as the day closes.

THE NIGHT-PATROL

Return now to the inner harbour. At twilight there was a stir among the packed craft like the separation of dried tea-leaves in water. The swing-bridge across the basin shut against us. A boat shot out of the jam, took the narrow exit at a fair seven knots and rounded into the outer harbour with all the pomp of a flagship, which was exactly what she was. Others followed, breaking away from every quarter in silence. Boat after boat fell into line—gear stowed

away; spars and buoys in order on their clean decks; guns cast loose and ready; wheel-house windows darkened, and everything in order for a day or a week or a month out. There was no word anywhere. The interrupted foot-traffic stared at them as they slid past below. A woman beside me waved a hand to a man on one of them, and I saw his face light as he waved back. The boat where they had demonstrated for me with matches was the last. Her skipper hadn't thought it worth while to tell me that he was going that evening. Then the line straightened up and stood out to sea.

"You never said this was going to happen," I said reproachfully to my A. B.

"No more I did," said he. "It's the night-patrol going out. Fact is, I'm so used to the bloomin' evolution that it never struck me to mention it as you might say."

Next morning I was at service in a man-of-war, and even as we came to the prayer that the Navy might "be a safeguard to such as pass upon the sea on their lawful occasions," I saw the long procession of traffic resuming up and down the Channel—six ships to the hour. It has been hung up for a bit, they said.

Farewell and adieu to you, Greenwich ladies,
Farewell and adieu to you, ladies ashore!
For we've received orders to work to the eastward
Where we hope in a short time to strafe 'em some more.

We'll duck and we'll dive like little tin turtles,
We'll duck and we'll dive underneath the North Seas,
Until we strike something that doesn't expect us,
From here to Cuxhaven it's go as you please!

The first thing we did was to dock in a mine-field,
Which isn't a place where repairs should be done;

And there we lay doggo in twelve-fathom water
With tri-nitro-toluol hogging our run.

The next thing we did, we rose under a Zeppelin,
With his shiny big belly half blocking the sky.
But what in the—Heavens can you do with six-pounders?
So we fired what we had and we bade him good-bye.

I

SUBMARINES

The chief business of the Trawler Fleet is to attend to the traffic. The submarine in her sphere attends to the enemy. Like the destroyer, the submarine has created its own type of officer and man—with a language and traditions apart from the rest of the Service, and yet at heart unchangingly of the Service. Their business is to run monstrous risks from earth, air, and water, in what, to be of any use, must be the coldest of cold blood.

The commander's is more a one-man job, as the crew's is more team

work, than any other employment afloat. That is why the relations between submarine offieers and men are what they are. They play hourly for each other's lives with Death the Umpire always at their elbow on tip-toe to give them "Out."

There is a streteh of water, onee dear to amateur yachtsmen, now given over to seouts, submarines, destroyers, and, of eourse, eontingents of trawlers. We were waiting the return of some boats which were due to report. A couple surged up the still harbour in the afternoon light and tied up beside their sisters. There elimbed out of them three or four high-booted, sunken-eyed pirates elad in sweaters, under jaekets that a stoker of thc last generation would

have disowned. This was their first chance to compare notes at close hand. Together they lamented the loss of a Zeppelin—"a perfect mug of a Zepp," who had come down very low and offered one of them a sitting shot. "But what *can* you do with our guns? I gave him what I had, and then he started bombing."

"I know he did," another said. "I heard him. That's what brought me down to you. I thought he had you that last time."

"No, I was forty foot under when he hove out the big 'un. What happened to *you?*"

"My steering-gear jammed just after I went down, and I had to go round in circles till I got it straightened out. But *wasn't* he a mug!"

"Was he the brute with the patch on his port side?" a sister-boat demanded.

"No! This fellow had just been hatched. He was almost sitting on the water, heaving bombs over."

"And my blasted steering-gear went and chose *then* to go wrong," the other commander mourned. "I thought his last little egg was going to get me!"

Half an hour later I was formally introduced to three or four quite strange, quite immaculate officers, freshly shaved, and a little tired about the eyes, whom I thought I had met before.

LABOUR AND REFRESHMENT

Meantime (it was on the hour of evening drinks) one of the boats was

still unaccounted for. No one talked of her. They rather discussed motor-cars and Admiralty constructors, but —it felt like that queer twilight watch at the front when the homing aeroplanes drop in. Presently a signaller entered: "V. 42 outside, sir; wants to know which channel she shall use." "Oh, thank you. Tell her to take so-and-so." . . . Mine, I remember, was vermouth and bitters, and later on V. 42 himself found a soft chair and joined the committee of instruction. Those next for duty, as well as those in training, wished to hear what was going on, and who had shifted what to where, and how certain arrangements had worked. They were told in language not to be found in any printable book.

Questions and answers were alike Hebrew to one listener, but he gathered that every boat carried a second in command—a strong, persevering youth, who seemed responsible for everything that went wrong, from a motor cylinder to a torpedo. Then somebody touched on the mercantile marine and its habits.

Said one philosopher: "They can't be expected to take any more risks than they do. *I* wouldn't, if I was a skipper. I'd loose off at any blessed periscope I saw."

"That's all very fine. You wait till you've had a patriotic tramp tryin' to strafe you at your own back-door," said another.

