

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

'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