

ABRAHAM DAVENPORT, eighth child and third son of the Rev. John Davenport (Harv. 1687), of Stamford, Connecticut, was born in that town, in 1715 or 1716. His father, a grandson of the first pastor of New Haven, was a Trustee of Yale College from 1707 till his death in 1731; he was twice married, and this son was the elder child of his second wife, Elizabeth, widow of William Maltby and daughter of John Morris, of New Haven. The name, Abraham, was derived from the elder Abraham Pierson, his great-grandfather.

He settled in his native town, and was early employed in civil office. Through a long life he continued abundant in useful labors for the town,—no one for example, during its history, having served for a longer period as selectman. In 1747 he was first sent as a representative to the General Assembly, and served for upwards of thirty sessions in that capacity before 1766, when he was advanced to the Council of Assistants, which position he retained until 1784; at thirteen sessions between 1750 and 1763 he was the clerk of the house, and in four later sessions was Speaker.

He was Judge of the Stamford Probate District from 1768 until his death, and also Judge of the Fairfield County Court. In the trying times of the Revolution, he seems to have been the one to whom his townsmen chiefly looked for counsel. He was also an important member of the Council of Safety for the State. He was a deacon in the Congregational Church in Stamford from 1759 until his death, and in his last will bequeathed £200 to that Society as a fund for the support of the ministry.

He died in Danbury, where he was holding a session of the County Court, November 20, 1789, in his 74th year.

President Dwight, who was a near kinsman of his wife, and knew him well, has left the following testimony:

“Colonel Davenport was possessed of a vigorous understanding, and invincible firmness of mind; of integrity, and justice, unquestioned even by his enemies; of veracity, exact in a degree nearly

singular ; and of a weight of character, which for many years decided in this County almost every question, to which it was lent. He was early a professor of the Christian religion ; and adorned its doctrines by an exemplary conformity to its precepts. He was often styled a rough diamond ; and the appellation was, perhaps, never given with more propriety. His virtues were all of the masculine kind ; less soft, graceful, and alluring, than his friends wished ; but more extensively productive of real good to mankind than those of almost any man, who has been distinguished for gentleness of character. It would be happy for this or any other country, if the Magistracy should execute its laws with the exactness for which he was distinguished. Colonel Davenport acquired property with diligence, and preserved it with frugality ; and hence was by many persons supposed to regard it with an improper attachment. This, however, was a very erroneous opinion. Of what was merely ornamental, he was, I think, too regardless ; but the poor found nowhere a more liberal benefactor, nor the stranger a more hospitable host. I say this from personal knowledge, acquired by a long continued and intimate acquaintance with him and his family. While the war had its principal seat in the State of New York, he took the entire superintendence of the sick soldiers, who were returning home ; filled his own houses with them ; and devoted to their relief his own time, and that of his family ; while he provided elsewhere the best accommodations for such as he could not receive. In a season, when an expectation of approaching scarcity had raised the price of bread corn to an enormous height, he not only sold the produce of his own farms to the poor at the former customary price, but bought corn extensively, and sold this also, as he had sold his own. His alms were at the same time rarely rivaled in their extent.

“Two instances of Colonel Davenport’s firmness deserve to be mentioned. The 19th of May, 1780, was a remarkably dark day. Candles were lighted in many houses ; the birds were silent, and disappeared ; and the fowls retired to roost. The Legislature of Connecticut was then in session at Hartford. A very general opinion prevailed, that the day of Judgment was at hand. The House of Representatives, being unable to transact their business, adjourned. A proposal to adjourn the Council was under consideration. When the opinion of Colonel Davenport was asked, he answered, ‘I am against an adjournment. The day of Judgment is either approaching, or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for an adjournment ; if it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. I wish therefore that candles may be brought.’

“The other instance took place at Danbury, at the Court of

Common Pleas; of which he was Chief Justice. This venerable man after he was struck with death heard a considerable part of a trial; gave the charge to the jury; and took notice of an article in the testimony, which had escaped the attention of the Council, on both sides. He then retired from the bench; and was soon after found dead in his bed.

“To his friends Colonel Davenport extended his acts of kindness, as if they had been his children. I say this from experience. Of his country and of all its great interests, he was a pillar of granite. Nothing impaired, nothing moved, his resolution, and firmness, while destined to support, in his own station, this valuable edifice.”

The first of the two incidents narrated by Dr. Dwight has been commemorated in verse by Whittier (*The Tent on the Beach*).

He was married, November 16, 1750, to Elizabeth, daughter of the Hon. Jabez Huntington, of Windham, Connecticut, and of a sister of Jonathan Edwards. They had four sons and one daughter; two of the sons died young, and the other two were graduated at this College in 1770 and 1779; in the line of the elder son descendants have graduated at the College in each of the succeeding generations (five from Judge Abraham). His wife, after some years of infirm health, died December 17, 1773, at the age of 48; and he next married, August 8, 1776, Martha, widow of Dr. Perez Fitch (Y. C. 1750), of Stamford, by birth a Coggeshall, of Preston, Connecticut; she died in Stamford, January 12, 1812, at the age of 83.

His full-length portrait, by Earle, is now in the possession of his great-grandson, the Rev. J. Radcliff Davenport (Y. C. 1830).

AUTHORITIES.

Davenport Family, Supplementary edition, 207-15. *Dwight*, Travels in N. E., iii, 497-9. *Huntington*, Hist. of Stamford, 210, 381-3; and Huntington Family Memoir, 96; and Stamford Registration, 29.