Some one told a tale of a man with a voice, notable even in a Service

where men are not trained to whisper. He was coming back, empty-handed, dirty, tired, and best left alone. For the peace of the German side he had entered our hectic home-waters, where the usual tramp shelled, and by miraculous luck, crumpled his periscope. Another man might have dived, but Boanerges kept on rising. Majestic and wrathful he rose personally through his main hatch, and at 2000 yards (have I said it was a still day?) addressed the tramp. Even at that distance she gathered it was a Naval officer with a grievance, and by the time he ran alongside she was in a state of coma, but managed to stammer: "Well, sir, at least you'll admit that our shooting was pretty good."

"And that," said my informant,

"put the lid on!" Boanerges went down lest he should be tempted to murder, and the tramp affirms she heard him rumbling beneath her, like an inverted thunderstorm, for fifteen minutes.

"All those tramps ought to be disarmed, and *we* ought to have all their guns," said a voice out of a corner.

"What? Still worrying over your 'mug?'" some one replied.

"He *was* a mug!" went on the man of one idea. "If I'd had a couple of twelves even, I could have strafed him proper. I don't know whether I shall mutiny, or desert, or write to the First Sea Lord about it."

"Strafe all Admiralty constructors to begin with. *I* could build a better boat with a 4-inch lathe and a sardine-

tin than——," the speaker named her by letter and number.

"That's pure jealousy," her commander explained to the company. "Ever since I installed—ahem!—my patent electric wash-basin he's been intriguin' to get her. Why? We know he doesn't wash. He'd only use the basin to keep beer in."

UNDERWATER WORKS

However often one meets it, as in this war one meets it at every turn, one never gets used to the Holy Spirit of Man at his job. The "common sweeper," growling over his mug of tea that there was "nothing in sweepin'," and these idly chaffing men, new shaved, and attired, from the gates of Death which had let

them through for the fiftieth time, were all of the same fabric—incomprehensible, I should imagine, to the enemy. And the stuff held good throughout all the world—from the Dardanelles to the Baltic, where only a little while ago another batch of submarines had slipped in and begun to be busy. I had spent some of the afternoon in looking through reports of submarine work in the Sea of Marmora. They read like the diary of energetic weasels in an overcrowded chicken-run, and the results for each boat were tabulated something like a cricket score. There were no maiden overs. One came across jewels of price set in the flat official phraseology. For example, one man who was describing some

steps he was taking to remedy certain defects, interjected casually: "At this point I had to go under for a little, as a man in a boat was trying to grab my periscope with his hand." No reference before or after to the said man or his fate. Again: "'Came across a dhow with a Turkish skipper. He seemed so miserable that I let him go." And elsewhere in those waters, a submarine overhauled a steamer full of Turkish passengers, some of whom, arguing on their allies' lines, promptly leaped overboard. Our boat fished them out and returned them, for she was not killing civilians. In another affair, which included several ships (now at the bottom) and one submarine, the commander relaxes enough to note that: "The

men behaved very well under direct and flanking fire from rifles at about fifteen yards." This was *not*, I believe, the submarine that fought the Turkish cavalry on the beach. And in addition to matters much more marvellous than any I have hinted at, the reports deal with repairs and shifts and contrivances carried through in the face of dangers that read like the last delirium of romance. One boat went down the Straits and found herself rather canted over to one side. A mine and chain had jammed under her forward diving-plane. So far as I made out, she shook it off by standing on her head and jerking backward; or it may have been, for the thing has occurred more than once, she merely rose as

much as she could when she could, and then "released it by hand," as the official phrase goes.

FOUR NIGHTMARES

And who, a few months ago, could have invented, or having invented, would have dared to print such a nightmare as this: There was a boat in the North Sea who ran into a net and was caught by the nose. She rose, still entangled, meaning to cut the thing away on the surface. But a Zeppelin in waiting saw and bombed her, and she had to go down again at once—but not too wildly or she would get herself more wrapped up than ever. She went down, and by slow working and weaving and wriggling, guided only by guesses at the mean-

ing of each scrape and grind of the net on her blind forehead, at last she drew clear. Then she sat on the bottom and thought. The question was whether she should go back at once and warn her confederates against the trap, or wait till the destroyers which she knew the Zeppelin would have signalled for, should come out to finish her still entangled, as they would suppose, in the net? It was a simple calculation of comparative speeds and positions, and when it was worked out she decided to try for the double event. Within a few minutes of the time she had allowed for them she heard the twitter of four destroyers' screws quartering above her; rose; got her shot in; saw one destroyer crumple; hung

round till another took the wreck in tow; said good-bye to the spare brace (she was at the end of her supplies), and reached the rendezvous in time to turn her friends.

And since we are dealing in nightmares, here are two more—one genuine, the other, mercifully, false. There was a boat not only at, but in the mouth of a river—well home in German territory. She was spotted, and went under, her commander perfectly aware that there was not more than five feet of water over her conning-tower, so that even a torpedo-boat, let alone a destroyer, would hit it if she came over. But nothing hit anything. The search was conducted on scientific principles while they sat on the silt and suffered.

Then the commander heard the rasp of a wire trawl sweeping over his hull. It was not a nice sound, but there happened to be a couple of gramophones aboard, and he turned them both on to drown it. And in due time that boat got home with everybody's hair of just the same colour as when they had started!

The other nightmare arose out of silence and imagination. A boat had gone to bed on the bottom in a spot where she might reasonably expect to be looked for, but it was a convenient jumping off, or up, place for the work in hand. About the bad hour of 2.30 A.M. the commander was waked by one of his men, who whispered to him: "They've got the chains on us, sir!" Whether it was

pure nightmare, an hallucination of long wakefulness, something relaxing and releasing in that packed box of machinery, or the disgustful reality, the commander could not tell, but it had all the makings of panic in it. So the Lord and long training put it into his head to reply! "Have they? Well, we shan't be coming up till nine o'clock this morning. We'll see about it then. Turn out that light, please."

