

THE FRINGES OF THE FLEET

Being nearly all fishermen they discuss their work in terms of fish, and put in their leisure fishing overside, when they sometimes pull up ghastly souvenirs. But they all want guns. Those who have three-pounders clamour for sixes; sixes for twelves; and the twelve-pound aristocracy dream of four-inchers on anti-aircraft mountings for the benefit of roving Zeppelins. They will all get them in time, and I fancy it will be long ere they give them up. One West Country mate announced that 'a gun is a handy thing to have aboard—always.' 'But in peace-time?' I said. 'Wouldn't it be in the way?'

'We'm used to 'em now,' was the smiling answer. 'Niver go to sea again without a gun—I wouldn't—if I had my way. It keeps all hands pleased-like.'

They talk about men in the Army who will never willingly go back to civil life. What of the fishermen who have tasted something sharper than salt water—and what of the young third and fourth mates who have held independent commands for nine months past? One of them said to me quite irrelevantly: 'I used to be the animal that got up the trunks for the women on baggage-days in the old Bodiam Castle,' and he mimicked their requests for 'the large brown box,' or 'the black dress basket,' as a freed soul might scoff at his old life in the flesh.