

# MEDICINE

IN CHARGE OF

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## THE CAUSE OF DEATH OF PROMINENT PERSONS.

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A curious incident attaches to the demise of a friend. When "the rider of the pale horse" stops at the house of a friend, we seldom fail to inquire the cause of death. Death is to us so deep a mystery. It changes a being full of energy and life and hope, into an inanimate object, with a rapidity that is appalling. We stand aghast in its presence. The friend, whose welcome smile we meet to-day, is dead to-morrow. We eagerly inquire the cause. So it seemed to me that it would be of interest to make a collection of facts in regard to the death of celebrated persons ; those whom we have learned to know and love from their written pages ; and those whose deeds have moved men's hearts in the times in which they lived. It is impossible to ascertain the cause of death in many instances. Diagnosis has acquired a degree of accuracy but very recently. In many cases the cause of death is given as "fever," which is indefinite. And often the cause is unknown or not stated. The following, however, is believed to be reasonably accurate.

Early in the spring of 1616 Shakespeare and his boon companions, Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton, spent the evening at a tavern at New Place. All became too much intoxicated to reach home, and laid out all night on the ground. The consequence was to Shakespeare a "fever" of which he died in a few days. It was undoubtedly pneumonia.

Lord Bacon died at 65, a martyr to science. While riding one winter day, it occurred to him that snow would preserve flesh, as well as salt. Accordingly he alighted, bought a hen, and stuffed it with snow, at which operation he became much chilled. He was too sick to return home, but stopped at the house of a friend. Their kind hands put him in a cold damp bed—the "best room" perhaps—and he died in a few days. Probably pneumonia.

Burton, author of "The Anatomy of Melancholy," believed in astrology. He calculated by the stars the time of his death. He died at the time assigned, but was suspected of taking something to hasten it in order to make it conform to his calculation.

"O Rare" Ben Jonson had several attacks of apoplexy. As a consequence his mental faculties became much impaired. His last days were dark and gloomy.

Ben Franklin had gout ; also cystic calculus, and the attendant inflammation of the bladder confined him to bed for a year. He was then 84. The immediate cause of death, however, was abscess of the lung.

Washington died at 67, of acute laryngitis, complicated with œdema of the glottis. On December 12, 1799, he rode over his estate on horseback. It was a day of rain and sleet, and he became thoroughly chilled. He contracted a severe cold, and at the end of two days was very sick. Before sending for the doctor he had his overseer to bleed him. When the doctor came he bled him again. Still there being no improvement a consulting physician was called. They bled him again. Being no better, they gave him tartar emetic and calomel. They also applied fly blisters to his throat. The medical treatment has been the subject of much criticism.

Edward Gibbon, the historian, had the largest hydrocele on record—as large as a bucket. Repeated operations for relief exhausted him, and he died of a "fever" brought on thereby at 57.

Napoleon died of cancer of the stomach.

Thomas Gray, author of "An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," died at 55. He was subject to hereditary gout. One day at dinner he was taken suddenly and violently sick, with pain in the stomach, and died on the sixth day.

Burns died at 37. Of convivial habits, he perished from drink and exposure. One day in January, 1796, he dined at a tavern in Dumfries. He was barely convalescent from a spell of sickness, and was in no condition to stand exposure. The night was very cold, and Burns, wandering