

## THE UMPIRE

SMITHY sprawled lazily on the grassy cliff. A gentle breeze blew in from the south, and the glassy, sunlit sea was dotted with laden transport boats.

Grazing within a radius afforded by the loose rein that Smithy held was the major's horse. In the soiled mustard-coloured garb that the soldier affects on manœuvres, Smithy had followed both Red and Blue forces, for Major Somebody-or-other, whose serf he was, had been umpiring.

"If," said Smithy reflectively, "if we'd fought with umpires in South Africa, who do you think would have won?"

"I can tell you," he went on, without waiting for an answer. "Take Lady-

smith. Why, if that job had been part of manœuvres, you'd have seen twenty little umpires come streaking up in their Panniers and Napiers and Baby Peugeotts, blinding the Boers with dust, and they'd have had a conference on Wagon Hill and then they'd 've sent for George White.

“ ‘Good mornin’, Sir George,’ they’d say. ‘Fine weather we’re havin’. ‘Ow are the birds in this part of the world? My fifty-horse-power Damyer put up a dozen brace between here and Colenso,’ they’d say. Then Sir George would talk about the shootin’.

“ ‘Oh, by the way,’ sez the umpire, ‘wot about Ladysmith?’

“ ‘Wot about it?’ sez Sir George.

“ ‘Well,’ sez one of the umpires, polishin’ his motor-goggles, ‘I think you’re out of action, don’t you?’

“ Sir George gets huffy.

" 'Nothin' of the sort,' he sez ; ' I can hold Ladysmith for months and months,' he sez.

" Then all the umpires larf, except one with spectacles.

" ' Pardon me,' sez this one, ' you don't seem to understand that the strategic defensive calls for the preponderance of the tactical defensive——'

" ' You dry up,' sez Sir George quick ; ' I'm goin' to hold Ladysmith as long as we've got boots to eat.'

" But he'd have had to give way before the umpires, and Ladysmith would have gone in.

" Then," went on the great man, " take Colenso. The umpires would 'ave gone up to Botha—no, I don't know how they'd have got to him unless they went up in a balloon—and there would be me bold Botha directin' the fire of the First Loyal Sjamboks."

“ ‘Cease fire,’ shout the umpires, and Botha stares.

“ ‘Wot for?’ he sez.

“ ‘You’re defeated,’ sez the umpire, and then goes on affably : ‘What sort of a season are you havin’ in this part of the world? Nice weather for the crops. By-the-by, as I was comin’ along in my 94-horse-power Wolseley, I put up twenty brace——’

“ Then Botha gets mad.

“ ‘What the howling raadzaal do you mean by sayin’ that I’m defeated, when I’ve got a position here that I could hold for a month of Sundays?’ he sez, as wild as anything.

“ The umpire gets very stiff.

“ ‘I’d have you know, General, that you’re not allowed to hold this position.’

“ ‘Why?’ sez Botha, very astonished.

“ ‘Because it’s out of bounds,’ sez the umpire—and so we’d have got Colenso.”

Smithy stopped to watch a bare-footed sailor, with two little yellow and red hand-flags, wave erratic arms seaward.

He spelt out the message, having some knowledge of the semaphore.

"Make—your—own—arrangements," spelt Smithy, and added, with a dry laugh, "That's just the bloomin' thing the umpires don't allow for.

"I remember once," he continued with unaccustomed animation, "when we were messing about after De Wet. You know the sort of thing—twenty miles a day in every direction. Every night we used to come up to the place where De Wet was the night before. There was half a battalion of ours, one squadron of scallywags, two squadrons of bushangers, and a couple of pom-poms.

"Well, one day, when we wasn't exactly lookin' for De Wet, De Wet was

lookin' for us, and you can bet he found us!

"Before we knew where he was he'd got our horses, and we was all lyin' flat on our chests, envyin' the little ants that had as much cover as they wanted.

"We'd been shootin' away for about an hour, and it was easy to see we were pretty well surrounded.

"There was a sort of general in charge of our three columns, and he was twenty miles away with the other two.

"Bimeby we got a helio message from him—'Make the best arrangements you can; I can't get to you under six hours.' So our old man, and the scallywag captain—Somebody's Horse it was—an' the Australian major, had a sort of council of war underneath a water-barrel.

"'Well, gentlemen,' sez our old man, 'I'm afraid we're pipped,' he sez, 'rightly

speakin', he sez, ' we ought to shove up the white flag,' he sez ; ' but I give everybody fair warnin', ' he sez, ' that I'll shoot the man who as much as blows his nose with a white handkerchief,' he sez, with a wicked laugh.

" ' And the scallywag and the bush-ranger and the little gunner who had just crawled up, said, ' Hear, hear ! ' "

" Then our old man goes on : ' The main body of the enemy is in a donga three hundred yards to our left,' he sez, ' and we've got to get that donga,' sez our old man."

Smithy's eyes were far away.

" Bimeby," he went on, " I heard the old man shouting, ' Concentrate your fire on that donga,' he sez ; then after a bit, when the dust begins to go up, he yells, ' Fix bayonets ! ' "

Smithy turned and looked me squarely in the face.

“What would the umpire have said?” he asked. “Why, we’d have been bloomin’ well decimated—but we wasn’t. The Boers didn’t wait for the bayonet—they pushed off, and we got away with the guns.

“There’s only one kind of war,” said Smith sagely, “and that’s the kind that hurts. When the chap that’s playin’ the real game makes a misdeal or revokes, there’s no re-shuffle. If he puts up a big bluff and it comes off, he’s a great man, and gets his picture in the papers. If it don’t come off, why——”

Smithy’s silence was eloquent.

“Umpires in war,” he went on, “are food and feet and fingers—fingers for holdin’ on to positions where, rightly, you should ’a’ been kicked off.

“I know regiments that could never be put out of action unless every man was killed—what’s an umpire goin’ to do with



a lot like that?" he demanded. Somewhere down on the shingly beach below us a stentorian voice roared:

"Smith!"

Smith rose with alacrity.

"Comin', sir," he shouted. Then, as he led his officer's charger seaward, he turned.

"He's an umpire," he said with a jerk of his thumb toward the beach, "but he's a very decent chap otherwise."

