

T H E R E S U L T O F T H E L A T E
T E L E G R A P H E R S'
S T R I K E.

(In Harper's Weekly: Sept. 1, 1883)
V. XXVII, No. 1393.

The telegraph strike ended as quietly as it had proceeded. The leaders, seeing that the movement had failed, advised a return to work wherever it was possible. They disclaimed all knowledge of the violence shown in cutting the wires, and all responsibility for it. In every such disturbance of established system there will be miscreants to turn the situation to mischief. But liberty can not be held responsible for the crimes committed in its name. The operators had an undoubted right to decline to work for unsatisfactory wages, and though illicit advantage of the situation may have been taken by others, or by some of the striking body, the strike itself was justifiable, however mistaken.

As we pointed out at the beginning, the company had necessarily an enormous advantage, because it could afford to lose time and money. At present strikes are contests of endurance, and a corporation has stronger powers of endurance than a body of workmen. A monopoly which also controls the labor market can not only determine the rate of wages, but it can do what the Western Union is now reported to have done--it can refuse to employ any person who belongs to any labor organization. Yet the result of the movement is not to be regretted. It has exposed thoroughly the methods of the telegraph monopoly, and the exposure has certainly not conciliated public favor, and it has immensely stimulated public interest in the postal telegraph. Indeed, the powerful support which that scheme received during the month of the strike showed a much more general demand for it and understanding of it than had been supposed to exist, and forecasts some Congressional action upon the subject. The argument in opposition has been exceedingly feeble and futile and has mainly served to show how little is to be said against the proposition.

But we repeat what we said last week, that no such scheme ought to be entertained until it is settled that the increase of the number of public places which it would necessitate should not add to the existing evils and dangers of patronage. In a service requiring the special knowledge and diligent habits which are essential to the successful and profitable operation and management of a telegraph the reformed system of appointment by competition and probation would be indispensable, unless it were proposed to plunge into the utmost waste and extravagance. And should a postal telegraph under government control be established, does any intelligent man really think that it would be more American and less aristocratic, more economical, and more agreeable to popular institutions, to limit the employment of the operators to a term of four years, in order to dismiss them more easily at the end of it? There is no subject upon which it seems to

