

# E.W. LANE'S HYDROPATHIC ESTABLISHMENT AT MOOR PARK

By TOMO SATO\*

## I. Introduction

Edward Wickstead Lane,<sup>1</sup> brother-in-law of George and Charles Robert Drysdale,<sup>2</sup> came to Moor Park, Farnham, in March 1854 to run a hydropathic establishment there. Originally he had been trained as a lawyer, but something made him to decide to change the course of his life. He took up medical studies and graduated in medicine in Edinburgh in 1853. He was critical of contemporary medicine with its heavy dependence on drugs, and decided to devote himself to hydropathy which he regarded as "the natural system of medical treatment." His hydropathic establishment was successful under the joint management of himself, his wife, and Lady Drysdale. Among patients and visitors there were people who held the Malthusian doctrine of population like James Stuart Laurie,<sup>3</sup>

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\* Lecturer (*Kōshi*) in Social Thought.

<sup>1</sup> Edward Wickstead Lane (1822/23?-1891), Advocate and M.D. He studied at the Edinburgh Academy from about 1837 till 1840, went to the University of Edinburgh where he obtained the degree of M.A., and in 1847 he was admitted as Advocate. In the same year he married Margaret Mary Drysdale, the youngest daughter of Sir William Drysdale and sister german of George and Charles Robert Drysdale. He graduated in medicine in Edinburgh in 1853, and published his *Thesis, Notes on Medical Subjects*. In 1854 he took over the hydropathic establishment at Moor Park, Farnham, Surrey, and about 1860 moved to Sudbrook Park in Richmond. Letar he practised at 4 Harley Street, London. He wrote *Hydropathy: or the Natural System of Medical Treatment*, first published in 1857. (Second edition in 1859).

<sup>2</sup> George Drysdale, the author of *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion*, 1854. He was the fourth son of Sir William Drysdale (1781-1843) and his mother was Elizabeth Pew, or Lady Drysdale. Charles Robert Drysdale (1827?-1907), the first President of the Malthusian League (1877-1907), was the youngest child of Sir William Drysdale and his mother was Lady Drysdale.

<sup>3</sup> James Stuart Laurie (1832-1904), formerly a tutor to Lord Amberley, father of Bertrand Russell, was an Inspector of Schools at the time of his stay at Moor Park in the 1850s. He recommended George Drysdale's anonymous work, *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* to his former pupil who read it with great interest in 1864. See *The Amberley Papers* edited by Bertrand Russell and Patricia Russell, reprinted in 1966, vol. 1, p. 288 for Lord Amberley's comments on the book. Laurie read a paper on "The Happiness of Community as Affected by Large Families" at the meeting of the London Dialectical Society in 1868. See *ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 167-173, and *The Medical Press and Circular*, 22 July, 1868, pp. 84-85. As for his visit to Moor Park, see his letter to George Combe in the Combe Collection, No. 5355.

Alexander Bain,<sup>4</sup> Charles Darwin,<sup>5</sup> and George Combe.<sup>6</sup> George Drysdale himself was a frequent visitor there, if not having made his brother-in-law's home his own. Although Lane's view on Malthusianism in the 1850s was unknown, he was to express his agreement with Malthus in the 1870s.<sup>7</sup> From these facts it is easy to presume that Moor Park provided routes for quiet infiltration of Malthusian and neo-Malthusian ideas in the period when the latter ideas were especially dormant. But regrettably there is not sufficient evidence in writing to prove that point. Here we shall make a study of the life of the Lanes and the Drysdals in Moor Park and in Sudbrook Park, centring on the divorce scandal in which E.W. Lane was involved.<sup>8</sup> It will give us some idea of intellectual and social backgrounds of the Drysdale family in the 1850s which are otherwise hardly known to us. It will also bring into relief the personality of Lady Drysdale, the mother of George and Charles Robert Drysdale. The divorce case by itself adds proof to George Drysdale's argument on sexual difficulties, especially experienced by women, which most of his contemporaries turned a blind eye to.

## II. *E.W. Lane and the Drysdals in Edinburgh*

First a brief account must be given of the relationship that existed between E.W. Lane and the Drysdale family in Edinburgh. Lane, born in Quebec, was about a year, or two older than George Drysdale, and went to the Edinburgh Academy. Like George he was an excellent scholar, and was the Dux of the whole school in 1839-40.<sup>9</sup> He then proceeded to the University of Edinburgh where he obtained the degree of M.A. in 1844. In 1847 he was admitted as an Advocate, and married Margaret Mary Drysdale (1823-1891), sister

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Bain (1818-1903), psychologist and author of *Senses and Intellect*, 1855. At the time of the Bradlaugh-Besant trial in 1877, according to his own account, he was asked by Bradlaugh to appear as a defence witness, but he was unable to comply with his wish, because he was then in Hamburg. He referred to his agreement with Malthus's doctrine of population in his *Autobiography*, 1940, pp. 392-393.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Darwin (1809-1882). According to Alexander Bain, he introduced Darwin to Lane's hydropathic establishment in Moor Park. Chronically sick, Darwin stayed at Lane's hydropathic establishments at Moor Park and then at Sudbrook Park, in 1857, 1858 and 1859. See *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, edited by his son, Francis Darwin, 1887, 2 volumes; *More Letters of Charles Darwin*, edited by Francis Darwin, 1903, 2 volumes; and Litchfield, Henrietta E. *Emma Darwin, Wife of Charles Darwin*, 1904, 2 volumes. George Drysdale regarded Darwin as Malthusian when *The Origin of Species* came out, and so did many others. But Sir Gavin De Beer in his *Charles Darwin, Evolution of Natural Selection*, 1963, shows that in spite of his own statement in his *Autobiography*, Darwin did not get the idea of natural selection of variations from Malthus. See *Charles Darwin*, pp. 86-100.

<sup>6</sup> George Combe (1788-1859), phrenologist, and his wife came to stay at Moor Park as we shall see soon in the text of this article. For Combe's endorsement of Malthus's view of population, see his work on *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*, 1828, p. 225, and also his later work *On the Relation Between Science and Religion*. The Combes had no children.

