

THE AUXILIARIES

'A COMMON SWEEPER'

My sponsor and chaperon in this Elizabethan world of eighteenth-century seamen was an A.B. who had gone down in the *Landrail*, assisted at the Heligoland fight, seen the *Blücher* sink and the bombs dropped on our boats when we tried to save the drowning ('Whereby,' as he said, 'those Germans died gottstrafin' their own country because *we* didn't wait to be strafed'), and has now found more peaceful days in an Office ashore. He led me across many decks from craft to craft to study the various appliances that they specialise in. Almost our last was what a North Country trawler called a 'common sweeper,' that is to say, a mine-sweeper. She was at tea in her shirt-sleeves, and she protested loudly that there was 'nothing in sweeping.' 'See that wire rope?' she said. 'Well, it leads through that lead to the ship which you're sweepin' *with*. She makes her end fast and you make yours. Then you sweep together at whichever depth you've agreed upon between you, by means of that arrangement there which regulates the depth. They give you a glass sort o' thing for keepin' your distance from the other ship, but *that's* not wanted if you know each other. Well, then you sweep, as the sayin' is. There's nothin' *in* it. You sweep till this wire rope fouls the bloomin'