

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

thing 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.