

In the trial of an English election petition the other day, the postoffice authorities were required to produce the telegrams which had passed between certain persons during the election. A clerk accordingly attended with "a sackful" of the desired documents, but refused to give them up without an order of the court. The Judge took three days for consultation and reflection, and then declined to interfere. "His lordship said he did not intend to go into the reason for his decision, because he had no wish to say that cases might not arise where strong specific grounds might justify the interposition of the election judge." The demand was not pressed, and the telegrams were not read. The *New York Tribune* suggests that the inquiry is now raised why telegrams should not be held as sacred as letters, and protected absolutely against the espionage which they seem to have narrowly escaped on this occasion; and then that journal discusses the question involved as follows:

"The increasing use of the telegraph as a substitute for the post gives this question considerable importance in this country as well as in England. There is no good reason why the correspondence which is sent by wire should be any less sacred than the correspondence which is sent by rail; but the law on the subject is in a very unsatisfactory state, and nothing but the fear of public odium protects the telegraph office now from legal inquisitions. We have proof that the mails have occasionally been tampered with by customhouse officers, and a newspaper holding intimate relations with the Administration calmly told us the other day that the Government had under consideration a more complete system of postoffice espionage for the protection of the revenue. What would happen if Government officials had the handling of all our telegraphic messages? A letter is sealed, and to read it involves delay, trouble, and the risk of detection. But dispatches are open. Copies are taken of them. They are read always by two and generally by three or more persons before they reach their destination. There can hardly be a doubt that while the average character of public officers is as low as it is now, the confidence of the people under a Government telegraph system would be systematically violated. In times of political excitement, opponents of the party in power would be practically debarred from the use of the wires for political purposes, because they could never trust them. Opposition newspapers could not communicate freely with their correspondents, and the press generally would get no intelligence which the authorities saw fit to suppress. And then imagine what the result would be when the Government began to watch the telegraph office 'for the better protection of the revenue,' and every importer became subject to a perpetual inspection of his private correspondence. It is one of the rarest of incidents now-a-days for the secrecy of the telegraph office to be violated. There are two reasons for this. In the first place the business in the United States is very well managed—much more efficiently than any Government business could be—and in the second place the companies are liable in damages for any wrong to their customers. But if the postoffice loses a letter, or sends it to a wrong address, or detains it, the sufferer has no redress whatever; and there would be none for blunders and dishonesty in postal telegraphy."