<sup>7</sup> See Lane's article, "Home-Work for the Medical Missionary," in *The Medical Press and Circular*, January 27, 1875, pp. 71-73.

<sup>8</sup> On the Drysdals and the Lanes at Moor Park and on the divorce case of Robinson v. Robinson and Lane, in which E.W. Lane was involved, the main sources of information are George Combe's MS diary, and MS letters written by George Combe, Dr. Lane, Lady Drysdale and some other persons in the Combe Collection. The author of this article is grateful to the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh for permission to quote from them.

<sup>9</sup> See The Edinburgh Academy's *Rector's Reports and Prize Lists* for the years 1837-1840 inclusive.

to George and Charles Robert Drysdale, at St. Stephen's Church in Edinburgh on 8 June.<sup>10</sup> At the time of his marriage, Lane lived at 30 Royal Circus, Edinburgh, and the Drysdals had been at 8 Royal Circus over twenty years.<sup>11</sup> But soon the Lanes and Lady Drysdale might have gone over to Ireland, probably to Dublin, for the Lanes' first child was born in Ireland in 1848.<sup>12</sup> In 1848 there were in Dublin George Drysdale who had started medical studies at Trinity College in the autumn of 1847,<sup>13</sup> and Charles Robert Drysdale who probably studied at the School of Engineering in the same College.<sup>14</sup> Being good at mathematics, he had been previously at Trinity College, Cambridge.<sup>15</sup> Did he come to Dublin because his brother George was there, and possibly his mother and his sister as well? We do not know. But there was in that city another Drysdale, first cousin to George, Charles, and Margaret on both paternal and maternal sides. Ann Cunison Drysdale, daughter of Major James Drysdale (1782-1830), lived at 3 Rutland Square (now renamed Parnell Square), having been married to George Willoughby Hemans (1814-1885), civil engineer son of the famous poetess, Felicia Dorothea Hemans.<sup>16</sup> The Hemans were friendly with the Lanes and the Drysdals. One guess is that Lady Drysdale and the Lanes chose to come over to famine-stricken Ireland to look after George who might not have been completely well yet after years of ill health.<sup>17</sup>

In the session of 1849-50, George came back to Edinburgh to continue his medical studies. E.W. Lane, too, started to study medicine in Edinburgh in the same session. They all lived at 8 Royal Circus.<sup>18</sup> The Kerrs, the family of Anne Lambert Drysdale, half-sister to George, Charles, and Margaret, had been living there for the past few years.<sup>19</sup> E.W. Lane graduated in 1853, but George found some more urgent mission to carry out than graduate quickly. He wrote his important work, *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* at the age of about twenty-eight, and he reached that age on 27 December 1852. He came to London to find a publisher for his work, which was very difficult because of its heterodox nature. But at long last Edward Truelove (1809-1899), Owenite, freethought publisher, agreed to

<sup>10</sup> Margaret Mary Drysdale (1823-1891), sister of George and Charles Drysdale, often used her middle name by itself rather than the first in signing her letters. For her marriage to Lane, see the registration of their marriage in the Scottish Register House in Edinburgh, and *The Gentleman's Magazine* for September, 1847, vol. 28, p. 310.

<sup>11</sup> For the Drysdals at 8 Royal Circus, see *The Post Office Edinburgh Directory* for the years following 1824-25.

<sup>12</sup> In the 1851 Census records, E.W. Lane's eldest son, Arthur G.P. Lane was three years old, and the place of his birth was stated as Ireland. So presumably his parents and Lady Drysdale who had always been with the Lanes since their marriage were in Ireland about 1848.

<sup>13</sup> George Drysdale started medical studies in Dublin in 1847 according to the records at the University of Edinburgh.

<sup>14</sup> On 14 January, 1848, Charles Robert Drysdale was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin. See *Alumni Dublinenses*, 1935, Supplement [34]

<sup>15</sup> C.R. Drysdale was admitted to Trinity College, Cambridge, on 8 July, 1846. See *Alumni Cantabrigienses* Part II. Vol. II, 1944, p. 343.

<sup>16</sup> *The Dublin Almanac* for 1847 and 1848 gave the address of the Hemans as at 3 Rutland Square, East, which is now renamed Parnell Square. About G.W. Heman's life and work, see an obituary notice in *The Minutes of Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers*, vol. lxxxv (1885-86, Pt. III) pp. 394-399.

<sup>17</sup> About the nature of George Drysdale's long illness, see Tomoko Sato's article in Japanese on "George Drysdale's Supposed Death and *The Elements of Social Science*" in the *Hitotsubashi Ronso* (*The Hitotsubashi Review*) for August 1977.

<sup>18</sup> In the Census records (1851), the Drysdals and the Lanes were at 8 Royal Circus, though not Charles.

<sup>19</sup> The baptismal records of the Kerrs' two children show that they lived at 8 Royal Circus at the time of their baptism in 1848 and in 1850 respectively.

publish it, and it came out anonymously towards the end of 1854. He went back to Edinburgh and qualified in medicine in July, 1855. He then lived at 4 Saxe-Coburg Place, Edinburgh, the home of Anne Lambert and her husband, Lieut. G.C. Kerr,<sup>20</sup> for the Lanes and Lady Drysdale were no longer in Edinburgh. They had moved to Moor Park in March 1854, as already mentioned.

The Lanes and Lady Drysdale managed to put their hydropathic establishment on a sound foundation by the autumn of 1855. They attracted to their establishment their old Scottish friends as well as other people. We learn about their life and their circle of friends at Moor Park mainly from the letters of George Combe, phrenologist and great health popularizer,<sup>21</sup> Charles Darwin, the author of *The Origin of Species* (1859), and one of his daughters who all stayed at the hydropathic establishment.

