

MELTON PRIOR

War Correspondent of the Illustrated London News

CAMPAIGNS OF A WAR CORRESPONDENT.
By Melton Prior. Illustrated. Longmans,
Green & Co. \$4.20.

JUST at the time when the Turco-Bulgarian war seems to show that the days of the war correspondent are past, there appears a volume taken from the diaries of one of the best known of all that adventurous fraternity. Melton Prior of The Illustrated London News, was not a writer, indeed, but as an artist he interpreted, with his pencil, war and its actualities at least as clearly as his colleagues with the pen. He was the close associate of such war correspondents as Archibald Forbes, Bennett Burleigh, George W. Steevens, and Frederick Villiers, and when a monument to him was unveiled only a week or so ago in St. Paul's Cathedral the address was delivered by such a distinguished soldier as Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, V. C., with whom he had shared many a perilous campaign.

The titles of Mr. Prior's chapters give some idea of the kind of life he led. He followed the British colors in the Ashanti war of 1827-4, the Kaffir war of 1878, the Zulu war of 1879-80, the Boer war of 1881, the Egyptian campaign of 1882, and the Suakim expedition of 1883, the Burmese campaign of 1887, the Afridi campaign of 1897, the Transvaal war of 1900-02, and the Somali expedition of 1903. He was a spectator in the Herzegovina rising against the Turks in 1875, and was with the Sultan's armies when they fought the Russians in 1877. He saw something of the Jameson raid in 1895, and was at Buluwayo in 1896. He sketched the international forces at work in Crete in 1897, and was one of the correspondents who was disappointed in going to the front in the Russo-Japanese war in 1904-5.

Truly, he lived a life of adventure, and it is worth noting when the question of the place of a newspaper correspondent in the field is considered how greatly such a man as Mr. Prior, or, for that matter, Mr. Burleigh and a few of the other journalistic veterans, must have excelled the average officer in the actual knowledge of war. Year after year they were in the field exposed to every possible kind of warfare and seeing their campaigns from far more varied standpoints than professional soldiers wedded to one path of duty. When the Boers were closing around Ladysmith Mr. Prior could deliberately choose to be among those shut up within it, in order to experience a new feeling in war, for had he not stormed trenches at Tel-el-Kebir, watched a bombardment from shipboard at Alexandria, seen a British square crumpled up at Tamai, and tried mountain fighting against the Afridis?

Notes taken from the journals of such a man cannot but be interesting. Of course, Mr. Prior does not attempt to give the slightest account of his campaigns from the historical point of view. He assumes that enough of their events are fresh in his reader's memory to explain what he has to say, and he scarcely ventures on criticism of any commander or any order however blameworthy. He just chats about himself and the men he happened to come across, and he is quite as keenly interested in the plate of Irish stew he was able to give Baker Pasha in the midst of the desert, or the value of a well-filled flask at a crisis in an engagement as he is with the movements of troops and the strategy that he witnessed. Tragedies and adventures in plenty are to be found in his pages, but he neither hides nor emphasizes the horrible side of war, and the result is an eminently readable book, which may be picked up and laid down by the reader as the fit pleases him.

But when one compares the career of Mr. Prior, an acquaintance, if not a friend, of the Generals whose forces he was accompanying, and able to wander as he pleased and risk his life as he chose with the lot of those correspondents, who tried to follow the Japanese Army in Korea or the present Bulgarian war, it must be remembered that there is an essential difference between the wars which Mr. Prior "covered" and those other conflicts. Not the sternest martinet could find any valid objection to sending to England news from the front of movements directed against such foes as the Ashantis, the Zulus, or the Mahdi's forces. Even if the distances to England had not been so great as to render any possible information contained in the dispatches stale by the time it could be sent back to the seat of opera-

tions, there was no possible means for its transmission to the enemy, and censorship of the mildest character was sufficient to make the work of any correspondent from the military point of view innocuous. When, however, the Japanese were in their death struggle with the Russians, and now, when the Bulgarians are fighting their hereditary foes with infinitely inferior reserves, secrecy is absolutely necessary, and the newspapers must be muzzled.

So we find that Mr. Prior was in many cases assisted by the Generals and other important officers. In the Ashanti campaign Sir Garnet Wolseley sent home for him his sketches by the official bearer of dispatches, and after the victory of Tel-el-Kebir the same commander lay down on the rugs in Arabi Pasha's tent and helped Mr. Prior copy his own plan of the action. Admiral Sir William Hewitt gave him an opportunity to send his sketches home from Suakim by a dispatch boat, which permitted him to bring off a very pretty "beat," and during the siege of Ladysmith the military authorities established a weekly post to Durban by Kaffir runner, who took the newspaper messages through the Boer lines at the somewhat startling cost of \$75 a story. Even that, however, was a good deal cheaper than the correspondents had had to pay when they employed their own messengers, as each of these received \$250 for making the perilous trip.

There are, however, in Mr. Prior's book, far as it is from a philosophical discussion of anything, a few hints of the other side of the war correspondence question. He himself has spoken of the restrictions placed on him by the Japanese in the Russian War simply from the point of view of the newspaper man yearning to get to his work and fretting because he has not the opportunity to do his duty by his office. But a chance remark he drops about one of the most horrible sides of savage warfare shows the service that thoroughly trained correspondents—men who know what war is and what war necessitates and not arm-chair theorists—may render to the professional soldier. In one of the Suakim expeditions the British stormed and took a trench full of Arabs. It was, Mr. Prior declares, an absolute rabbit warren, and from its holes the wounded Soudanese fired or stabbed at the Englishmen, sometimes when their backs were turned, often when they were offering them succor. There was nothing for it but to kill every tribesman left in the place, if many casualties were to be avoided.

Mr. Prior sketched the scene and questions were raised about his pictures in the House of Commons. Mr. Gladstone spoke in defense of the action of the troops and declared his belief that they were justified in all they had done. Some little time later he met Mr. Prior and told him what implicit faith he placed in his pictures of events in the field and how convinced he was that he had not exaggerated the straits, in which the expedition found itself. An incident such as this throws a light on the importance for political reasons of having the representatives of the newspapers with the army, even if from the military point of view they are often a nuisance. In the present Bulgarian war, when an entire people has strung itself to one heroic dash for freedom from its ancient foe, and when everything depends on the ability to accomplish a great object in one swift stroke, it may be feasible to keep the people at home in the dark as to what is going on; but when a war is long drawn out, when a Government, dependent on the popular support, finds itself compelled to demand sacrifices of blood and money, then it will be found absolutely necessary to permit the newspapers to send their own men to the front and to draw their own conclusions.

In such times it will be well if there are waiting for marching orders such men as Melton Prior. In this review there has been no room to speak of the resource, the artistic skill and the hardihood he displayed. For he himself makes nothing of it, and seems far more concerned about the discomforts he suffered than the risk to life and limb he sustained.

A WILD HORSE

"Piebald, King of Bronchos," is the biography of a wild horse, by Clarence Hawkes, who has already given us the life stories of a buffalo, a wolf, a moose, a bear, and a beaver, and apparently intends to go right through the zoological list. As he knows his field, and has a vigorous narrative style, his animal census is a very interesting thing. The hero of the present book gets out of favor from the start, and it grows as he grows from an awkward colt to a victorious racer. Mr. Hawkes's style, indeed, leaves much to be desired, but there is vigor and narrative and the immensity of the Western plains, so what does it matter? (George W. Jacobs & Co.)