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GEORGE KENNAN.

A well-known literary man who met Mr. Kennan on his return from Siberia declared, "I have been talking with a man who has seen hell!" It is not strange, says a writer in the *Century Magazine*, from whose article this sketch is condensed, that the world is curious about one whose experiences can be thus graphically described. We wish further knowledge of the personality of him who has traversed the awful circles and himself tasted the fire. Indeed, he who tells us such tales may justly be asked for an account of himself.

It may well enough be that not only to the readers of this magazine, but to all the world as well, Mr. Kennan's history is centred around the expedition of 1885 to study the exile system. His career up to that time was but a preparation for that high service. Keen, quick, discriminating, yet especially just and accurate, strong in body and with a stout purpose, of an unconquerable will and an indomitable courage, and with an eager interest in all strange places and peoples, Nature had made him for her service. Nursed on difficulties, and trained by necessity, he yet had never parted company with industry and perseverance, while readiness of resource was both his inheritance and his habit.

Born in Norwalk, Ohio, on the 16th of February, 1845, canny Scotch and impetuous Irish blood mingle with the sturdy English currents in the veins of George Kennan; but for four generations the Kennans have been Americans. His father, John Kennan, a young lawyer from Western New York, had found home and wife in what was then a small town of Ohio. His mother was Mary Ann Morse, daughter of a Connecticut clergyman, and it is not without interest to learn that she was of the same family as the great inventor of telegraphy, S. F. B. Morse.

The coveted "education" was no light matter to this seeker after knowledge, as appears by the price he willingly paid for the hope. At the somewhat tender age of twelve George Kennan began life as a telegraphist at Norwalk, which prevented any further regular school-going, but which, with equal pace, led the way to a very different career. For the next five years, not only there but at Wheeling, Columbus, and Cincinnati,—for thoroughness and skill brought rapid promotion,—he never ceased both study and recitation, whether it was 3 or 4 o'clock of the night when he laid

down his work. It was at Cincinnati, in the latter part of 1863, that he finally gave up the hard-fought battle; and from that time on there was no more school for Kennan, and of the plan of a collegiate course only the unconquerable desire remained. It was now in the midst of the civil war, and filled with the patriotic fervor of the time, he left no stone unturned to procure an appointment as telegraph operator in the field, and, failing in this, besieged the authorities for other difficult service.

It was perhaps as much because wearied with importunities as on account of old family friendship, that General Anson Stager, then superintendent of the Western

