

In one certificate from a prominent medical man the only information given was contained in the two words, "Puerperal mania." Perhaps, however, the climax was reached in a certificate wherein the only fact alleged to prove unsoundness of mind was, "He tells lies." I fear were all those who stretch the truth to be "run in" we would have to vastly increase our asylum capacity. For this patient the doctor could easily have filled out a good certificate had he taken at first the time and care that he was obliged to do later. True, the proof of mental unsoundness was best seen in the patient's telling lies, but they were insane lies, in other words, delusions. For example, he averred that he had never been in Ireland, whereas he was born and brought up there; he said he did not know the gentleman who was his guardian, although he had been living with him for two years; and he persisted that his name was Mountain while everyone knew that it was in reality something quite different.

Before quitting the subject of certificates I would say, in his examination of a patient a physician should never be satisfied with the detection of one decided symptom of mental unsoundness, such as a well-marked delusion, to the exclusion of all others. On the contrary, he should examine the patient thoroughly, and, at the least, report all the principal symptoms. A certificate depending on the statement of a single delusion, as a proof of insanity, would, in an important trial, run a possible chance of being disputed, whereas if fully made out it would prevent all cavilling. Again, in his examination, he should always be careful to see that the patient has fair play. He should remember that he is examining him to satisfy himself as to the real state of his mind, not to trip him up and extort what will sound well in a certificate. We all know how readily a clever lawyer can bewilder the average witness in cross-examination. In like manner, it is no great task to so puzzle an inferior intellect as to make a sane man seem really wrong in his mind.

The filling in of the form of history which accompanies the certificate also usually falls to the medical examiner. While all the questions included in this form are valuable, some of them are especially so as bearing on the treatment and prognosis in the case, and no pains should be spared to answer them correctly and fully. It is to these that I would now call attention.

The questions relating to how and when the disease first manifested itself, and the number and nature of former attacks, if any, are of great moment as regards prognosis, yet it is quite the exception to get reliable information on these points. Friends are prone to make the