He did not sleep, but the dreamer and the others did; and when morning came and he gave the order to rise, and she rose unhampered, and he saw the grey smeared seas from above once again, he said it was a very refreshing sight.

Lastly, which is on all fours with the gamble of the chase, a man was

eoming home rather bored after an uneventful trip. It was neeessary for him to sit on the bottom for awhile, and there he played patienee. Of a sudden it struek him, as a vow and an omen, that if he worked out the next game eorreetly he would go up and strafe something. The eards fell all in order. He went up at onee and found himself alongside a German, whom, as he had promised and prophesied to himself, he destroyed. She was a mine-layer, and needed only a jar to dissipate like a eracked eleetrie-light bulb. He was somewhat impressed by the contrast between the single-handed game 50 feet below, the aseent, the attaek, the amazing result, and when he deseended again, his cards just as he had left them.

The ships destroy us above
And ensnare us beneath.
We arise, we lie down, and we move
In the belly of Death.

The ships have a thousand eyes
To mark where we come . . .
And the mirth of a seaport dies
When our blow gets home.

II

SUBMARINES

I was honoured by a glimpse into this veiled life in a boat which was merely practising between trips. Submarines are like cats. They never tell "who they were with last night," and they sleep as much as they can. If you board a submarine off duty you generally see a perspective of fore-shortened fattish men laid all along. The men say that except at certain times it is rather an easy life, with relaxed regulations about smoking, calculated to make a man

put on flesh. One requires well-padded nerves. Many of the men do not appear on deck throughout the whole trip. After all, why should they if they don't want to? They know that they are responsible in their department for their comrades' lives as their comrades are responsible for theirs. What's the use of flapping about? Better lay in some magazines and cigarettes.

When we set forth there had been some trouble in the fairway, and a mined neutral, whose misfortune all bore with exemplary calm, was careened on a near by shoal.

"Suppose there are more mines knocking about?" I suggested.

"We'll hope there aren't," was the soothing reply. "Mines are all Joss.

You either hit 'em or you don't. And if you do, they don't always go off. They scrape alongside."

"What's the etiquette then?"

"Shut off both propellers and hope."

We were dodging various craft down the harbour when a squadron of trawlers came out on our beam, at that extravagant rate of speed which unlimited Government coal always leads to. They were led by an ugly, upstanding, black-sided buccaneer with twelve-pounders.

"Ah! That's the King of the Trawlers. Isn't he carrying dog, too! Give him room!" one said.

We were all in the narrowed harbour mouth together.

"'There's my youngest daughter.

Take a look at her!'" some one hummed as a punctilious navy cap slid by on a very near bridge.

"We'll fall in behind him. They're going over to the neutral. Then they'll sweep. By the bye, did you hear about one of the passengers in the neutral yesterday. He was taken off, of course, by a destroyer, and the only thing he said was: 'Twenty-five time I 'ave insured, but not *this* time. . . . 'Ang it!'"

The trawlers lunged ahead toward the forlorn neutral. Our destroyer nipped past us with that high-shouldered, terrier-like pouncing action of the newer boats, and went ahead. A tramp in ballast, her propeller half out of water, threshed along through the sallow haze.

"Lord! What a shot!" somebody said enviously. The men on the little deck looked across at the slow-moving silhouette. One of them, a cigarette behind his ear, smiled at a companion.

Then we went down—not as they go when they are pressed (the record, I believe, is 50 feet in 50 seconds from top to bottom), but genteelly, to an orchestra of appropriate sounds, roarings, and blowings, and after the orders, which come from the commander alone, utter silence and peace.

"There's the bottom. We bumped at fifty—fifty-two," he said.

"I didn't feel it."

"We'll try again. Watch the gauge and you'll see it flick a little."

It may have been so, but I was more interested in the faces, and above all the eyes, all down the length of her. It was to them, of course, the simplest of manœuvres. They dropped into gear as no machine could; but the training of years and the experience of the year leaped up behind those steady eyes under the electrics in the shadow of the tall motors, between the pipes and the curved hull, or glued to their special gauges. One forgot the bodies altogether—but one will never forget the eyes or the ennobled faces. One man I remember in particular. On deck his was no more than a grave, rather striking countenance, cast in the unmistak-

able petty officer's mould. Below, as I saw him in profile handling a vital control, he looked like the Doge of Venice; the Prior of some sternly-ruled monastic order; an old-time Pope—anything that signifies trained and stored intellectual power utterly and ascetically devoted to some vast impersonal end. And so with a much younger man, who changed into such a monk as Frank Dicksee used to draw. Only a couple of torpedo-men, not being in gear for the moment, read an illustrated paper. Their time did not come till we went up and got to business, which meant firing at our destroyer, and, I think, keeping out of the light of a friend's torpedoes.

The attack and everything con-

nected with it is solely the commander's affair. He is the only one who gets any fun at all—since he is the eye, the brain, and the hand of the whole—this single figure at the periscope. The second in command heaves sighs, and prays that the dummy torpedo (there is less trouble about the live ones) will go off all right, or he'll be told about it. The others wait and follow the quick run of orders. It is, if not a convention, a fairly established custom that the commander shall inferentially give his world some idea of what is going on. At least, I only heard of one man who says nothing whatever, and doesn't even wriggle his shoulders when he is on the sight. The others soliloquize, etc., accord-

ing to their temperament; and the periscope is as revealing as golf.