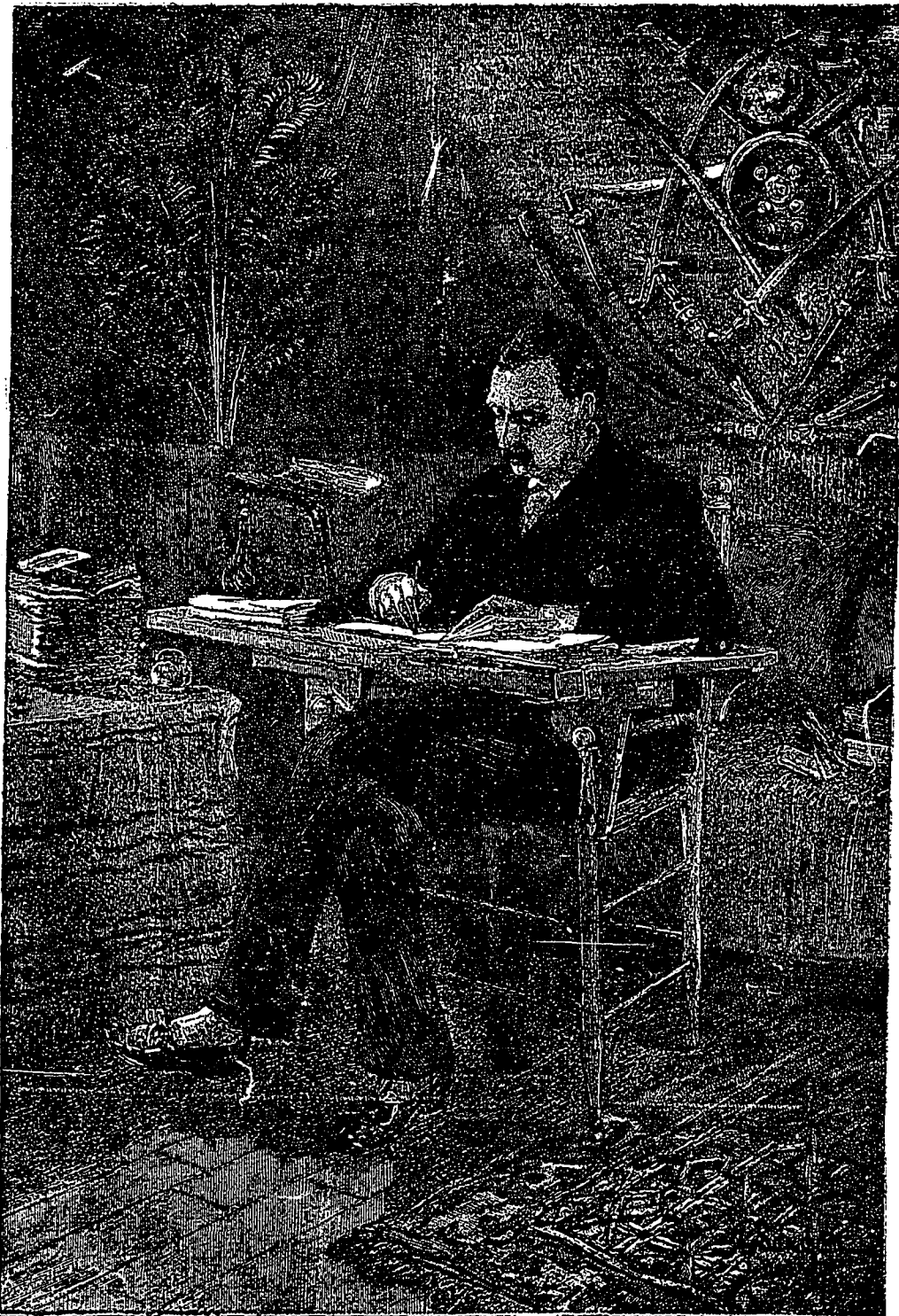
Union Telegraph Company, at last acceded to his request for a place in the Russian-American telegraph expedition. The failure of the first Atlantic cable made it seem for a time as if no such medium of intercontinental communication could be accomplished. In this emergency the Western Union Telegraph Company saw a possibility of a land route through British Columbia and Alaska on the one side, and over the vast barren spaces of Siberia on the other, with the short and quite possible cable across Behring's Straits to connect the two. Work was actually begun upon the line, but the success of the second Atlantic cable put an end to the overland experiment midway in its career. While

it was still a plan however, the restless and gloomy youth in Cincinnati, sitting one day at his place in the office, thinking hopelessly of his appeal to General Stager, suddenly jumped into life at the receipt of a laconic message sent over the wires by that gentleman's own hand, "Can you start for Alaska in two weeks?" and with the confident courage alike of his age and his temperament replied, "Yes, in two hours!" The expedition left for eastern Asia on July 3, 1865.

The two years spent in the wilds of eastern Siberia, with its camps on the boundless steppes, its life in the smoky huts of the wandering Koraks, its arctic winters, its multiplied hardships, and its manifold interests and excitements, proved a very preparatory school for another and vastly more important Siberian journey. Not the least of its advantages was the knowledge of the language then first acquired in those months of often solitary life among the wild tribes of Siberia. Among this man's many qualifications for his work is an unusual linguistic ability.

Not only is a language very easy to him, but almost without his own knowledge he possesses himself of a certain inner sense of its use, and a facility at its idiom. He has been called among the first—if not, indeed, the best—of Russian scholars in America. However this may be, a strong sense of the genius of the language is his to that degree that those fortunate friends who have been introduced by him to some of the leading Russian novelists are sometimes heard to express the wish that he would give over more important work and take to translating. It goes without saying that his acquaintance with Korak and Caucasian, Georgian and Kamtchatkan, wild Cossack and well-to-do citizen, nihilist and soldier, has given him a range of speech seldom possessed in a foreign tongue by any one man, and obviously of inestimable value in the difficult work before him. Certainly no other Russian traveller can equal him in this indispensable adjunct to investigation.

Mr. Kennan's brilliant story of these strange months of work and travel for the telegraph company is too well known to require any retelling of its experiences, but it is only between the lines that we get knowledge of the physical endurance, the unbounded resource, the nerve, the skill that made the result possible, the high spirits and buoyant temperament that filled with gaiety the most tedious days, and upheld the little party



GEORGE KENNAN.

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