The whaler *Balaena* leaving Dundee Harbour.

Of considerable interest is Bennett's account of an illness after ingesting salted albacore, or tunny. A few hours after the meal the affected men became feverish, complained of headache, and broke out in a "scarlet rash." The illness was not brought on by eating fresh tunny, and was short lived. I believe that this is an early, if not the earliest, account of scombrototoxic poisoning, which results from eating tuna, bonito, or mackerel, the flesh of which has become toxic as a result of bacterial contamination and growth. It is a form of histamine poisoning in which there

is a brief, non-fatal illness of headache, fever, diarrhoea, and a bright red rash. The incubation period is a matter of hours, the onset abrupt, and the illness lasts from three to six hours and is always over by 24 hours. Although as little as 20 mg histamine/100 g flesh may cause symptoms, the usual dose is in excess of 100 mg/100 g.⁵

The great days of whaling are over. In the early part of this century factory ships were developed and accelerated the decline of an industry that had already squandered the resources on which it depended. These factory ships brought a new dimension of health care to the whaling crew; and a new literature of life in the frozen south emerged in which medical writers have made their own contributions. Excellent though these be, they cannot equal in importance the early writings of the whaling surgeons.

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Illness of Dorothy Wordsworth

IRIS I J M GIBSON

Dorothy Wordsworth was a very striking woman whose intelligence, character, and sensibility impressed people at first view as vital and unique. She had a gift for words that really exceeds that of both William and Coleridge and often gave rise to their finest poetry when they converted her prose into their poetry.

When I first read her journals and letters I had not had an attack of migraine, but when I came to do so again I had had many attacks and instantly recognised that she suffered from migraine. In 1804 she wrote William's opinion of her illness, "He bids me add that I *always* begin with sickness and that any agitation of mind either of joy or sorrow will bring it on." She said of herself, "It is natural to me to do everything as quickly as I can and at the same time." This seems to me to be the pattern of a particular type of migrainous personality, where the person scarcely seems happy without having so much to do that she can scarcely contend with it. Dorothy did not have unilateral headache, eye symptoms, or paraesthesiae. She obviously had anorexia, vomiting, photophobia, and typical relief by sleep and by lying down in a darkened room. Quite strikingly she might

have several days of extreme activity culminating in headache, but after a short period of sleep would be able to return to over-activity. On one occasion, however, she said, "I lay in bed to have a Drench of sleep till one o'clock." Any sufferer from migraine knows exactly what she means and exactly what she sought. There are 63 probable references to migraine in the journals, but there were erasures in the manuscript by an unknown person and some of these referred to illness.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

I regard her attacks as multifactorial in origin, due to considerable physical and mental activity, to the stress of William's problems and struggles with composition, and her undue anxiety about him. At this time Samuel Taylor Coleridge played a large part in their lives. He was a poet of genius, a man of great vitality and charm, evasive, an opium addict, and had an unhappy marriage. I am in no doubt that Dorothy found him sexually attractive and that this and Coleridge's own problems contributed to the migraine. It is not so much when Coleridge is actually present that she gets migraine but farewells precipitate attacks.

I wondered if the migraine could be related to late hours, since the Wordsworths often did not go to bed until 11, 12, or 1. If they were in talkative mood or William had insomnia or Coleridge was there, bedtime could be half past three or four in

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the morning. I could not find a time relationship. A study of the dates in the journals does not suggest to me that Dorothy's migraine was related to menstruation.

Daguerreotype of Dorothy Wordsworth.

