

There are a few considerations arising out of the discussion concerning the Benevolent Institution, **WHAT DOES IT MATTER?** as it has so far appeared in the Dunedin dailies, which it worth while to note. In the first place, we find some of the writers expressing surprise or disgust, as the case may be, that Presbyterianism should be confounded with Methodism and that both should not be distinguished from some other species of doctrine also belonging to the sects.—To Catholics, nevertheless, as we have before said, the distinctions are totally inconsiderable; whether the sects break their spiritual eggs at the big end or the little one, is necessarily a matter of indifference to them, and one name can convey to them no less and no more an idea of error, than another.—But even if there had been anything more than a mere accidental confusion in the matter, there would still have been sufficient precedent to plead.—The celebrated Sydney Smith, for example, nearly eighty years ago writing in the *Edinburgh Review* spoke as follows:—"We shall use the general term of Methodism to designate these three classes of fanatics, (Armenian and Calvinistic Methodists and Evangelical clergymen of the Church of England,) not troubling ourselves to point out the finer shades and nicer discriminations of lunacy, but treating them all as in one general conspiracy against common sense and rational orthodox Christianity."—Sydney Smith indeed adds that he had known many truly religious persons of manly, rational, and serious, characters, both in the Presbyterian and Episcopal churches, but people who take the advantage of the unprotected condition of poor little children to rob them of their parents' faith and; proselytise them can hardly be accredited with any such character and may well be classed among the fanatics to whom it is lawful to apply a general name according to the Canon of St. Paul's.—Whether such fanatics may be call Methodists or Presbyterians or any other name, or all indifferently will naturally depend upon the particular experience of those speaking of them.—But let us hope that there is something more than a mere idle pretence in the indignation expressed by our evangelical friends to whatever sect they belong, at the notion that Catholic children have been proselytised. There is at least something gained if the shameful deed in question has at length been perceived by them to be a shameful deed, and one against whose committal they are anxious to defend the memory of a friend. It is not long since they would openly have gloried in the action, and, whether in pretence or in earnest they now seem anxious to disclaim it—there is certainly a change for the better.—But the sects, it would appear, are undergoing a change, for the Evangelicalism that has so far been the great motive of their fanaticism is dying, and in some respects we may, therefore, look out for their improvement. The London *Spectator*, for example, speaks concerning the decline of Evangelicalism as follows:—"It is dying away as fast among the orthodox Nonconformists as it is in the Church of England. It is dying away almost as fast in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland as it is amongst the orthodox Nonconformists. The power of the most potent of our present religious convictions works against Evangelicalism instead of, as it once did, perhaps, in its favour." And again the *Spectator* writes: "To sum up, it has always been, we think, of the very essence of the Evangelical procedure to bring into the strongest and most absolute contrast 'the filthy rags' of human nature, on the one hand, and the free gift of the divine grace and atonement on the other hand. Evangelicals would hardly admit the possibility of any process of sanctification preceding conversion; they would hardly admit the possibility of anything gradual and natural in the character of conversion; they would hardly admit the possibility that the body could become the channel of God's influence over the mind, as well as the mind the channel of God's influence over the body; and they would hardly admit the possibility that in the Bible, which they regard as God's book, and identify almost absolutely with God, there is anything human, really imperfect, really ambiguous, least of all, really erroneous. Thus their conception of religion is essentially a crude and abrupt one, which severs man far too absolutely from God, and renders it almost impossible to regard any permanent relation between God and man as possible at all except by a sheer miracle of grace, which it is the next thing to impious to pretend to understand or to bring about. In such a world as we have been living in for the last fifty years, such a view of religion has been growing daily less and less tenable, and we do not wonder, therefore, that the worthies of the Evangelical type of Christianity are daily dying off and leaving no successors behind them."—If Mr. James Macfie, then, has left behind him in Dunedin a circle of friends to excuse, rather than boldly glorify his conduct, we see that the natural course of things following the decline of Evangelicalism prevails here also.—But if while Mr. James Macfie was still alive and "Evangelicalism" still flourished some confusion prevailed as to whether he should be called a Presbyterian or a Methodist or some other name that has not as yet been mentioned, those who misnamed him may be justified by the example of the famous Canon of St. Paul's.—They also excusably refrained from searching into the "finer shades and nicer discriminations of lunacy," but took it for granted that the gospeller in

question belonged to one or other of those shades and discriminations that, as they evidently had reason to believe, were less fine and nice.

