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**Popular Errors On the Subject of Insanity Examined and Exposed**

**Duncan James Foulis**

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**Author: Duncan James Foulis**

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**POPULAR ERRORS**

ON THE

**SUBJECT OF INSANITY**

**EXAMINED AND EXPOSED.**

BY

**JAMES F. DUNCAN, A.M., M.D.,**  
Fellow and Censor of the College of Physicians; Physician to Sir F. Dun's and  
Simpson's Hospitals.

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**DUBLIN**

**JAMES M<sup>c</sup>GLASHAN, 50 UPPER SACKVILLE-STREET.**  
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TO THE  
RIGHT HON. FRANCIS BLACKBURNE,  
VICE-CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN,  
AND FORMERLY  
LORD HIGH CHANCELLOR OF IRELAND,  
THE FOLLOWING PAGES  
WITH HIS KIND PERMISSION, ARE MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.



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## Introduction.



THE following essay owes its origin to the circumstance of my having read a paper in the spring of 1852, on an interesting subject connected with insanity, before the Medical Association of the College of Physicians, which, though not intended for publication, I was strongly urged by many of those in whose hearing it was read to commit to the press. Much as I felt flattered by a testimony of this kind, coming from persons so well qualified to pronounce an opinion upon any medical subject, there were circumstances connected with the paper which led me to hesitate before adopting the suggestion thus kindly thrown out. After mature reflection, I arrived at the conclusion that it was better not to follow the advice of those friends, for whose judgment generally I entertain the highest respect; but the circumstance led me to consider whether I

might not advantageously prepare another work, embodying some of the topics incidentally introduced into the original paper. I had long been of opinion, from general observation on what passed in society around me, that much ignorance and misconception prevailed upon the subject of insanity, even among persons whose condition in life and information upon other subjects were such as to lead one to anticipate a very different state; and I began to think that a short treatise, compiled for the purpose of exposing and refuting these popular errors, would enable me to comply in some measure with the wishes of my friends, and at the same time confer a benefit upon the public. The execution of the design has been retarded much longer than I anticipated by the frequent interruptions incidental to the uncertain nature of the profession in which I am engaged.

It is scarcely necessary to say that most of the views put forward in this work have been long held by physicians who have directed their attention to the study of this branch of practical medicine. It is, consequently, not the originality of the opinions that it contains that constitutes its claim to general attention, but the fact that

they are still not sufficiently known to the masses of the community. Most of the writers on insanity have composed their works for the instruction of professional readers simply ; their observations, therefore, though accessible enough to medical men, are sealed documents to the generality of readers : and are not calculated to correct mistaken impressions floating vaguely over the surface of society. If these are to be dissipated, a different style must be adopted from what is usual in systematic treatises, and the work must be especially addressed to those for whose benefit it is intended.

While this is the general character of the volume now presented to the reader, it is perhaps right to add, that there are some views brought forward within its pages which I have not seen broached elsewhere, and which appear to me, at the least, deserving of consideration ; and even in bringing before the notice of the reader what has been already remarked with sufficient clearness by other writers, I believe it will be found that some degree of novelty has been displayed in the manner of handling the subject.

Perhaps it may be said that the discussion of these topics ought not to be extended beyond