Wordsworthian overactivity

It is difficult to make clear the degree of Wordsworthian physical and mental overactivity. They walked incessantly. They talked incessantly. They wrote letters and read incessantly. They read widely. At Grasmere Dorothy read Shakespeare, Spencer, Chaucer, Lamb, Goethe, Boswell, Wallenstein, Bruce, *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, *Life of Smollett*, and was teaching herself German. They wept together over the 11th canto of *Paradise Lost*. William's main task in life was to be a poet, and he found this a great strain. Not only did Dorothy take part in discussions about his poetry but often contributed. She wrote it out. She had to sew the volumes and argue with the publishers. They had exotic visitors such as De Quincey and Hazlitt but also had a local social life of teas and dinners, playing whist, and a neighbourly exchange of plums and pork or newspapers. They often walked their visitors halfway or the whole way home. They walked in all weathers and would walk 20 miles or more. They would go late at night to walk by moonlight or into the hills. They went when the roads were almost impassable with ice and snow. Some of their walking was most imprudent. Mary Hutchinson and Dorothy nearly lost their lives on one journey, "I was often obliged to crawl upon all fours and Mary fell many a time."

Household and garden tasks have to be done. Dove Cottage was cold and damp. Dorothy lined the little box-room with newspapers to try to warm it. She did most of the decorating, made most of the furnishings, and sewed and cleaned. She baked and cooked. She stuffed and cooked the pike they caught in the lakes, washed, ironed, made a "mattress," spread linen for bleaching, dried and starched it, ironed it and put it away, mended stockings, mended old clothes, bound carpets, made shoes. She attended to the mundane affairs of life such as writing to the butcher and seeing to the delivery of coal.

She was a passionate gardener. The Wordsworths really made a very attractive garden out of what was a steep slope from the back door and built a little summer hut at the top. Dorothy transplanted "raddishes" after breakfast, set slips of "privott,"

weeded the carrots and onions. She sowed French beans, planted broccoli, stuck peas, and gathered wild strawberries, raspberries, and apples. She cleared brambles. She gathered mosses and plants to decorate the house and longed for a book on botany. She collected wild flowers and flowers from neighbours and planted them in her garden, often by moonlight. During all this time she incessantly noted the sights and sounds of nature and the beggars, soldiers, and local people she met, and recorded these with the commonplaces of life and amidst her love and worry for William.

She loved William dearly. Unfortunately William suffered a great deal when composing. He used to take a severe pain in his side and dreadful insomnia. He could never be ill like other people—he had always to be very ill and the diary is full of this. It is difficult to retain patience with him when the household is going to bed and he suddenly decides a word in a poem is wrong and the whole household is upset all night in a desperate frenzy to remedy it. One day she was having a lovely orgy of sentimentality about Coleridge, ending in tears—"Nervous blubbing" says William. I think William had migraine also but he was so neurotic it is difficult to prove. He called his headaches "apoplectic." There is a divine silliness about William which is endearing. The most entertaining passage in the Grasmere Journal is after snow, when William is given a simple task, clamours for female admiration, it all goes wrong, and Dorothy writes the poetry. "William cleared a path to the necessary—he called me out to see it but before we got there a whole housetopful of snow had fallen from the roof upon the path and it echoed on the ground below like a dull beating upon it."

A commune of devoted women

One of the great literary scandals of this century was the discovery that just after he left Cambridge William had an affair in France with Annette Vallon and left an illegitimate child there. Dorothy knew about this as soon as he came home, taught herself French, and wrote many times to Annette addressing her as "sister." The other scandal was the suggestion that there was an incestuous relationship between William and Dorothy. Dorothy knew of course that she could not marry her brother and was probably quite unaware of sexual feelings towards him. In 1802 William married Mary Hutchinson, whom he had known all his life and who was a dear friend of Dorothy. She must have been one of the nicest people possible. Only Mr Carlyle said anything nasty about her, and he said nasty things about everyone. William went to France to tell Annette of his impending marriage and strangely it was Dorothy who went with him. Equally strangely she does not describe the meeting

Dove Cottage.

with ex-mistress and child and only refers to them, although the Wordsworths were there for four weeks and she was still keeping her journal. It is one thing however to write to an ex-mistress far off and quite another to meet the woman for whom her brother had once had passionate sexual feelings. Her migraine was less troublesome during the journeying though she had travel sickness, but the Wordsworths went straight home to the wedding, which really must have provided a climax of un-

Mary Wordsworth in old age.

conscious sexual difficulty. Not only did she have migraine for the whole weekend but she had an hysterical fugue during the wedding, which she did not attend, although she set out on honeymoon with the married couple.

