

ST. JOHN

SIDE LIGHT

Bennet Burleigh, writing from Estcourt, agrees with many critics at home and abroad that Natal is "the least suitable of countries for armored trains." and proceeds to say:

"Besides, those we have are poorly expedientized affairs, though the best, perhaps, that could be done in a hurry. Imagine a few 3 in boiler-plates placed round the engine, and flat bogie trucks boxed round seven feet high with similar sheets of iron or steel, and roughly loop-holed—the whole painted khaki—and you have the armored train. There being no door-ways, to get inside one of those oblong iron boxes, which are quite uncovered at the top, you have to clamber up as best you can, gripping the loop-holes and exterior fastenings. Egress has to be made in the same manner. They are all right against rifle fire, except when in a cutting or passing under a hill, when an enemy might have you at his mercy by firing down into the open-topped trucks. It is a well known lesson, also, that an armored train, except in an absolutely flat country, is unsuited for scouting or attack, unless backed and flanked by a friendly force of cavalry and guns. Our armored trains here are unprovided with Maxims or cannon."

In this letter he writes a full account of the armored train affair in which Winston Churchill distinguished himself. After describing how Churchill and the others worked with might and main, and how the young correspondent accompanied the wounded in the train back to Frere, he says that from there the train went on to Estcourt, but Mr. Churchill, after handing in his revolver and field glasses, said he was going back to the scene to assist the wounded, and stand by the men. The last seen of him was as he trudged alone away down into the arena of battle, where the shot and shell were still screaming, splintering rock and ploughing the ground. A few of the luckier fugitives passed him on the way, but failed to turn him back from his purpose.

Mr. Burleigh concludes his letter thus:

"By way of finale, is it not a little odd that the War Office has forgotten to provide the officers with a supply of military maps of Natal? It so happens at the moment that even Colonels are unable to procure trustworthy maps, either military or ordinary, for the good reason there are none left on stock anywhere."

There seems to be good ground for this complaint about maps. Early last Monday morning we got the message from the war-office despatch announcing General Buller's reverse. In this the General said he had been "misled" by guides. "The chery" was at once the comment, and there generally followed an expression of wonder that any such confidence should be placed in local guides when it is well known that the whole of the country is thoroughly disaffected. One also wondered, to use the words of the Standard's military critic, whether the General's staff officers had been idle since they reached this part of South Africa. We know that at least one battalion, the Second Royal Berkshire, spent the month of October at Stormberg Junction, which they had placed in a state of defence, when a sudden order reached them to dismantle their works and return to Queenstown. Were no surveys, no reconnaissances made of the range which lies to the east of Stormberg Junction? These hills dominate not only the railway, but the roads leading to Queenstown from the Orange River and are of obvious importance in the plan for the defence of the colony. The Cape Colony is a British possession. Are there no large scale maps of the district in which our troops were operating? Were our generals like those of the French army, who possessed elaborate maps of the enemy's country, but none of their own?

Mr. Ralph, writing from Orange River, Nov. 16, recurs to the subject of khaki color. When one thinks of the

news received here these last three days, his opening paragraph sounds almost ominous. "It sounds grewsome" he writes, "to liken the sending out of an army to the return of 'dust to dust,' and yet a reader could see an army or any of soldiers in khaki out on the veldt would at once think of the simile. Africa looks now as if it were the bin of creation. Its ground is loam. Its air is flying dust. Its vegetation, man's and insects are nearly all of different shades of dust color."

"As I write, the men are dissolving in their tails and dipping brushes in mud to paint their white straps mud color. Every pouch and strap and cloth covered with bottles that would show white or dark undergoing this treatment. And drummers are doing the same with their drums—painting the white tighter cords with mud, mudding over the gold mottoes, so that everything shall look like velvet—so that we shall be as dusty as



earthlike him in war and sword straps. danger of and from many. different have the