### III. *The Lanes and the Drysdales at Moor Park*

George Combe and his wife Cecilia arrived at Moor Park on 21 August, 1856, for their first stay there.<sup>22</sup> They were met with "a most cordial welcome from Lady Drysdale and Dr. and Mrs. Lane, and found a large and agreeable company assembled for the water-cure." During their ten days' stay, he took cold, cool, and warm showers in that order. He did not receive a hot air bath treatment which was also available. He had a long conversation with Dr. Lane. On the question of the hydropathic establishment, the older man advised the younger "to enlarge the basis of it, and pronounce it as an institution for hygienic treatment of invalids, hydropathy being one means of cures, but not the panacea for all maladies." Certainly the establishment was conducted on that line,<sup>23</sup> and was resorted to by the chronically sick like Charles Darwin,<sup>24</sup> neurotics, and other people who had no particular complaints. The sick mostly found the treatment given there efficacious, and the healthy enjoyed relaxation.

Charles Darwin wrote to J.D. Hooker from Moor Park in April, 1857:

I am undergoing hydropathy for a fortnight, having been here a week, and having already received an amount of good which is quite incredible to myself and quite unaccountable. I can walk and eat like a hearty Christian, and even my nights are good. I cannot in the least understand how hydropathy can act as it certainly does on me. It dulls one's brain splendidly; I have not thought about a single species of any kind since leaving home.<sup>25</sup>

Probably Darwin's reaction to the treatment that it did him good although he did not understand how was what other patients who frequented Moor Park felt about it. Darwin himself "found so much benefit from the treatment under Dr. Lane that he frequently returned

<sup>20</sup> The records of George Drysdale's examinations at the University of Edinburgh.

<sup>21</sup> In the *Journal of Henry Cockburn*, 1874, vol. 1, p. 74, he records George Combe's great popularity as a phrenology and health lecturer at "The Edinburgh Association for Procuring Instruction in Useful and Entertaining Science," in the early 1830s.

<sup>22</sup> An entry in George Combe's MS diary for 21 August, 1856. Quotations in this paragraph are from his MS diary for 21 and 29 August 1856.

<sup>23</sup> Lane, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> About various interpretations of Darwin's chronic illness, Peter B. Medawar's "Darwin's Illness" in *The Art of the Soluble*, Pelican, 1969, pp. 71-78, is illuminating.

<sup>25</sup> *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. 2, p. 91.

[there] for a fortnight's stay at a time," while writing *The Origin of Species* and afterwards.<sup>26</sup>

Magnetism of Moor Park did not, however, solely lie in the good treatment it gave, but also delightful society formed there, and it was not an accident. Dr. Lane saw a special value of "cheerful and easy society" for preservation and recovery of mental health.<sup>27</sup> In his view, fresh air, exercise, proper diet for the body and "healthy moral influences for the mind" were essential for the preservation of physical and mental health, and a hydropathic establishment provided them all. Presumably "healthy moral influences for the mind" in his sense included "cheerful and easy society" as an important constituent. We shall see that Moor Park was an ideal place for relaxation and good society.

The building itself was an old English mansion, and it stood in beautiful, vast grounds with woods and moors. It had been the famous residence of Sir William Temple and his one-time private secretary, Jonathan Swift, in the late seventeenth century.<sup>28</sup> The atmosphere of the place was well described by Charles Darwin. He wrote to his wife from Moor Park:

The weather is quite delicious. Yesterday, after writing to you, I strolled a little beyond the glade for an hour and a half, and enjoyed myself—the fresh yet dark-green of the grand Scotch fir, the brown of the catkins of the old birches, with their white stems, and a fringe of distant green from the larches, made an excessively pretty view. At last I fell asleep on the grass, and awoke with a chorus of birds singing around me, and squirrels running up the trees, and some woodpeckers laughing, and it was as pleasant and rural a scene as ever I was, and I did not care one penny how any of the beasts or birds be formed.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, the natural beauty of the place was matched by excellent human qualities at Moor Park. Dr. Lane, his wife, and Lady Drysdale were all kind and attentive as George Combe noted in his diary. The Lanes were well versed in literature. Mrs. Lane amused Darwin with her pert remarks on some novel that it "was so poor that it must have been written by a man."<sup>30</sup> But the mainstay of the whole establishment was unmistakably Lady Drysdale. She was, according to Henrietta, one of Darwin's daughters,

dressed in black brocade with a lace collar, very Scotch, full of life and character and with a most racy twinkle in her eyes before she burst into a hearty peal of laughter; overflowing with kindness and hospitality; so that all waifs were taken under her protection; a great reader, a great whist-player, and the active capable housekeeper of the great establishment. . . . She made the charm of Moor Park.<sup>31</sup>

The young girl's impression of Lady Drysdale was shared by adult visitors. George Combe was "deeply impressed with the excellent quality of Lady Drysdale, Dr. Lane, and the family," and introduced Sir James Clark, Queen's physician, to Moor Park, who in his turn sent some of his patients there.

George Combe and his wife came back to Moor Park in July, 1857, soon after the publication of his work *On the Relation Between Science and Religion* which he had revised just a little time back. In it he takes up religious issues which he avoided in his earlier,

<sup>26</sup> Bain, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>27</sup> Lane, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> The building is now used as Moor Park College for adult education.

<sup>29</sup> *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, vol. 2, pp. 113-114.

<sup>30</sup> *Emma Darwin*, vol. 2, p. 186.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.

celebrated work on *The Constitution of Man*, first published in 1828. He now attacks dogmas as founded in the age when science was not developed and therefore as outdated. In their place, he puts veneration of natural laws as religion. He was concerned about what reaction his new work would cause, but soon found that it "is selling well," and that "nobody dares to express approbation of it in public, and yet many are reading it with approval."<sup>32</sup>

At Moor Park, however, Combe's heterodox work must have been openly discussed. Dr. Lane himself was as keenly interested in his latest writings as to draw the attention of Mr. Savage, editor of *The Examiner*, to them. George Drysdale, too, read *On the Relation Between Science and Religion*. After Combe's death, he was to quote in *The Elements of Social Science*<sup>33</sup> passages from his work that told how he in his youth came to support Malthus's doctrines on population. He was to add that Combe told him that "he never heard anyone deny the Malthusian doctrines who understood them."<sup>34</sup> Moor Park in the summer of 1857 was a very likely place where George Drysdale heard Combe make such remarks in view of the time of the publication of his work. On Combe's part, however, there is no mention of George Drysdale, or of his anonymous work, in his diary, despite its contents which could have interested an author on natural religion.

