

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

—‘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 aspect 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 rigging, 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