

DYING SPEECHES AND CONFESSIONS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

By Martin J. Griffin, Parliamentary Librarian.

NOW that the years of the century are numbered, and we pause at the opening of a new period in the history of mankind to listen for the first notes of the voices that are to reach us and teach us in the new time, it may not be without value and interest to recall for a moment the tones of the voices that taught us once and are silent, and the meaning and effect of the last messages they have left for our guidance.

During the last half of the century the intellectual leanings of great masses of thinking people were guided by a comparatively small number of men of strong character and striking views. They were either "scientists"—using that word in its popular and well understood sense—or men who had so far yielded to the influence of the scientists that their views of literature and its object, of life and its purpose, of religion and its sanction, were deprived of all notion of certainty, of finality, of authority. Man, in their estimation, was a being destined to continually investigate without discovering anything; to think perpetually without arriving at any definite conclusions; to wander always in a valley of shadows in pursuit of an unapproachable mystery. These men expressed themselves in the language of practical science, the language of philosophic discussion, the language of literary criticism, and the language of poetry. They appealed to the receptive minds of the young. They created schools of thought. They had a following. They influenced the studies of many thousands. The terminology of their various forms of thought permeated the literature of our age. To doubt them was feeble; to decry them was bigotry; to agree with them was the note of emancipated intellect.

Revelation was on the defensive in their presence. Historic Christianity was a mass of narrative futilities. The saints and sages, martyrs and doctors, the guides of mankind during a thousand years, were persons with inadequate knowledge of scientific data. And so for half a century these new lights of a scientific dispensation lorded it over their adherents with a security of intellectual tenure surpassing the sternest claims of the feudal barons or the pontiffs of the middle ages.

Most of them have passed away. Their influences, though diminishing, remain with us still. The great body of their work has suffered some wrong. Time, "that gathers all things mortal, with cold immortal hands," has heaped much of it with dust. But each of them has in some fashion—not always of set purpose but only by accident or incidentally—left us what we may call a dying speech and confession indicating what—when we put all the confessions together—may be asserted to be the final failure of all they attempted to do, all they tried to teach, all they hoped to establish. We propose to gather all these dying speeches and confessions and place them briefly before the reader with a few obvious comments. They may refresh the memory of some. They may serve as a warning to others. They will in any case serve to show how slender was the claim to so much vogue and authority.

Few men of the past generation had such temporary authority over a large part of the educated public as John Stuart Mill. In the region of politics—a wide and varied area—he exercised by his writings great influence. He probably influenced directly or indirectly, the course of legislation in the United Kingdom. With that part of