If Combe had not taken notice of George Drysdale, he was charmed by a relation of his, G.W. Hemans. Combe found him "liberal in his religious and political opinions," "full of information and a very pleasant talker."<sup>35</sup> Hemans told Combe that he "saw a good deal of Lord Clarendon, at the Castle in Dublin," and that "the Irish opinion of his Lordship is that as viceroy he was diplomatic and not straightforward in his public conduct, and that he fanned the rebellion of 1848 in order to get it ahead, and to crush it with the least effusion of blood." Perhaps Hemans' religious opinions were not too radical as Combe's remarks imply, but it seems that there were a number of relations and friends of the Drysdale family who held unorthodox opinions on religion.

#### IV. *The Divorce Case—Robinson v. Robinson and Lane*

In the summer of 1857, the Combes could not enjoy their stay at Moor Park all through. Lady Drysdale was taken ill "with great derangement of the digestive system,"<sup>36</sup> and Mrs. Lane, too, was in bed from a sun-stroke. They did not dream that Lady Drysdale and the Lanes were longing to open their hearts and ask George Combe's advice on the divorce suit which Henry O. Robinson, civil engineer, was instituting at the Ecclesiastical Court against his wife and Dr. Lane.<sup>37</sup> After they had returned to Edinburgh, they received a letter from Dr. Lane in which he defended his innocence against Robinson's charge that he had committed adultery with Mrs. Robinson.<sup>38</sup> The Combes knew the Robinsons, espe-

<sup>32</sup> An entry in George Combe's MS diary for 19 July 1857.

<sup>33</sup> Probably first in the third edition of *The Elements of Social Science*, 1859, which the author of this article has not seen. She has used the seventh edition published in 1867, which seems to be a reprint of the third edition. Drysdale writes in p. 516 that the following passages are taken from Combe's prefix to his work *On the Relation Between Science and Religion*.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 517.

<sup>35</sup> Quotations in this paragraph are from an entry in Combe's diary for 12 July 1857.

<sup>36</sup> From an entry in Combe's MS diary for 24 July 1857.

<sup>37</sup> Lady Drysdale's MS letter to Mrs. Combe, n.d., but noted in Combe's hand 'London 29 Dec. 1857.'

<sup>38</sup> E.W. Lane's MS letter to G. Combe dated 29 August, 1857.

cially Mrs. Robinson who had confided in George Combe about her anxiety over religion and other matters.

The Lanes and Lady Drysdale left Moor Park to live at Devonshire Place, off Marylebone Road, London. Dr. Lane sent his lawyer to Mrs. Robinson to find out the situation he was forced in. The divorce case was heard at the Consistory Court at the beginning of December, 1857, and the undefended case was only briefly reported in *The Times* of 4 December, without any reference to Dr. Lane. Had he been accused in public of having committed adultery with his patient, he might have been ruined. They hoped the matter was settled with the granting of divorce *a mensa et thoro* to Mr. Robinson. Mrs. Lane was able to write cheerfully on Christmas Day, 1857, to Mrs. Cecilia Combe in Edinburgh:

Dear mamma is very well and enjoying having so many of us around her at this X'mas time, as my brother John<sup>39</sup> is with us, my brothers George and Charles, Lane and myself and all our little pets.

The place of their festive gathering was Devonshire Place, and "little pets" meant the Lanes' four children, Arthur, Edward, Sydney, and Walter. But their peace was not to last long.

George Combe and his wife were disturbed at a seemingly corroborated account of Dr. Lane's adultery with Mrs. Robinson which Mr. Robinson had been confidentially spreading among their Edinburgh friends. They wrote to Dr. Lane about the rumour.

No sooner had Lady Drysdale read the Combes' letter, than she took a pen to defend her son-in-law's innocence. She was then over seventy years of age. She wrote:

You will believe my solemn words when I declare that Lane is most perfectly innocent—nay that when Mary and I often urged the necessity of having the unfortunate woman like her, as she had such an unhappy home, Lane was always loath to yield to our entreaties considering her a bore. This makes me feel doubly afflicted to think that any rhapsody of hers, not intended to meet the light should be the means of conspiring [against] him.<sup>40</sup>

She was much afraid of Mr. Robinson's character. She warned George Combe and Robert Chambers<sup>41</sup> that no handle should be given to him that he might use to entrap Lane to make the matter public.<sup>42</sup>

George Combe corresponded with all the parties concerned in the alleged Lane-Robinson affair to find out the truth about it. In reply to his enquiry, H.O. Robinson told him the circumstances that had led to his discovery of his wife's adultery with Dr. Lane.<sup>43</sup> Mrs. Robinson was attacked by a fever in the spring of 1856 in Boulogne. In his words, "whilst in a state of delirium she referred to certain individuals in such a manner as to excite the attention and suspicion" of himself. He searched a volume of her diary in which he found the description of her passionate attachment to Dr. Lane. He took more volumes of her

<sup>39</sup> John James Drysdale (1815-1892), second son of Sir William Drysdale, and half-brother to George, Charles, and Mary Drysdale, was a homoeopathic doctor and had a practice in Liverpool. He was co-editor of *The British Journal of Homoeopathy* which carried a sympathetic review of *The Elements of Social Science* in January, 1860, p. 176. In 1877 his booklet, *Is Scientific Materialism compatible with Dogmatic Theory?* was published, and that earned him praise as Christian materialist in *The National Reformer* for 7 July, 1878, pp. 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> Lady Drysdale's MS letter to Mrs. Combe, n.d., \*with G. Combe's notes, 'London 29 Dec. 1857.'

<sup>41</sup> Robert Chambers, anonymous author of the *Vestiges of Creation*, 1844, in which he put a theory of evolution. He was also co-publisher with his brother William of the *Chambers' Journal*.

