

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

length of her. It was to them, of course, the simplest of manœuvres. They dropped into gear as no machine could; but the training of years and the experience of the year leaped up behind those steady eyes under the electrics in the shadow of the tall motors, between the pipes and the curved hull, or glued to their special gauges. One forgot the bodies altogether—but one will never forget the eyes or the ennobled faces. One man I remember in particular. On deck his was no more than a grave, rather striking countenance, cast in the unmistakable petty officer's mould. Below, as I saw him in profile handling a vital control, he looked like the Doge of Venice; the Prior of some sternly-ruled monastic order; an old-time Pope—anything that signifies trained and stored intellectual power utterly and ascetically devoted to some vast impersonal end. And so with a much younger man, who changed into such a monk as Frank Dicksee used to draw. Only a couple of torpedo-men, not being in gear for the moment, read an illustrated paper. Their time did not come till we went up and got to business, which meant firing at our destroyer, and, I think, keeping out of the light of a friend's torpedoes.

The attack and everything connected with it is solely the commander's affair. He is the only one who gets any fun at all—since he is the eye, the brain, and the hand of the whole—this single figure