Now that the decline of Evangelicalism is pronounced to be in its last stages, the article written by Sydney Smith in the *Edinburgh Review* for January 1808 is of peculiar interest. We learn from it the consternation with which the growing system was looked upon by the orthodox of the day; and what were their fears arising from the aspect under which it presented itself to them. The Methodists also, it seems, had their particular *War-cry*, and published certain magazines which were circulated to what was then regarded as the enormous number of from eighteen to twenty-thousand each a month. The extracts from these magazines given by the writer, however, do not strike us now, after the experience of three-quarters of a century, as so very extraordinary or alarming, and we may, perhaps, on the whole, take them as rather milder than much that has since been printed. They consist chiefly of interpositions of Providence, special judgments, spiritual experiences, with some visions, and miraculous occurrences. A clergyman, for example, drops down dead at a card table; a young man who swears is stung by a bee on the tip of the tongue; a violent storm prevents one Captian Scott from preaching in a certain chapel; an innkeeper dies, and is carried to his grave exactly at the moment he had appointed for a cock-fight. One case, however, given by the writer is of unusual horror, and he hardly speaks too strongly of it: "The following," he says, "we consider to be one of the most shocking histories we ever read. God only knows how many such scenes take place in the gloomy annals of Methodism. The case was that of a young man who had been for some years believed to be "under powerful convictions of his miserable condition as a sinner." He had, however, committed some transgression that preyed upon his mind—"On the Lord's Day he was in great agony of mind. His mother was sent for, and some religious friends visited him; but all was of no avail. That night was a night beyond conception. The horror which he endured brought on all the symptoms of raging madness. He desired the attendants not to come near him, lest they should be burnt. He said that the 'bed-curtains were in flames,—that he smelt the brimstone,—that devils were come to fetch him,—that there was no hope for him, for that he had sinned against light and conviction, and that he should certainly go to hell.' It was with difficulty he could be kept in bed. An apothecary being sent for, as soon as he entered the house and heard his dreadful howlings, he enquired if he had not been bitten by a mad dog. His appearance, likewise, seemed to justify such a suspicion, his countenance resembling that of a wild beast more than that of a man." Medical treatment, nevertheless, resulted in an ending his physical condition, and a confession made by him to the doctor seemed to have some such effect upon his mind. "His nervous system, however, had received such a shock that his recovery was doubtful; and it seemed certain that, if he did recover, he would sink into a state of idiocy. He survived this interview but a few days."—The effects of the system generally, as we learn from the writer, were, moreover, such as have since been noticed in connection with Evangelical revivals, and insanity was largely increased by it. "In a man of common imagination," he writes, "the terror and the feeling which it first excited, must necessarily be soon separated: but where the fervour of impression is long preserved, piety ends in bedlam. Accordingly there is not a mad-house in England where a considerable part of the patients have not been driven to insanity by the extravagance of these people. We cannot enter such places without seeing a number of honest artisans, covered with blankets, and calling themselves angels and apostles, who, if they had remained contented with the instruction of men of learning and education, would still have been found masters of their own trade, sober Christians, and useful members of society." That Evangelicalism or Methodism should die out in a natural kind of way after it had run its course, hardly entered into the calculations of the writer, and he, on the contrary, took a gloomy view of the ends to which it would probably lead. "To what degree will Methodism extend in this country," he asks. This question is not easy to answer. That it has rapidly increased within these few years, we have no manner of doubt; and we confess we cannot see what is likely to impede its progress. The party which it has formed in the Legislature, and the artful neutrality with which they give respectability to their small numbers—the talents of some of this party, and the unimpeached excellence of their characters, all make it probable that fanaticism will increase rather than diminish. The Methodists have made an alarming inroad into the Church, and they are attacking the Army and Navy. The Principality of Wales and the East India Company they have already acquired. All mines and subterraneous places belong to them; they creep into hospitals and small schools, and so work their way upwards. It is the custom of the religious neutrals to beg all the little livings, particularly in the North of England, from the minister for the time being; and from these fixed points