After that, however, there seems to me a distinct diminution in her migraine, although she remained liable to travel sickness. She ceases her sentimental worry about William, and I think that she felt she could share him with her good friend Mary and by allowing Mary to have the sexual relationship and family which she was denied and by allowing Mary to take over the worry of William she avoided many of the stresses which had troubled her before. William eventually was the centre of a commune of devoted women. At this time Dorothy also began to realise that a lot of Coleridge's problems were of his own making. Financial problems were also relieved by the payment of a large debt. The journals cease, and I can find no reference to migraine in her letters after 1808.

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MATERIA MEDICA ET VENEREA

Life returns to the railway station

In 1969 I visited a railway station, the like of which could exist only in Vietnam, a country torn and disrupted by years of war.

It was nearly 30 years since through trains ran proudly from Saigon north to Qui Nhon, Bong Son and Hue to Hanoi. They were colonial replicas of the French railway system, with long wooden benches lining the third class carriages and large glassless window spaces, which could be shuttered to deflect the heat of summer. Nearly 30 years—during the Japanese occupation the line was used for goods trains ferrying war material westward, but the glamour never returned to Bong Son Station with its once-proud two-storeyed building and large concrete canopy over the platform. After 1945 the French held the country tenuously for nine stormy years but they never reoccupied Bong Son, which was in the heart of the Vietminh territory; in fact they shelled the station several times and slowly it deteriorated into the present ruin.

The line south to Qui Nhon was a frequent target of the Vietcong later and Bong Son station received their annoying attention, for propaganda purposes, though there was little left to destroy. The last train reached Bong Son from the south in 1964, hauled by a diesel-electric engine built only a year before in the USA. There it remained, rusting, unable forever to go north or south, hitched to two old wooden carriages, in which many cattle had reposed. The rolling stock rested under what remained of the platform canopy and the station yard was overgrown with grass and shrubs.

For two or three years after '64 the stationmaster used to run the tiny train up and down the 50 metres of line between the barbed-wire barricades but he had given up this fruitless pastime over two years before and the machinery was heavy with rust.

Yes, it had been a quiet and rather boring life for the stationmaster

in recent years; he had slept on the platform on his stretcher, slumbers broken only by the nocturnal sounds of war common to the district. Too quiet a life, until the American military police at the nearby base, incongruously called ENGLISH, faced a problem. They had to control over 5000 young GIs whose boredom and loneliness were being exploited by the mamasans and their girls of the cheap bars which had sprung up along the road to English—and VD rates were rising. Rather than impose an impossible "off limits" ban on the whole town, a compromise scheme was devised. The MPs offered to put any bar "on limits" if the mamasan could show certificates confirming that each of her girls had received a weekly injection of penicillin (3 megaunits).

Where could they hold this weekly clinic as the numbers attending rose and rose?

Happily for the stationmaster they picked his derelict building, put some new iron on the *salle d'attente*, and announced Friday mornings as the time. Then for one day each week life returned to the railway station. From 8 am onwards the girls arrived singly or in groups, many brought by brothers, fathers, and boy friends on their Hondas. They sat talking on the grass, until the American medics arrived, when a queue rapidly formed along the station wall. If delayed by pushful rivals in the queue—and there were over 200 attending every week—the mamasans dispensed picnic fare, though it was hardly a Sunday school picnic.

By 2 pm the last had been injected and they returned to work, a strict "off limits" ban having been imposed on all bars until the clinic ended. The American captain in charge of the scheme was dedicated to his task—he had a great love for the Vietnamese. Senator Fullbright was apparently never informed of the dedicated work of this officer, but at least the old stationmaster was grateful that something, however curious, had enlivened his premises once more.—MALCOLM H WATSON, physician, Lower Hutt, New Zealand.