

# AN AUTOGRAPH LETTER OF DR. RENE LAENNEC

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THE Deputy Keeper of the Public Records of Northern Ireland has kindly allowed us to reproduce this attendance or class certificate issued by Doctor Laennec in 1826 to John Creery Ferguson (Figure 1). John Ferguson was a native of Tandragee, County Armagh. Born in 1802, he received the degree of M.B. from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1827, and became eventually the second professor of medicine in the Belfast medical school. He was appointed to the chair of medicine in the new Queen's College at Belfast on its foundation in 1849, and occupied it until 1865. He was attending physician at the Belfast General Hospital from 1853 (Moody and Beckett 1959).

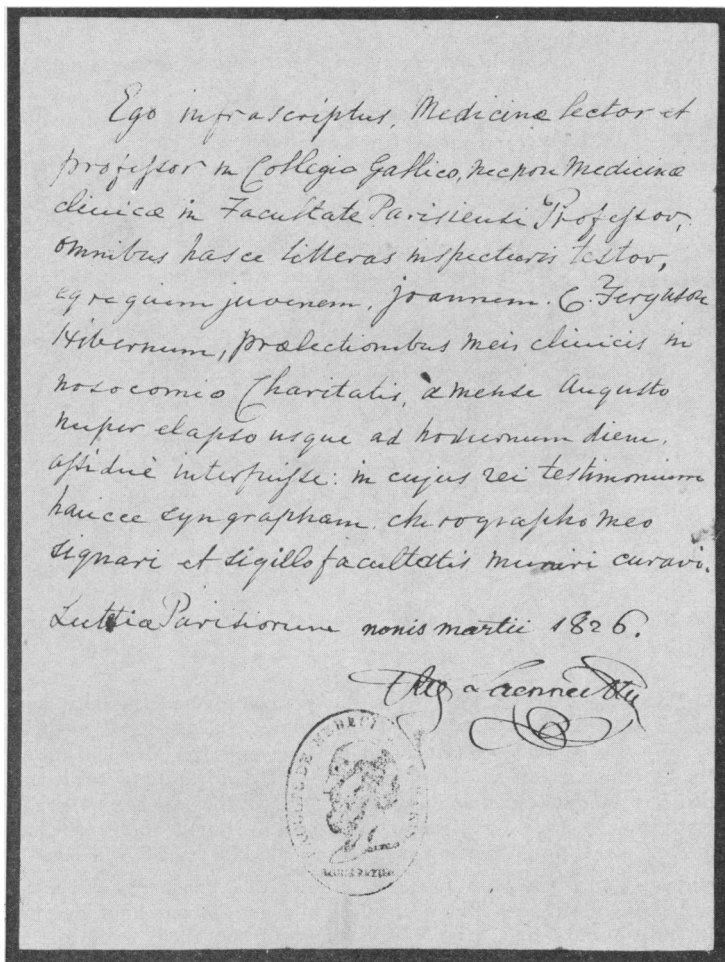


FIG. 1.  
Autograph  
letter of Doctor  
René Laennec.

Of the physicians of the Paris school of medicine in the early nineteenth century, in the days of its pre-eminence, René Laennec, the Breton, is best remembered. His invention of the stethoscope in 1816 (the year after Waterloo), his development of the physical examination of the chest, and his correlation of auscultation and pathological anatomy began a method in chest medicine, which, reinforced and not superseded by radiology and thoracotomy, is still ours. Laennec died at his home at Kerlouarnec in Finistère on the 13th August, 1826, only five months after writing this certificate. It is interesting to see the similarity of the signature on the certificate to that reproduced on the portrait of Laennec (Figure 2).



FIG. 2.  
*Portrait  
of Doctor  
René Théophile  
Laennec.*

The certificate may be translated as follows. "I the undersigned, reader and professor of medicine in the Collège de France, and professor of clinical medicine in the Faculty of Paris, bear witness to all readers of this letter that that excellent young man John C. Ferguson, from Ireland, has been present constantly at my

clinical lectures in the Charité hospital from the month of August last until today. In witness whereof I have been at pains to write this note in my own hand and to have it furnished with the seal of the Faculty. At Paris, on the 7th March, 1826.”

#### REFERENCES

- ACKERKNECHT, ERWIN H. (1967). *Medicine at the Paris Hospital, 1794-1848*. Baltimore. The John Hopkins Press.
- KERVAN, ROGER (1960). *Laennec, His Life and Times*. London. Pergamon Press.
- MOODY, T. W., and BECKETT, J. C. (1959). *Queen's Belfast*. London. Faber and Faber.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photograph of the letter (Figure 1) is by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, and that of the portrait of Laennec (Figure 2) is by the Royal Victoria Hospital department of photography.