<sup>42</sup> Lady Drysdale's MS letter to G. Combe, dated 1 January, 1858.

<sup>43</sup> H.O. Robinson's MS letter to G. Combe, dated 4 January, 1858.

diary when they came back to England, and found in them her admission that she had committed adultery with Dr. Lane at Moor Park and in its neighbourhood. That made him to take action at the Ecclesiastical Court. Hearing his version of the affair, Combe was shocked at what seemed to him the recounting of the sin in her diary, but he turned to her with his usual open-mindedness.

Mrs. Robinson was surprised that somebody was still willing to listen to her whom everybody else had dropped.<sup>44</sup> She told Combe in detail a painful history of her life: impractical education she received, her marriage with an incompatible man, his seizure of some of her property, his keeping of a mistress, and his frequent attacks on her personal liberty. In connection with her alleged affair with Dr. Lane, she explained that she had put down in her diary what she had imagined, and by way of illustrating her point that she did not always record in her writings her real thoughts, she reminded him of her poems published several years previously in the *Chambers' Journal* in which she took the side of belief in immortality, while in reality, as he had known, she was not quite a believer in it. But she was yet to reveal more why she had put in her diary records of her alleged affair.

Mrs. Robinson wrote to Combe again to explain more specifically her extraordinary conduct.<sup>45</sup> She confessed that while she was "the victim temporarily of my own fancies and delusions," she had described in her diary what proved to be so damaging to Dr. Lane and his family whose kindness to her she had much appreciated. She further told him that she "constantly put down for facts what were the wildest imaginings of a mind exhausted with the tyranny of long years, and given up to seek in imaginative writings for the only solace of my daily lot." Combe passed one or all of those letters to Robert Chambers, publisher and writer, William Ivory, Advocate, and one or two more friends of his in Edinburgh.

They were all staggered at her new confession. To commit adultery was shocking enough, but what to say about her own recording of her crime in her diary! They were now mostly inclined to believe Dr. Lane's innocence, while condemning Mrs. Robinson as an "adulteress in her heart."<sup>46</sup>

In early March Dr. Lane learned that Mr. Robinson was taking action at the new Divorce Court, citing him as co-respondent. His lawyers contemplated libel action against Mr. Robinson, but Lane could not himself produce any written evidence to substantiate his libel. Combe suggested that Lane's lawyers should apply to the Sheriff of Edinburgh to enforce himself and Robert Chambers to give up Mr. Robinson's letters addressed to them. Robert Chambers on his part tried to mediate between Lane and Robinson. But Lane realized that Robinson's hatred of his wife was such that he would not listen to any kind of arguments or statements.<sup>47</sup>

Dr. Lane went to the Public Record Office to read Mrs. Robinson's journal, and he became convinced that she was "a fantastical, vain, egotistical being half-crazed through misery, and goaded on by wild hallucinations to put down as fully all the fancies and desires of a much-diseased and most corrupt imagination."<sup>48</sup> Dr. Lane and his lawyers decided to print her journal in full to show her insanity and to expose the character of Mr. Robinson.

<sup>44</sup> Mrs. Isabella Hamilton Robinson's MS letter to G. Combe dated 26 February, 1858.

<sup>45</sup> The same to the same, 28 February, 1858.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Chambers' MS letter to G. Combe, noted by the latter, 26 February, 1858.

<sup>47</sup> E.W. Lane's MS letter from 38 Devonshire Place to G. Combe, 28 March, 1858.

<sup>48</sup> Lane's MS letter from Moor Park to G. Combe, 13 April, 1858.



Now it is clear that Mrs. Robinson herself, Dr. Lane, and the third party like Robert Chambers all agreed on one point about her diary that she recorded in it the product of her imagination. Neither Lane, or Chambers thought she was a liar where her statement on her diary was concerned. What they condemned in her was her morality, or immorality that was in their view, projected into the world of her imagination. A natural conclusion from this way of thinking would be that because she was so corrupt in the world of her imagination as her diary revealed, she was totally untrustworthy in the real world. Obviously they were so much shocked at her immorality that they did not remember her perceptive assessment of her own behaviour. Or, was it because deep under the surface of their thinking there was a fear to recognize openly women's sexuality?

Printing of Mrs. Robinson's journal might bring another vexed question of the time, religion, into fresh discussion among George Combe's circle of friends. He heard from Lane that his name and opinions appear much in her journal. Dr. Lane wrote:

I am pained to say that there are few names which figure more conspicuously in any part of the journal than your own. You generally appear there in connection with two subjects—Phrenology and the Immortality of the soul, but chiefly with the latter topic, which appears from the period of Mrs. R's arrival in Edinburgh. She is never done with the theme, which keeps her everlastingly on the rack. It is plain indeed that the notion of the doctrine of *a Future State being without foundation*, or at any rate untenable as a logical proposition, was too much for her, and it seems to have given her whole nature such a shock as to throw her clean of the rails of common sense and common propriety, and to have cast a livid cloud of depression and *malaise* over the rest of her life.<sup>49</sup>

Dr. Lane sounds as if he wanted, subconsciously, if not consciously, to drag Combe into a predicament he himself had been driven into, and to fight a pending fight with him. But it is rather unmanly of him to have sent such a letter that would inevitably cause worries to its receiver, for Combe was an old, ailing man. In contrast, this is not the tone of Lady Drysdale's letters, however eager she was to defend his innocence.

Combe was certainly critical of a state of mind which "*demand[s] immortality as a right, or cling to it . . . as a conviction necessary to render this life endurable.*"<sup>50</sup> But if he had shaken Mrs. Robinson's religious beliefs so radically as to lead her to lose her belief in a future state, or immortality, what had he replaced it with for her? As a remedy for her troubled mind, Combe had "recommended occupation, and confining of the views to the practical and well-authenticated side of things; as well as the taking an interest in the broad question relating to humanity."<sup>51</sup> She told him that she had greatly benefited from his advice, but it is evident from her letters and journal that it had not solved her real problem, the emotional need of a woman freed from religious dogmas.