Submarines nowadays are expected to look out for themselves more than at the old practices, when the destroyers walked circumspectly. We dived and circulated under water for a while, and then rose for a sight—something like this: "Up a little—up! Up still! Where the deuce has he got to—Ah! (Half a dozen orders as to helm and depth of descent, and a pause broken by a drumming noise somewhere above, which increases and passes away.) That's better! Up again! (This refers to the periscope.) Yes. Ah! No, we *don't* think! All right! Keep her *down*, damn it! Umm! That ought to be nineteen knots. . . . Dirty trick!

He's changing speed. No, he isn't. *He's* all right. Ready forward there! (A valve sputters and drips, the torpedo-men crouch over their tubes and nod to themselves. *Their* faces have changed now.) He hasn't spotted us yet. We'll ju-ust—(more helm and depth orders, but specially helm)—'Wish we were working a beam-tube. Ne'er mind! Up! (A last string of orders.) Six hundred, and he doesn't see us! Fire!"

The dummy left; the second in command cocked one ear and looked relieved. Up we rose; the wet air and spray spattered through the hatch; the destroyer swung off to retrieve the dummy.

"Careless brutes destroyers are," said one officer. "That fellow nearly

walked over us just now. Did you notice?"

The commander was playing his game out over again—stroke by stroke. "With a beam-tube I'd ha' strafed him amidship," he concluded.

"Why didn't you then?" I asked.

There were loads of shiny reasons, which reminded me that we were at war and cleared for action, and that the interlude had been merely play. A companion rose alongside and wanted to know whether we had seen anything of her dummy.

"No. But we heard it," was the short answer.

I was rather annoyed, because I had seen that particular daughter of destruction on the stocks only a short time ago, and here she was grown up

and talking about her missing children!

In the harbour again, one found more submarines, all patterns and makes and sizes, with rumours of yet more and larger to follow. Naturally their men say that we are only at the beginning of the submarine. We shall have them presently for all purposes.

THE MAN AND THE WORK

Now here is a mystery of the Service.

A man gets a boat which for two years becomes his very self—

> His morning hope, his evening dream,
> His joy throughout the day.

With him is a second in command, an engineer, and some others. They

prove each other's souls habitually every few days, by the direct test of peril, till they act, think, and endure as a unit, in and with the boat. That commander is transferred to another boat. He tries to take with him if he can, which he can't, as many of his other selves as possible. He is pitched into a new type twice the size of the old one, with three times as many gadgets, an unexplored temperament and unknown leanings. After his first trip he comes back clamouring for the head of her constructor, of his own second in command, his engineer, his cox, and a few other ratings. They for their part wish him dead on the beach, because, last commission with So-and-so, nothing ever went wrong

anywhere. A fortnight later you can remind the commander of what he said, and he will deny every word of it. She's not, he says, so very vile—things considered, barring her five-ton torpedo-derricks, the abominations of her wireless, and the tropical temperature of her beer-lockers. All of which signifies that the new boat has found her soul, and her commander would not change her for battle-cruisers. Therefore, that he may remember he is the Service and not a branch of it, he is after certain seasons shifted to a battle-cruiser, where he lives in a blaze of admirals and aiguillettes, responsible for vast decks and crypt-like flats, a student of extended above-water tactics, thinking in tens of thousands of

yards instead of his modest but deadly three to twelve hundred.

And the man who takes his place straightway forgets that he ever looked down on great rollers from a sixty-foot bridge under the whole breadth of heaven, but crawls and climbs and dives through conning-towers with those same waves wet in his neck, and when the cruisers pass him, tearing the deep open in half a gale, thanks God he is not as they are, and goes to bed beneath their distracted keels.

. . . . . .

EXPERT OPINIONS

"But submarine work is cold-blooded business."

(This was at a little session in a

green-curtained "wardroom" cum owner's cabin.)

"Then there's no truth in the yarn that you can feel when the torpedo's going to get home?" I asked.

"Not a word. You sometimes see it get home, or miss, as the case may be. Of course, it's never your fault if it misses. It's all your second-in-command."

"That's true, too," said the second. "I catch it all round. That's what I am here for."

"And what about the third man?" There was one aboard at the time.

"He generally comes from a smaller boat, to pick up real work—if he can suppress his intellect and doesn't talk 'last commission.'"

The third hand promptly denied

the possession of any intellect, and was quite dumb about his last boat.

"And the men?"

"They train on, too. They train each other. Yes, one gets to know 'em about as well as they get to know us. Up topside, a man can take you in—take himself in—for months; for half a commission, p'rhaps. Down below he can't. It's all in cold blood—not like at the front, where they have something exciting all the time."

"Then bumping mines isn't exciting?"

"Not one little bit. You can't bump back at 'em. Even with a Zepp——"

"Oh, now and then," one interrupted, and they laughed as they explained.

"Yes, that was rather funny. One of our boats came up slap underneath a low Zepp. 'Looked for the sky, you know, and couldn't see anything except this fat, shining belly almost on top of 'em. Luckily, it wasn't the Zepp's stingin' end. So our boat went to windward and kept just awash. There was a bit of a sea, and the Zepp had to work against the wind. (They don't like that.) Our boat sent a man to the gun. He was pretty well drowned, of course, but he hung on, choking and spitting, and held his breath, and got in shots where he could. This Zepp was strafing bombs about for all she was worth, and—who was it?—Macartney, I think, potting at her between dives; and naturally all hands wanted

to look at the performance, so about half the North Sea flopped down below and—oh, they had a Charlie Chaplin time of it! Well, somehow, Macartney managed to rip the Zepp a bit, and she went to leeward with a list on her. We saw her a fortnight later with a patch on her port side. Oh, if Fritz only fought clean, this wouldn't be half a bad show. But Fritz can't fight clean."

