



Do Our Hands Hold the Key to Our Future Health?

Graphology and palmistry, long considered superstitions of the Middle Ages, are now under study as possible diagnostic tools for cancer, heart disease, and mental illness

By EVAN M. WYLIE

IN AN EXAMINATION room at a medical center in the South, a child extends the palm of his hand to the doctor, who scans its lines for clues to the boy's heart ailment.

In another laboratory in a Northeast city, a specially trained diagnostician peers intently at the handwriting of a 50-year-old woman in an effort to determine whether the lump in her breast is cancerous.

In Michigan, doctors at a mental hospital check the fingertips of patients with mental illness, comparing them with those of criminals and law-abiding citizens.

Were it not for the hum of electronic apparatus and the modern design of the buildings, you might well imagine that these physicians were practicing in the Middle Ages, when palm reading and handwriting analysis were used by soothsayers to prophesy men's futures. But medical activities described above are being carried on in modern laboratories which are among the most respected in the world.

The first American reports on the value of handwriting in early diagnosis of cancer came from a conservative hospital in New York City. A recent report on the hand's palm-line patterns as a sign of inherited heart defects came from Tulane University's school of medicine and subsequently was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Analysis of handwriting specimens dates back to the Romans and earlier. In the second century A.D., the historian Suetonius claimed he could discern the penny-pinching proclivities of the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar from his crabbed script.

In the 1890s, a physiologist stated the now obvious truth: that the delicate nerve-muscle interplay necessary to penmanship originates in the central nervous system and therefore indicates what is going on there.

With the acceptance of the psychoanalytic methods of Freud, handwriting was subjected to symbolic analysis.

Modern psychologists have found handwriting analysis as helpful as the famed Rorschach inkblot test frequently used for detecting emotional maturity or abnormality.

Medically, the study of handwriting has been focused on emotional and mental disorders, although it has not been limited to that area. A psychiatrist and a handwriting expert have examined signatures of Franklin D. Roosevelt over the last decade of his life. They claim to have detected signs of his fatal circulatory ailment as early as 1940. Other authorities in the field deride such diagnosis made *after the fact*. But the two investigators contend that they can show signs of President Eisenhower's heart attack in *his* signatures a month before the event and that Defense Secretary James Forrestal's suicidal depression was manifest in his penmanship a year before he took his own life.

In other medical areas, there have been handwriting tests to discriminate among some types of Parkinsonism (shaking palsy) and between hardening of the arteries that feed the heart and those that nourish the brain. A famed American graphologist, Klara Roman, has reported marked differences in the handwriting of patients suffering from high blood pressure as compared with those crippled with arthritis. Other diseases, notably tuberculosis, some psychoses, and epilepsy, also seem to indicate a loss of delicate nerve control over fine muscular coordination.



**The Goal—
Decode the Hidden
Meanings of
Handwriting**

The big problem of handwriting analysts has been the multitude of signs to be observed and interpreted. Such factors as rigidity, reduction in size of characters, tremor, changes in pressure and inking, loss of free flow, and many others have been noted and variously interpreted.