Combe, knowing Mrs. Robinson's tendency to allow full play to her imagination, became worried if she represented his religious views in her journal in such a way as would construe blasphemy. But soon he learned from Dr. Lane that his counsel would prohibit printing of anything injurious to other people than the parties directly involved in the divorce suit. He reckoned that his opinions would not attract much attention under the shadow of more

<sup>49</sup> The same to the same, 17 May, 1858.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Charles Gibbon's *The Life of George Combe, Author of "The Constitution of Man,"* 1878, vol. 2, p. 342.

<sup>51</sup> Mrs. I.H. Robinson's MS letter to G. Combe, 21 February, 1858.

sensational accounts in her journal, and that his reputation would be impregnable.

The case *Robinson v. Robinson and Lane* came up to the Court for Divorces and Matrimonial Causes on 14 June, 1858, before Lord Chief Justice, Sir Alexander Cockburn, and Justice Wightman.<sup>52</sup> Extracts from Mrs. Robinson's journal were read from time to time, and newspapers duly reported them. Her descriptions of her feelings for Dr. Lane and her encounters with him seemed to be so true in every detail that the public who read them could hardly believe that it was a product of her hallucinations as alleged by the defence. But as the trial moved on, unworthiness of Mr. Robinson's witnesses was fully exposed, while the defence was able to draw powerful medical evidence on the nature of her disease. They had such authorities as Sir Charles Locock, Dr. Bennett, and Dr. Forbes Winslow. The newspapers reported that she had been suffering from a disease of the uterus which sometimes caused hallucinations in the sufferer. They did not go into details of the disease, or name it. But their readers knew it from the way it was described—hysteria<sup>53</sup> of which nymphomania was a manifestation.

Lady Drysdale gave evidence on 15 June, the second day of the court hearings.<sup>54</sup> She told that the Lanes and the Robinsons had been on very friendly terms, and that "there was nothing in the conduct of Dr. Lane towards Mrs. Robinson at all different to his conduct towards other ladies." She also said that she and Mrs. Lane, her daughter, always knew when the doctor walked or drove with Mrs. Robinson, and that he was in the habit of walking in the grounds of Moor Park with other ladies as well. Cross-examined, she described her daughter as a very sweet-tempered person aged about 27 (in fact she was 35!). According to Lady Drysdale, Mrs. Robinson was over 50.

George Combe watched the court proceedings as they were reported in *The Times*. He put down in his diary that "the husband's evidence is a perfect shadow, except from her [the wife's] journal," and that "if he succeed, no man's reputation is safe from similar records."<sup>55</sup> His impressions were to prove what the public felt about the case. He and Robert Chambers set to use their influence to obtain wide journalistic support for Dr. Lane.

Dr. Charles Mackay, manager of *The Illustrated London News*, to whom George Combe dedicated his work *On the Relation Between Science and Religion* a year previously, wrote to Combe on 19 June:<sup>56</sup> "All the kindness I can show in the matter is to prevent the slightest allusion to the case in *The Illustrated London News*.—That journal circulates largely in families. . . . it is a rule rigidly adhered to, never to allude to any cases, however important in themselves, or however notoriously before to public, in which an immoral connection of the sexes is the matter of enquiries." He accordingly fully agreed to Lady Drysdale's request that any view of Moor Park should not be published in the weekly. He further told Combe that "as far as I can hear in clubs or in society generally—there is a disposition to exonerate Dr. Lane from all blame."

Robert Chambers wrote to Mr. Dallas and Mr. Sampson, editors of *The Times* request-

<sup>52</sup> *The Times* reported the case of *Robinson v. Robinson and Lane* on 15, 16, 17 and 22 June 1858; on 5 July on the adjournment of the case; on 6 July a leading article on the case; on 27 November 1858 E.W. Lane's evidence; and on 3 March 1859 the judgment on the case that the petition by Mr. Robinson was dismissed.

<sup>53</sup> Veith, Ilza, *The History of a Disease Hysteria*, 1965, is useful for understanding the history of the disease.

<sup>54</sup> *The Times* for 16 June, 1858, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> An entry in G. Combe's MS diary for 15 June, 1858.

<sup>56</sup> Charles Mackay, LLD of the University of Glasgow, was political and literary editor of *The Illustrated London News* from 1848 to 1852, and manager from 1852 to December, 1859.

ing a leader on the divorce case. Dallas wrote to Dr. Lane, promising a strong leader would appear as soon as judgment on the case would be announced.

On 3 July, Lord Chief Justice, Sir Alexander Cockburn, adjourned the case.<sup>57</sup> He told the court that a Bill was pending before the Legislature in which it was intended to introduce a clause for the purpose of "enabling the Court, supposing it did not already possess the power to dismiss the co-respondent under certain circumstances as those of the present case, and make him admissible as a witness," and that if that clause should become law, the Court would discharge Dr. Lane "against whom no case had been established," and allow him to give evidence in the suit. By then Dr. Lane virtually won the case.

George Combe and his wife arrived at Moor Park on 10 July, a week after the adjournment of the case.<sup>58</sup> They found there "the Drysdale family and the Lanes and a few patients making a comfortable society," but families were "all low in spirit, although relieved from the load of anxiety and toil attending the late trial." "A few patients" included Mr. Savage, editor of *The Examiner*. Sir James and Lady Clark called on the Combes. They had been kind to the Lanes during their trying time. Then George Combe fell ill, and died on 14 August. Mrs. Combe recorded in her husband's diary: "No son could be kinder than Dr. Lane has been; no friends more than so than the whole family." They had no children.

Now we shall examine some press comments on the divorce case as they reflected society's attitude towards sexual problems in the mid-nineteenth century. *The Illustrated London News*, enjoying as large a circulation as of 110,000,<sup>59</sup> would not report anything that was related to "an immoral connections of the sexes" as it was much read among families. *The Saturday Review*, a nascent weekly with a more intellectual bent,<sup>60</sup> defended Dr. Lane in one article, while it condemned in another the extensive reporting by the press of such immorality as disclosed in Mrs. Robinson's diary. Probably more weeklies commented on the case. But here we shall confine our survey to *The Times*, the most powerful newspaper, aimed at the general public, and *The British Medical Journal* as representing opinions entertained by the medical profession.