"And *we* can't do what he does—even if we were allowed to," one said.

"No, we can't. 'Tisn't done. We have to fish Fritz out of the water, dry him, and give him cocktails, and send him to Donnington Hall."

"And what does Fritz do?" I asked.

"He sputters and clicks and bows.

He has all the correct motions, you know; but, of course, when he's your prisoner you can't tell him what he really is."

"And do you suppose Fritz understands any of it?" I went on.

"No. Or he wouldn't have lusitaniaed. This war was his first chance of making his name, and he chucked it all away for the sake of showin' off as a foul Gottstrafer."

And they talked of that hour of the night when submarines come to the top like mermaids to get and give information; of boats whose business it is to fire as much and to splash about as aggressively as possible; and of other boats who avoid any sort of display—dumb boats watching and relieving watch, with

their periscope just showing like a crocodile's eye, at the back of islands and the mouths of channels where something may some day move out in procession to its doom.

I

PATROLS

On the edge of the North Sea sits an Admiral in charge of a stretch of coast without lights or marks, along which the traffic moves much as usual. In front of him there is nothing but the east wind, the enemy, and some few our ships. Behind him there are towns, with M. P.'s attached, who a little while ago didn't see the reason for certain lighting orders. When a Zeppelin or two came, they saw. Left and right of him are enormous docks, with vast crowded sheds, miles of stone-faced

quay-edges, loaded with all manner of supplies and crowded with mixed shipping.

In this exalted world one met Staff-Captains, Staff-Commanders, Staff-Lieutenants, and Secretaries, with Paymasters so senior that they almost ranked with Admirals. There were Warrant Officers, too, who long ago gave up splashing about decks barefoot, and now check and issue stores to the ravenous, untruthful fleets. Said one of these, guarding a collection of desirable things, to a cross between a sick-bay attendant and a junior writer (but he was really an expert burglar), "No! An' you can tell Mr. So-and-so, with my compliments, that the storekeeper's gone away—right away—with the key of

these stores in his pocket. Understand me? In his trousers pocket."

He snorted at my next question.

"*Do* I know any destroyer-lootenants?" said he. "This coast's rank with 'em! Destroyer-lootenants are born stealing. It's a mercy they's too busy to practise forgery, or I'd be in gaol. Engineer-Commanders? Engineer-Lootenants? They're worse! . . . Look here! If my own mother was to come to me beggin' brass screws for her own coffin, I'd —I'd think twice before I'd oblige the old lady. War's war, I grant you that; but what I've got to contend with is crime."

I referred to him a case of conscience in which every one concerned acted exactly as he should, and it

nearly ended in murder. During a lengthy action, the working of a gun was hampered by some empty cartridge cases which the lieutenant in charge made signs (no man could hear his neighbour speak just then) should be hove overboard. Upon which the gunner rushed forward and made other signs that they were "on charge," and must be tallied and accounted for. He, too, was trained in a strict school. Upon which the lieutenant, but that he was busy, would have slain the gunner for refusing orders in action. Afterwards he wanted him shot by court-martial. But every one was voiceless by then, and could only mouth and croak at each other, till somebody laughed, and the pedantic gunner was spared.

"Well, that's what you might fairly call a naval crux," said my friend among the stores. "The Lootenant was right. 'Mustn't refuse orders in action. The Gunner was right. Empty cases *are* on charge. No one ought to chuck 'em away that way, but . . . Damn it, they were *all* of 'em right! It ought to ha' been a marine. Then they could have killed him and preserved discipline at the same time."

A LITTLE THEORY

The problem of this coast resolves itself into keeping touch with the enemy's movements; in preparing matters to trap and hinder him when he moves, and in so entertaining him that he shall not have time to draw

clear before a blow descends on him from another quarter. There are then three lines of defence: the outer, the inner, and the home waters. The traffic and fishing are always with us.

The blackboard idea of it is always to have stronger forces more immediately available everywhere than those the enemy can send. x German submarines draw a English destroyers. Then x calls $x+y$ to deal with a, who, in turn, calls up b, a scout, and possibly a^2, with a fair chance that if $x+y+z$ (a Zeppelin) carry on they will run into a^2+b^2+c cruisers. At this point, the equation generally stops; if it continued, it would end mathematically in the whole of the German Fleet coming

out. Then another factor which we may eall the Grand Fleet would come from another place. To change the eomparisons: the Grand Fleet is the "strong left" ready to give the knockout blow on the point of the ehin when the head is thrown up. The other fleets and other arrangements threaten the enemy's solar plexus and stomach. Somewhere in relation to the Grand Fleet lies the "blockading" cordon whieh examines neutral traffic. It could be drawn as tight as a Turkish bowstring, but for reasons which we may arrive at after the war, it does not seem to have been so drawn up to date.

The enemy lies bchind his mines, and ours, raids our coasts when he secs a chanee, and kills seagoing

civilians at sight or guess, with intent to terrify. Most sailor-men are mixed up with a woman or two; a fair percentage of them have seen men drown. They can realize what it is when women go down choking in horrible tangles and heavings of draperies. To say that the enemy has cut himself from the fellowship of all who use the seas is rather understating the case. As a man observed thoughtfully: "You can't look at any water now without seeing 'Lusitania' sprawlin' all across it. And just think of those words, 'North-German Lloyd,' 'Hamburg-Amerika' and such things, in the time to come. They simply mustn't be."

