

THE PUBLIC TELEGRAPH

BY GEORGE L. STRYKER



HERE is nothing, perhaps, concerning which the public is more curious and knows less about than the manner in which the great daily volume of commercial telegraph business is handled.

The inner workings of the metropolitan newspaper is to the majority an enigma, but the operation of the telegraph to the uninitiated is a puzzle infinitely greater.

To the old-time telegrapher whose pen indited "copper plate" copy and whose clearly enunciated Morse was like music to the ear, telegraphy was an art and it had its recompense in accomplishment and renown.

Defending the old system an old-timer the other day remarked facetiously: "They may boast of their new-fangled schemes with a Bug, a Tin Can and a Mill—(new mechanical devices used by operators), but in the old days when I took press report in New York City I had to take nine carbon copies with a stylus." This did not seem to imply anything phenomenal until he added sententiously, "And mind you, I had to turn out the bottom copy in German for the *Staats Zeitung!*" Rather extravagant? Nevertheless, some remarkable feats were performed, the chief difficulty being that only comparatively few attained to the higher degree of the art.

Modern telegraphic inventions do not dip so deep into the intricate as to enable the telegrapher to manifold his copies in different languages, but to-day he does receive press reports at

the larger news-gathering agencies on wax stencil; combining the operation of receiving press reports in a phonetic form, doubling the old rate of speed, translating it into English and typing it in full at the same time direct from the wire. The stencil is then passed through a cyclograph and one hundred copies of the report turned out in one minute ready for distribution to the newspapers whose editors may revise to suit their particular journals.

The profession has become more mechanical, more prosaic, yet more scientifically systematic, and, in some respects, mollifying the high tension so superinducive to nervous strain on the operator of "heavy" wires.

Continual expansion of business demanded both increased wire facilities and an increase in the capacity of wires. These exigencies have been largely met by the invention of instruments which increase the capacity of single circuits many fold. Likewise, mechanical devices have helped to increase the capacity and efficiency of the workman, while many thousands of miles of copper wire strung for new circuits and to replace iron wires have given advantage of longer successfully operated circuits.

In the beginning the telegraphic signals were recorded by a needle which performed marks corresponding to those transmitted. In certain respects science has brought the automatic telegraph back to first principles, with the added advantage of reproducing the copy printed in full instead of merely the symbol.