*The Times* took up the divorce case in a leading article as Mr. Dallas promised to Dr. Lane. A leading article for 6 July, 1858, defended Dr. Lane in these words:

Dr. Lane's position is a most painful and a most trying one. He has been dragged before the public in a way which is calculated to ruin his professional prospects, unless he be purged of the scandal so ridiculously brought upon him by a lady whom it is charity to suppose mad. For all that has appeared, the case might happen to any of us. We really know of no reason why Mrs. Robinson should not have selected the Archbishop of Canterbury for the time being as the hero of her romance.<sup>61</sup>

The leader writers did justice to Dr. Lane, but at the sacrifice of Mrs. Robinson. For it was not her but Mr. Robinson who had tried to ruin Dr. Lane's professional career as we have seen. They had this to say about her:

<sup>57</sup> *The Times* for 5 July, 1858, p.11.

<sup>58</sup> An entry in G. Combe's MS diary for 10 July, 1858.

<sup>59</sup> Fox-Bourne, H.R. *English Newspapers, Chapters in the History of Journalism*, reprinted in 1966, vol. 2, p. 227.

<sup>60</sup> *The Saturday Review* was started on 3 November, 1855—see Fox-Bourne, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 232; for its intellectual bent, see *op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>61</sup> *The Times* for 6 July, 1858, pp. 8-9.

Every act of Mrs. Robinson's leaves us nothing but the choice between two conclusions—either she is as foul and abandoned a creature as ever wore woman's shape, or she is mad. In either case her testimony is worthless. . . . The real solution of the question, however, we believe to be that this lady is not in her right mind. The case is rather one for a physician who is accustomed to the care of persons of disordered intellect than for a judge.

Here we can see that they accepted the defence argument that Mrs. Robinson was insane, and therefore, untrustworthy. But a medical journal was to warn them against this mere blackening of her character soon.

*The British Medical Journal*, as a journal representing a body of medical brethren, put a leading article on 10 July<sup>62</sup> to defend E.W. Lane, the medical man. The writer of the article drew special attention to the case as "an extraordinary example of the dangers to which medical men above all others are exposed," and thanked *The Times* for it came forth "very nobly to champion Dr. Lane in this crisis of his fortunes." Surely to have the support of such an influential newspaper as *The Times* almost amounted to the public exoneration of his name even though judgment was not yet passed on the divorce case in which he was involved. But the writer in the medical journal would not let the matter rest there. He dissented from *The Times* where it condemned Mrs. Robinson's diary "as confession of filth."

The medical writer warned that the disease from which Mrs. Robinson suffered was not so uncommon among women as the writers in *The Times* implied. He wrote that "the best and most modest of the sex, under the same infliction, may be guilty of expressions and actions at which they would shudder when in a sane condition." He did not name the disease, but it was nymphomania, with which hysteria was often crudely equated in many people's mind in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> He meant that Mrs. Robinson, suffering from nymphomania, had hallucinations that she had an affair with Dr. Lane, and recorded it in her diary; and that "the best and most modest" of women might have similar experience. Mrs. Robinson might have truly had hallucinations, but in her letters<sup>64</sup> she gives the impression that she was generally neurotic, withdrawing partially from the real world, but had a clear understanding of what she did and what she was doing. Probably those letters had not been available to the writer in *The British Medical Journal*. But what was significant about his article was that he openly admitted the sexual frustration and misery experienced by Mrs. Robinson and her consequent flights into the world of phantasy, and that he hinted that her experiences were not all that unique among women.

George Drysdale, the author of *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* (1854), was silent on the divorce case, understandably in view of the direct involvement of his close relation in it. But from what he said on sexual difficulties in his book, it is possible to infer his opinion of the case. On hysteria he wrote:

Let the reader consider these facts; let him think of who are the victims of the disease—the single, widows, or women unhappily married; let him analyse the peculiar mental and physical phenomena of hysteria, and let him consider the powerful disturbing influence, which the systematic denial and disappointment of the strongest of our natural desires must have upon

<sup>62</sup> *The British Medical Journal* for 10 July, 1858, pp. 561-562. It also reports the case of Robinson v. Robinson and Lane, *ibid.*, pp. 573-574.

<sup>63</sup> Veith, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> See Notes (44) and (45) above.

a delicate and susceptible girl; and it is impossible to avoid the conclusion, that this is the main cause of the disease. The natural emotions are checked and thrown back upon themselves, and it is inevitable that they should become disordered.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from the question whether Mrs. Robinson had suffered from hysteria, or not, those remarks are applicable to her who was emotionally disturbed in consequence of long years of repression. But those remarks were by themselves not eye-opening, coming from a medical man. What was outstanding was his proposed remedy. He did not preach self-control unlike some of his contemporary physicians. He declared in the book aimed at the general public that the true method of preventing and curing the disease was the gratification of natural passions regardless of the fact whether the patient was married, or unmarried.<sup>66</sup> Elsewhere in his book he showed that that was possible without complications by the adoption of birth control.<sup>67</sup> Few of his contemporaries, either medical or lay, would have openly recommended such a remedy as Drysdale's. But in his eye, open discussions on all sexual matters were of paramount importance to prevent misery and bring about happiness among mankind.

### V. *The Lanes and the Drysdales at Sudbrook Park*

Dr. Lane and his family moved from Moor Park to Sudbrook Park, Richmond, probably in early 1860. He seemed to have an even more extended family than at Moor Park. William Copland, 20-year-old grandson of Lady Drysdale by her first marriage might have lived with them.<sup>68</sup> George and Charles Drysdale were as frequent and regular visitors as before even though they had rooms as medical practitioners at 39 Southampton Row, not far from the British Museum. By then George had published the third edition of his work, *The Elements of Social Science*,<sup>69</sup> and by the beginning of April, *Population Fallacies* which was his reply to critics of his earlier work.<sup>70</sup> As for Charles, he had done some railway surveying under G.W. Hemans, started medical studies at University College, London, in 1855, and graduated in medicine in St. Andrews in 1859.<sup>71</sup> Among Dr. Lane's patients was Charles Darwin again who had published *The Origin of Species* in November, 1859.