He was an elderly trawler, respectable as they make them, who,

after many years of fishing, had discovered his real vocation. "I never thought I'd like killin' men," he reflected. "Never seemed to be any o' my dooty. But it is—and I do!"

A great deal of the East Coast work concerns mine-fields—ours and the enemy's—both of which shift as occasion requires. We search for and root out the enemy's mines; they do the like by us. It is a perpetual game of finding, springing, and laying traps on the least as well as the most likely runaways that ships use—such sea snaring and wiring as the world never dreamt of. We are hampered in this, because our Navy respects neutrals; and spends a great deal of its time in making their path safe

for them. The enemy does not. He blows them up, because that cows and impresses them, and so adds to his prestige.

DEATH AND THE DESTROYER

The easiest way of finding a mine-field is to steam into it, on the edge of night for choice, with a steep sea running, for that brings the bows down like a chopper on the detonating-horns. Some boats have enjoyed this experience and still live. There was one destroyer (and there may have been others since) who came through twenty-four hours of highly compressed life. She had an idea that there was a mine-field somewhere about, and left her companions behind while she explored. The

weather was dead calm, and she walked delicately. She saw one Scandinavian steamer blow up a couple of miles away, rescued the skipper and some hands; saw another neutral, which she could not reach till all was over, skied in another direction; and, between her life-saving efforts and her natural curiosity, got herself as thoroughly mixed up with the field as a camel among tent-ropes. A destroyer's bows are very fine, and her sides are very straight. This causes her to cleave the wave with the minimum of disturbance, and this boat had no desire to cleave anything else. None the less, from time to time, she heard a mine grate, or tinkle, or jar (I could not arrive at the precise note it

strikes, but they say it is unpleasant) on her plates. Sometimes she would be free of them for a long while, and began to hope she was clear. At other times they were numerous, but when at last she seemed to have worried out of the danger zone, lieutenant and sub together left the bridge for a cup of tea. ("In those days we took mines very seriously, you know.") As they were in act to drink, they heard the hateful sound again just outside the wardroom. Both put their cups down with extreme care, little fingers extended ("We felt as if they might blow up, too"), and tip-toed on deck, where they met the foc'sle also on tip-toe. They pulled themselves together, and asked severely what the foc'sle thought it

was doing. "Beg pardon, sir, but there's another of those blighters tap-tapping alongside, our end." They all waited and listened to their common coffin being nailed by Death himself. But the things bumped away. At this point they thought it only decent to invite the rescued skipper, warm and blanketed in one of their bunks, to step up and do any further perishing in the open.

"No, thank you," said he. "Last time I was blown up in my bunk, too. That was all right. So I think, now, too, I stay in my bunk here. It is cold upstairs."

Somehow or other they got out of the mess after all. "Yes, we used to take mines awfully seriously in those days. One comfort is, Fritz'll take

them seriously when he comes out. Fritz don't like mines."

"Who does?" I wanted to know.

"If you'd been here a little while ago, you'd seen a Commander comin' in with a big 'un slung under his counter. He brought the beastly thing in to analyse. The rest of his squadron followed at two-knot intervals, and everything in harbour that had steam up scattered."

THE ADMIRABLE COMMANDER

Presently I had the honour to meet a Lieutenant-Commander-Admiral who had retired from the service, but, like others, had turned out again at the first flash of the guns, and now commands—he who had great ships erupting at his least signal—a squad-

ron of trawlers for the protection of the Dogger Bank Fleet. At present prices—let alone the chance of the paying submarine—men would fish in much warmer places. His flagship is a multi-millionaire's private yacht. In her mixture of stark, carpetless, curtainless, carbolised present with voluptuously curved, broad-decked, easy-stairwayed past, she might be Queen Guinevere in the convent at Amesbury. And her Lieutenant-Commander, most careful to pay all due compliments to Admirals who were midshipmen when *he* was a Commander, leads a congregation of very hard men indeed. They do precisely what he tells them to, and with him go through strange experiences, because they love him and

because his language is volcanic and wonderful—what you might call Popocatapocalyptic. I saw the Old Navy making ready to lead out the New under a grey sky and a falling glass—the wisdom and cunning of the old man backed up by the passion and power of the younger breed, and the discipline which had been his soul for half a century binding them all.

"What'll he do *this* time?" I asked of one who might know.

"He'll cruise between Two and Three East; but if you'll tell me what he won't do, it 'ud be more to the point! He's mine-hunting, I expect, just now."

WASTED MATERIAL

Here is a digression suggested by the sight of a man I had known in

other scenes, despatch-riding round a fleet in a petrol-launch. There are many of his type, yachtsmen of sorts accustomed to take chances, who do not hold master's certificates and cannot be given sea-going commands. Like my friend, they do general utility—often in their own boats. This is a waste of good material. Nobody wants amateur navigators—the traffic lanes are none too wide as it is. But these gentlemen ought to be distributed among the Trawler Fleet as strictly combatant officers. A trawler skipper may be an excellent seaman, but slow with a submarine shelling and diving, or in cutting out enemy trawlers. The young ones who can master Q. F. work in a very short time would—though

there might be friction, a court-martial or two, and probably losses at first—pay for their keep. Even a hundred or so of amateurs, more or less controlled by their squadron commanders, would make a happy beginning, and I am sure they would all be extremely grateful.

Where the East wind is brewed fresh and fresh every morning,
And the balmy night-breezes blow straight from the Pole,
I heard a destroyer sing: "What an enjoyable life does one lead on the North Sea Patrol!

"To blow things to bits is our business (and Fritz's),
Which means there are mine-fields wherever you stroll.
Unless you've particular wish to die quick you'll avoid steering close to the North Sea Patrol.

