

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

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, elsewhere, 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