Darwin was staying at Sudbrook Park in June 1860 when debates over the evolution theory took place at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Oxford.<sup>72</sup> The famous clash between Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, and T.H. Huxley took place on 30 June.<sup>73</sup> Wilberforce asked Huxley at the end of his long

<sup>65</sup> Drysdale, George, *The Elements of Social Science*, 1879, p. 180.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 182, 183 and 185 in particular.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 347 and 351.

<sup>68</sup> The 1861 Census records in the Public Record Office, London, RG 9 456, p. 17. The Lane family with their four sons and Lady Drysdale lived at Sudbrook House, Petersham, Richmond, Surrey. George and Charles Drysdale, and William Copland were there, too, when the Census was taken.

<sup>69</sup> The third edition of *The Elements of Social Science* was published in late 1859.

<sup>70</sup> *Population Fallacies: A Defence of the Malthusian or True Theory of Society*. By a Graduate of Medicine. 1860, pp. 36.

<sup>71</sup> Detailed information on Charles Drysdale's medical studies at the University College given kindly by the Deputy Registrar of the College from the records kept there. Mr. R.N. Smart, University Library, St. Andrews gave me information on his graduation there.

<sup>72</sup> *The Life and Letters*, vol 2, pp. 320, 323 and 324.

<sup>73</sup> De Beer, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-167.

attack on the evolution theory whether it was through his grandfather, or his grandmother that he claimed his descent from an ape, and Huxley replied:

If the question is put to me 'would I rather have a miserable ape for a grandfather, or a man highly endowed by nature and possessed of great means and influence, and yet who employs these faculties and that influence for the mere purpose of introducing ridicule into a grave scientific discussion'—I unhesitatingly affirm my preference for the ape.

Newspapers' reports about the meeting being scanty, Darwin learned about the proceedings in detail from his friends Hooker and Huxley who wrote to him. What was then the reception of the news, or *The Origin of Species* itself, at Sudbrook Park where he was staying? The immediate response came from George Drysdale.

George Drysdale was only too pleased to find the population principle discovered by Malthus was made "the basis of one of the most remarkable and important theories ever given to the world—namely, the theory of the development of the animal and vegetable series, brought forward by Mr. Charles Darwin in his great work on the Origin of Species (sic)".<sup>74</sup> After introducing Darwin thus in his own pamphlet, *Population Fallacies*, he went on to explain Darwin's principle of natural selection like this:

The geometrical powers of increase with which every vegetable and animal is endowed, give rise to a constant Struggle for Existence throughout the whole organic world; in this struggle immense multitudes of the individuals of every species are in each generation destroyed, and many species undergo Extinction, while those individuals and species which possess any advantages over their neighbours, such as superior strength or activity, acuter senses, higher instincts or other mental faculties, & c., tend to be preserved.<sup>75</sup>

Then he made ample quotations from the chapter on "Struggle for Existence" in Darwin's work, the chapter most relevant to Malthus's population principle. The quotations and his expostulation of Darwin's theory covered five out of the thirty-six pages of his pamphlet. As he held a materialistic view of the origin of life, he was far from being troubled with a fear entertained by some of his contemporaries that Darwin's book, because it implied common ancestorship for mankind and other animals, would lead to an argument that man was no higher ethical being than animals. He valued Darwin's work especially as a great contribution to the Malthusian theory, for Darwin made it applicable both to human society and to the world of nature.

We do not know E.W. Lane's reaction to Darwin's great book. But certainly he had been acquainted with some of his research into species, for Darwin had made some observations on the struggle for existence while staying at the hydropathic establishment at Moor Park. On one occasion Darwin made enquiries probably to E.W. Lane on young Scotch firs growing in multitudes in the enclosed parts of Farnham Common, which led him to observe in the chapter on "Struggle for Existence", as well as in his letter to Hooker, the portent "effect of the introduction of a single tree, [while] nothing whatever else have been done with the exception that the land had been enclosed, so that cattle could not enter."<sup>76</sup> Alexander Bain was later to write that while staying at Moor Park in 1857, he had walked with Darwin

<sup>74</sup> Drysdale, *Population Fallacies*, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>76</sup> The quotation from *The Origin of Species*, Penguin, 1968, pp. 123-124. Also see a letter from Charles Darwin to J.D. Hooker, dated 3 June, 1857 in *The Life and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 99-100.

who had told him about his research into species.<sup>77</sup> Even though Darwin had come to stay at Moor Park when in ill health, he had walked around to observe trees, plants, birds, and insects, and talked about them to people near him. At Lane's place, George and Charles Drysdale might have met him.

As we have seen, Charles Darwin and a number of other intellectual men and women came to stay at E.W. Lane's hydropathic establishments in the period between 1854 and 1860 for treatment, or for relaxation. Whom did George and Charles Drysdale meet and come into contact with among those people while they themselves were at Moor Park and at Sudbrook Park? Let us recapitulate. We have not found direct evidence to prove that they met Charles Darwin, Alexander Bain, and James Stuart Laurie. George met George Combe. Charles worked with G.W. Hemans. They might have known some Edinburgh men like Robert Chambers in addition to the Combes as they had lived in the city previously. But our difficulty lies in the fact that they were to remain so reticent in their later life about their early family acquaintances and their own that we had to rely, for information about their movements, on such pieces of information as we can glean from Combe's diary and letters to and from Combe, and official documents like the Census records and records of the academic institutions they attended. But it can be safely said that E.W. Lane, their brother-in-law, with the invaluable help from his sweet-tempered wife and indefatigable Lady Drysdale, helped enrich their life both socially and culturally. As for those establishments as possible meeting places for Malthusians and neo-Malthusians, we have not enough evidence as mentioned in the introductory part of this article. But it is tempting to assume that they had played some part in the quiet permeation of those ideas into civilized sections of society.

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<sup>77</sup> See Note (26).