"We warn from disaster the mercantile master
Who takes in high dudgeon our life-saving rôle,
For every one's grousing at doeking and dowsing
The marks and the lights on the North Sea Patrol."

[Twelve verses omitted.]

So swept but surviving, half drowned but still driving,
I watched her head out through the swell off the shoal,
And I heard her propellers roar: "Write to poor fellers
Who run such a Hell as the North Sea Patrol!"

II

PATROLS

The great basins were crammed with craft of kinds never known before on any Navy List. Some were as they were born, others had been converted, and a multitude have been designed for special cases. The Navy prepares against all contingencies by land, sea, and air. It was a relief to meet a batch of comprehensible destroyers and to drop again into the little mouse-trap wardrooms, which are as large-hearted as all our oceans. The men one used to know as destroyer-lieutenants ("born steal-

ing") are serious Commanders and Captains to-day, but their sons, Lieutenants in command and Lieutenant-Commanders, do follow them. The sea in peace is a hard life; war only sketches an extra line or two round the young mouths. The routine of ships always ready for action is so part of the blood now that no one notices anything except the absence of formality and of the "crimes" of peace. What Warrant Officers used to say at length is cut down to a grunt. What the sailor-man did not know and expected to have told him, does not exist. He has done it all too often at sea and ashore.

I watched a little party working under a leading hand at a job which, eighteen months ago, would have

required a Gunner in charge. It was comic to see his orders trying to overtake the execution of them. Ratings coming aboard carried themselves with a (to me) new swing—not swank, but consciousness of adequacy. The high, dark foc'sles which, thank goodness, are only washed twice a week, received them and their bags, and they turned-to on the instant as a man picks up his life at home. Like the submarine crew they come to be a breed apart—double-jointed, extra-toed, with brazen bowels and no sort of nerves.

It is the same in the engine-room, when the ships come in for their regular looking-over. Those who love them, which you would never guess from the language, know exactly

what they need, and get it without fuss. Everything that steams has her individual peculiarity, and the great thing is, at overhaul, to keep to it and not develop a new one. If, for example, through some trick of her screws not synchronising, a destroyer always casts to port when she goes astern, do not let any zealous soul try to make her run true, or you will have to learn her helm all over again. And it is vital that you should know exactly what your ship is going to do three seconds before she does it. Similarly with men. If any one, from Lieutenant-Commander to stoker, changes his personal trick or habit—even the manner in which he clutches his chin or caresses his nose at a crisis—the

matter must be carefully considered in this world where each is trustee for his neighbour's life and, vastly more important, the corporate honour.

"What are the destroyers doing just now?" I asked.

"Oh—running about—much the same as usual."

The Navy hasn't the least objection to telling one everything that it is doing. Unfortunately, it speaks its own language, which is incomprehensible to the civilian. But you will find it all in "The Channel Pilot" and "The Riddle of the Sands."

It is a foul coast, hairy with currents and rips, and mottled with shoals and rocks. Practically the same men hold on here in the same

ships, with much the same crews, for months and months. A most senior officer told me that they were "good boys"—on reflection, "quite good boys"—but neither he nor the flags on his chart explained how they managed their lightless, unmarked navigations through black night, blinding rain, and the crazy, rebounding North Sea gales. They themselves ascribe it to Joss that they have not piled up their ships a hundred times.

"I expect it must be because we're always dodging about over the same ground. One gets to smell it. We've bumped pretty hard, of course, but we haven't expended much up to date. You never know your luck on patrol, though."

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

Personally, though they have been true friends to me, I loathe destroyers, and all the raw, racking, ricochetting life that goes with them—the smell of the wet "lammies" and damp wardroom cushions; the galley-chimney smoking out the bridge; the obstacle-strewn deck; and the pervading beastliness of oil, grit, and greasy iron. Even at moorings they shiver and sidle like half-backed horses. At sea they will neither rise up and fly clear like the hydroplanes, nor dive and be done with it like the submarines, but imitate the vices of both. A scientist of the lower deck describes them as: "Half switchback, half water-chute, and

Hell continuous." Their only merit, from a landsman's point of view, is that they can crumple themselves up from stem to bridge and (I have seen it) still get home. But one does not breathe these compliments to their commanders. Other destroyers may be—they will point them out to you—poisonous bags of tricks, but their own command—never! Is she high-bowed? That is the only type which over-rides the seas instead of smothering. Is she low? Low bows glide through the water where those collier-nosed brutes smash it open. Is she mucked up with submarine-catchers? They rather improve her trim. No other ship has them. Have they been denied to her? Thank Heaven, *we* go to sea without a fish-curing

plant on deek. Does she roll, even for her class? She is drier than Dreadnoughts. Is she permanently and infernally wet? Stiff, sir—stiff: the first requisite of a gun-platform.

