



SPEAKER SAMUEL FESSENDEN

OF STAMFORD

It may fairly be said that "SAM" FESSENDEN to-day ranks as one of Connecticut's most representative citizens—a leader in the politics of his party, strong with the bar of the State, well known and highly esteemed in every county, with a firm hold on the affections of the people. The reason is not hard to find. Mr. Fessenden is by no means an arrogant man, but is noted for his geniality, loyalty to his friends and public spirit. These traits, and his intimate friendship with James G. Blaine and other great statesmen, have naturally brought him much in touch with national affairs, so that his influence in Washington is already very considerable and has steadily increased.

The subject of this sketch comes of a family long distinguished for its ability,

legislative experience and patriotism. William Pitt Fessenden, of Maine, Speaker Fessenden's uncle, made a record as Senator so active and useful during the war and trying period of Reconstruction, that his services are to this day gratefully remembered by his constituency and many outside of it, who are fond of recalling his noble appearance and dignified bearing, oratorical ability and remarkable powers of hard work. Samuel Fessenden's father—the late Hon. Samuel C. Fessenden—and his uncle—the late Hon. Thomas A. Fessenden—were both members of Congress from Maine, and made excellent records for themselves and the people of their respective districts.

Samuel Fessenden, the subject of this sketch, was born in Maine, in the town of

Rockland, on April 12, 1847. The stock from which he comes, however, was among the oldest and most distinguished in Windham County and indeed, in old-time Connecticut. His mother was Miss Mary Abigail Grosvenor Abbe, whose ancestry, through Joshua, Phineas, Ebenezer and Samuel Abbe, is prominently and honorably connected with the history of the historic towns of Windham and Pomfret.

Mr. Fessenden was fitting himself for college, at Lewiston Academy, when the war broke out. Young Fessenden was too vigorous and brave a boy not to respond at once to his country's call of duty. He promptly resigned his collegiate ambitions, when only sixteen, to enlist as a private in the Seventh Maine Battery, and he afterward did faithful service under Grant in the campaigns of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor and Petersburg.

General Grant thought so well of him that he recommended his appointment as first lieutenant and then captain in the Second U. S. Infantry. But young Mr. Fessenden believed he could render better service by remaining in the artillery. He therefore modestly declined promotion in the regulars and joined the First Maine Battery. Afterward he was placed on General Howe's staff and remained with him till the troops were mustered out in 1865.

Undaunted by the length of time he had been obliged to forego his classical and legal studies, Mr. Fessenden applied himself with such good effect that he was admitted to the Harvard Law School, from which he was graduated in 1869, with promise of that ability as a lawyer which has characterized him ever since. He was admitted to the Fairfield County bar (his family having in the meantime moved from Maine to Stamford), and soon became a member of the leading law firm of Ferris & Child. No one questions his solid attainments in the underlying principles of

his profession, but as a pleader and jury lawyer Mr. Fessenden's success has been little short of phenomenal. His tact, perseverance, acquaintance, personal magnetism, oratorical ability and knowledge of human nature, have combined to win him a reputation and secure him a fortune among the highest enjoyed by any lawyers in the State. As State's attorney he has always been painstaking in the discharge of all the duties intrusted to his charge, and as a representative of important private interests, he has repeatedly won big victories against great odds and with entire honor to himself.

It is natural that a man of Mr. Fessenden's active temperament and varied talents should be drawn into current politics. His honors have, however, come to him unsolicited, rather than from any personal effort on his part. When a young man, only 27 years of age, he was returned to the General Assembly as Representative from Stamford, and at once made his mark as a member of the Judiciary Committee and leader in a Legislature containing many prominent men. Those who are judges of eloquence are fond of recalling his brilliant speeches. While on the floor of the House none of his colleagues, perhaps, equaled young Mr. Fessenden in personal popularity and practical influence. The same success on a larger scale was repeated in 1879, when he was again returned to the House of Representatives and fairly divided the honors of leadership with the Hon. Henry C. Robinson, of Hartford.

In 1872, Governor Jewell, whose intimate personal friend he was and continued to be, appointed Samuel Fessenden as Judge-Advocate General of the Fourth regimental district of the Connecticut National Guard.

Entering the arena of national politics Mr. Fessenden was appointed a delegate in 1876 to the convention of the Republican party in Cincinnati, which, after an exciting discussion, finally nominated Rutherford B. Hayes for President. He was also

a delegate to the convention of the party in 1880.

In 1884 Samuel Fessenden was once more a delegate, and was afterward urged by Mr. Blaine and other great leaders of the party to accept the secretaryship of the Republican National Committee, and did so, winning a host of new friends from all over the country for his superior executive ability, far sightedness and untiring zeal. He is still a member of this committee for the State of Connecticut, and for real influence is not outranked by any of his distinguished colleagues.

Mr. Fessenden leads both a busy and a happy life with his family at Stamford. His law offices are commodious and his residence is charmingly located. Hospitality seems to be his motto, and he is equally cordial in manner to the most prominent citizens and humble visitors.

Mr. Fessenden married Miss Helen M. Davenport, of Stamford, daughter of Theodore and Harriet (Grant Cheseborough) Davenport, a direct descendant of Rev. John Davenport, "the founder and patriarch of New Haven," and of Abraham Davenport, her great-grandfather, born in Stamford in 1815, who opposed adjournment of the Legislature on the famous dark day, the 19th of May, 1780, and ordered candles to be brought when it was supposed that the end of the world was at hand, "On the ground that the Day of Judgment was either at hand or it was not. If it is not, then it is no cause for an adjournment; if it is. I choose to be found

doing my duty," which incident has been graphically described in verse by Whittier in his famous poem, "Tent on the Beach."

The campaign just closed furnished new and convincing proof of Speaker Fessenden's wide popularity. He was returned for the third time as member from Stamford, at the November election of 1894, by the largest majority ever given to him or any other resident of that town for any elective office, and was at once nominated for Speaker by many of the leading newspapers of the State. Though other candidates at first appeared in the field, one by one they all withdrew in his favor until on the night of the caucus he was nominated by acclamation, each one of his former leading opponents paying the highest tributes in his favor. In his election to the Speakership, he received the unanimous vote of his party.

Such a brilliant and spontaneous compliment is one of which any politician and his friends may justly be proud and on which they are justified in basing their hopes and expectations for the future. Speaker Fessenden's name has several times in recent years been prominently mentioned throughout the State in connection with the Senate of the United States, but so far always without his own consent. Judging by his past, it is safe to say that whatever may be his decision, it will be based on conservatism, a fair regard for the claims of others, and a profound regard for the welfare of Connecticut.