

so gained must not be allowed to bias his mind. It is only to be used as an aid to his examination, and is to be taken only as confirmatory of what he himself may observe. If he omit to ascertain anything before visiting the patient, he should not seek to remedy the omission by asking the question in his presence, unless it be something he is perfectly willing he should hear. In connection with the obtaining of outside evidence, I might say that it is sometimes of value to inspect a patient's letters or other writings and compare them with those written before the attack began, because such documents often prove fruitful sources of information. This rule is especially useful in doubtful cases. Many lunatics who are very reticent in conversation will, in what they write, reveal the morbid ideas under which they labour. The whole style of a letter, the signature and direction, may show the predominant fancy in mania and melancholia, or betray the failure of mental power characteristic of dementia. General paretics leave out letters, words or syllables, or they misplace them. The crossing out of many words indicates a difficulty in thinking, while the frequent underlining of words and addition of numerous notes of exclamation, points to an abnormally exaggerated process of thought.

In most countries the law demands that the examination on which a physician bases his certificate must be made separately from any other medical practitioner. This should be remembered, because I have known cases where consulting physicians founded their evidence of mental disorder on the evidence elicited during the consultation. If, therefore, two physicians make an examination together for the purpose of consultation, they must, ere either of them can legally sign a certificate, again visit the patient, examine him separately, and elicit afresh the information to be inserted. Otherwise, if at any future time, the alleged lunatic were to bring an action for false imprisonment, and the signer of the certificate was examined under oath, the document would probably be declared invalid for neglect of this precaution, and the maker, in all likelihood, brought in for damages.

In confronting a patient it is best to do so undisguised. Lunatics are, as I have said, often averse to seeing a doctor, for which reason friends are prone to advise a resort to stratagem, one of the commonest being that the examiner should be introduced to the patient as a lawyer, clergyman, merchant, or the like. This is a grievous mistake, because in such assumed character he has no fair pretext for discussing the patient's state of health with him, and questions he may wish to put are liable to be regarded as impertinent or absurd. Many of the insane are even preternaturally sharp and able to see through the most cun-