

## The Spider Web.

By P.I.X.

There is magic in salt water which transmogrifies all things it touches. The aeroplane with its cubist outline undergoes a sea change on reaching the coast and becomes a flying-boat, a thing of beauty, a Viking dragon ship, a shape born of the sea and air with pleasant and easy lines, and in the sun, the dull war-paint stripped from the natural mahogany, a flashing golden craft of enchantment.

During the war nothing was published about the flying-boats, partly because they worked with the Silent Navy, and partly because they were produced in the service. They were created to harry and destroy the German submarines, and were a manifestation of the genius of the English-speaking peoples for all things connected with the sea.

There is a tang of salt in the adventures of the men who boomed out in them over the narrow waters, for they had to do with submarines and ships, and all that that implies. In their job o' work of bombing U-boats, attacking Zeppelins, fighting enemy seaplanes, and carrying out reconnaissance and convoy duties, there is as much romance as in any particular effort in the war. In the future, grown great in size, the boats will form the winged Navy, and will carry mails and passengers over the water-routes of all the world.

Boat seaplanes, or flying-boats as they are called by the men who use them, are a true type of aircraft designed for dealing with the chances and hazards of flying over the sea. They have a stout wooden boat hull, planked with mahogany and cedar, to which the wings, with the engines between the planes, are attached. They carried a service crew of four: Captain, navigator, wireless operator, and engineer. Float seaplanes, which the boats superseded, were practically land machines with two wooden floats instead of wheels, and struck you as being aeroplanes on a visit to the seaside which had put on huge goloshes in order to keep dry. On seeing one pass overhead it was usual to say: "There she goes with her big boots on."

Float seaplanes were not very seaworthy, breaking up quickly in rough water; and many a brave lad, down at sea in them with engine trouble, has been drowned. They are very much to-day what they were in 1914.

From the very beginning of things there was much faith shown by the sea-going pilots of the Royal Naval Air Service in the seaplane as a weapon to "do down" the U-boat. But the technical people of the service neglected float seaplanes; and flying-boats, of which they did not approve, took a long time to develop. Instead of perfecting seaplanes, the slide-rule merchants developed scout land machines with the idea of using them off the decks of ships, and a strong force of