"SERVICE AS REQUISITE"

Thus the Cæsars and their fortunes put out to sea with their subs and their sad-eyed engineers, and their long-suffering signallers—I do not even know the technieal name of the sin which causes a man to be born a destroyer-signaller in this life—and the little yellow shells stuck all about where they can be easiest reached. The rest of their acts is written for the information of the proper authorities. It reads like a page of Todhunter. But the masters of

merchant-ships could tell more of eyeless shapes, barely outlined on the foam of their own arrest, who shout orders through the thick gloom alongside. The strayed and anxious neutral knows them when their searchlights pin him across the deep, or their syrens answer the last yelp of his as steam goes out of his torpedoed boilers. They stand by to catch and soothe him in his pyjamas at the gangway, collect his scattered lifeboats, and see a warm drink into him before they turn to hunt the slayer. The drifters, punching and reeling up and down their ten-mile line of traps; the outer trawlers, drawing the very teeth of Death with water-sodden fingers, are grateful for their low, guarded signals; and when

the Zeppelin's revealing star-shell cracks darkness open above him, the answering crack of the invincible destroyers' guns comforts the busy mine-layers. Big cruisers talk to them, too; and, what is more, they talk back to the cruisers. Sometimes they draw fire—pinkish spurts of light—a long way off, where Fritz is trying to coax them over a mine-field he has just laid; or they steal on Fritz in the midst of his job, and the horizon rings with barking, which the inevitable neutral who saw it all reports as "a heavy fleet action in the North Sea." The sea after dark can be as alive as the woods of summer nights. Everything is exactly where you don't expect it, and the shyest creatures are the farthest away

from their holes. Things boom overhead like bitterns, or scutter alongside like hares, or arise dripping and hissing from below like otters. It is the destroyers' business to find out what their business may be through all the long night, and to help or hinder accordingly. Dawn sees them pitch-poling insanely between headseas, or hanging on to bridges that sweep like scythes from one forlorn horizon to the other. A homeward-bound submarine chooses this hour to rise, very ostentatiously, and signals by hand to a lieutenant in command. (They were the same term at Dartmouth, and same first ship.)

"What's he sayin'? Secure that gun, will you? 'Can't hear oneself speak." The gun is a bit noisy on

its cone, but that isn't the reason for the destroyer-lieutenant's short temper.

"Says he's goin' down, sir," the signaller replies. What the submarine had spelt out, and everybody knows it, was: "Cannot approve of this extremely frightful weather. Am going to bye-bye."

"Well!" snaps the lieutenant to his signaller, "what are you grinning at?" The submarine has hung on to ask if the destroyer will "kiss her and whisper good-night." A breaking sea smacks her tower in the middle of the insult. She closes like an oyster, but—just too late. *Habet!* There must be a quarter of a ton of water somewhere down below, on its way to her ticklish batteries.

"What a wag!" says the signaller, dreamily. "Well, 'e can't say 'e didn't get 'is little kiss."

The lieutenant in eommand smiles. The sea is a beast, but a just beast.

RACIAL UNTRUTHS

This is trivial enough, but what would you have? If Admirals will not strike the proper attitudes, nor lieutenants emit the appropriate sentiments, one is forced back on the truth, which is that the men at the heart of great matters in our Empire are mostly of an even simplicity. From the advertising point of view they are stupid, but the breed has always been stupid in this department. It may be due, as our enemies assert, to our racial snobbery, or, as

others hold, to a certain God-given lack of imagination which saves us from being over-concerned at the effects of our appearances on others. Either way, it deceives the enemies' people more than any calculated lie. When you come to think of it, though the English are the worst paper-work and *viva voce* liars in the world, they have been rigorously trained since their early youth to live and act lies for the comfort of the society in which they move, and so for their own comfort. The result in this war is interesting.

It is no lie that at the present moment we hold all the seas in the hollow of our hands. For that reason we shuffle over them shame-faced and apologetic, making arrangements

here and flagrant compromises there, in order to give substance to the lie that we have dropped fortuitously into this high seat and are looking round the world for some one to resign it to. Nor is it any lie that, had we used the Navy's bare fist instead of its gloved hand from the beginning, we could in all likelihood have shortened the war. That being so, we elected to dab and peck at and half-strangle the enemy, to let him go and choke him again. It is no lie that we continue on our inexplicable path animated, we will try to believe till other proof is given, by a cloudy idea of alleviating or mitigating something for somebody —not ourselves. [Here, of course, is where our racial snobbery comes

in, which makes the German gibber. I cannot understand why he has not accused us to our Allies of having secret commercial understandings with him.] For that reason, we shall finish the German eagle as the merciful lady killed the chicken. It took her the whole afternoon, and then, you will remember, the carcase had to be thrown away.

Meantime, there is a large and unlovely water, inhabited by plain men in severe boats, who endure cold, exposure, wet, and monotony almost as heavy as their responsibilities. Charge them with heroism —but that needs heroism, indeed! Accuse them of patriotism, they become ribald. Examine into the records of the miraculous work they

have done and are doing. They will assist you, but with perfect sincerity they will make as light of the valour and forethought shown as of the ends they have gained for mankind. The Service takes all work for granted. It knew long ago that certain things would have to be done, and it did its best to be ready for them. When it disappeared over the sky-line for manœuvres it was practising—always practising; trying its men and stuff and throwing out what could not take the strain. That is why, when war came, only a few names had to be changed, and those chiefly for the sake of the body, not of the spirit. And the Seniors who hold the key to our plans and know what will be done

if things happen, and what links wear thin in the many chains, they are of one fibre and speech with the Juniors and the lower deck and all the rest who come out of the undemonstrative households ashore. "Here is the situation as it exists now," say the Seniors. "This is what we do to meet it. Look and count and measure and judge for yourself, and then you will know."

It is a safe offer. The civilian only sees that the sea is a vast place, divided between wisdom and chance. He only knows that the uttermost oceans have been swept clear, and the trade-routes purged, one by one, even as our armies were being convoyed along them; that there was no island nor key left unsearched on any

waters that might hide an enemy's craft between the Arctic Circle and the Horn. He only knows that less than a day's run to the eastward of where he stands, the enemy's fleets have been held for a year and four months, in order that civilization may go about its business on all our waters.

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