

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

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