CHAPTER VI

Marie Corelli's views on Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and the Origin of Christianity.

"Some things He taught were wise, and some were foolish, because impracticable, - and possibly His best suggestions may be traced to Egypt, and He be proved the merest echo of some ancient perished creed."

..... Barabbas. p.337

"While considering the sources of Corelli's Electric Creed of Christianity, a reference has already been made to her complaint against the existing state of Christianity. She demands a new interpretation of the New Testament in the light of what she calls the esoteric teaching of Jesus Christ. She disapproves the sacerdotal system of the Christian Church in all its forms and asks for a Christian religion based entirely on the 'true principles' of Jesus Christ. She does not accept the doctrine of man's original sin and of the indispensability of Christ's sacrifice for redeeming mankind. She expounds the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Jesus Christ is to her the perfect symbol of God in Man, showing how a man can attain Divinity through his own spiritual training. In order
to emphasise the greatness and superiority of Jesus Christ and his religion, she posits a close connection between the ancient philosophical tradition of the Chaldean Fraternity of more than six thousand years B.C. and the comparatively modern religion of Christianity. Three main topics are considered in this chapter in relation to Corelli's views,—the life of Jesus Christ, and of Virgin Mary and the origin of Christianity.

Life is a continual struggle between good and evil. When reason and justice fail to operate in the minds of human beings, and their existence degenerates into mere chaos and brutality, there comes on the scene a superhuman being like the Buddha or Jesus Christ to show the heavenly path of light. He appears as the redeemer of a decadent world. But he is the child of his age. "Systems of philosophy can be understood only in relation to their time and place." They should not be taken as absolute the final. The utterances of great prophets and seers spring primarily from the needs of their own age.

The age of Jesus Christ was an age of transition. In the land, in which he was born, Judaism had degenerated into a mockery of itself. The neighbouring country, Egypt, was then the centre of Eastern and Western thought. Platonic philosophy,

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Stoicism and Epicurianism were current there. The Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris was popular at that time. The religion of Zoroaster exerted considerable influence especially on Judaism. King Ashoka had already sent Buddhistic missionaries to Egypt and other parts of the world, in the third century B.C. Buddhistic principles were known at the time of Jesus Christ in his own land and in Egypt. "Between all these religions many striking parallels can at one time or another, be found; but the difficulty of dating the sources frequently makes it impossible to determine on which side the debt, if any, really lies." The diversity of the Christian creeds themselves in this early era of Christianity is typical of the period. "False Messiahs, Essenes and Zealots, and especially John the Baptist reflect in their turn significant movements." Corelli has cleverly made use of the 'striking parallels' of different religions in her depiction of the life of Jesus Christ and in her history of the antiquity of the Christian religion.

There are no sufficient and authentic historical records about the early life of Jesus Christ before His appearance as a prophet. "The life and personality of Jesus can be reconstructed only from the three Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke,

commonly known as the Synoptic Gospels with some assistance from the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul. If the Synoptic Gospels treat Jesus more as a human being, the Gospel of St. John and the Epistles of St. Paul exalt His personality. They represent Him as the incarnate and unique Son of God. They interpret His life "in terms of the philosophic concepts then dominant in the Hellenistic world." Corelli follows mainly the life of Jesus as it is depicted in all the Gospels and Epistles in the New Testament. But there are additions from a few other sources which give more information about His life, and sometimes contradict the accepted beliefs of the Church.

There are some references to Jesus's early life and training in the New Testament. St. Matthew mentions the flight of Joseph to Egypt with the new born child, Jesus, and his mother Mary according to the advice of an angel. For, king Herod was in search of the child. Joseph stayed in Egypt with Jesus and Mary till the death of Herod. After the king's death Joseph returned to Israel with his wife and son and lived in Nazareth. St. Luke dwells on Jesus' interest in philosophical and religious knowledge even in his childhood: "The child grew, and waxed strong, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was

3. The New Testament St. Matthew Chapter. II.
And in the same chapter St. Luke describes an incident which took place in a temple. At the age of twelve years, Jesus was found once "in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors and teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions: and all that heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers." Then St. Luke describes in brief the later growth of Jesus: "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men." Further it is said that Jesus was about thirty years old when he began to preach. St. Mark and St. John do not tell us anything about his boyhood. According to the information available in the New Testament three things seem to be quite clear. Jesus was taken to Egypt in early childhood and he was keenly interested in philosophical and religious knowledge since his boyhood. Lastly, he was about thirty years of age when he appeared before the public as a teacher of the new religion.

Did Jesus spend some of his early years in Egypt? Did he get his spiritual training in Egypt? Where did he live in his days of wandering? There is no record of his life, in the New Testament, after the incident in the temple and before the commencement of his public preaching, which covers a period of

2. --Ibid-- Chapter II.
3. --Ibid-- Chapter III.
nearly eighteen years. Some of Corelli's characters refer to Jesus' training and wandering in Egypt and in the Chaldean monasteries during this very period. A Jewish scribe says in Barabbas that the principles which Jesus taught can be traced to Egypt; and that they seem to him to be echoes of the principles of some ancient creed. Another Jew while explaining the parentage of Jesus, says that his mother Mary was of Egypt and Joseph, his father, was of Nazareth. In another context in the same novel "a prominent and much-respected member of the Sanhedrim" complains against Jesus and his new doctrines to the Roman Governor, the Pilate. He condemns Jesus along with the wandering magicians of Egypt: "A rebellious rogue and murderer such as Barabbas hath proved himself to be, is far less dangerous to the community than yonder young Teacher of new doctrines, who out of very arrogance, arising perchance from the consciousness of a certain superior physical force and outward beauty, striving to terrify thee and avert true Justice. Lo, there are many such as he among the wandering Egyptian aliens, who by reason of an imposing presence, and a certain vague sublimity of speech, do persuade the less crafty to believe in their supernatural powers." The Chaldean monk Heliobas seems to suggest in Ardath that during the period of his absence of

nearly eighteen years, Jesus wandered from one monastery to
the other of the Chaldean Fraternity and lived in them.¹ Those
retreats were scattered in Egypt, Greece and other neighbouring
countries.² Jesus appears to have developed his spiritual
wisdom and to have formed his religious doctrines, in these
monasteries. It seems wrong to say that Jesus left his Gospel
in the charge of just a few fishermen and outcasts. He
seems to have left his Gospel in the hands of the mystics of
the Chaldean Fraternity and to have mainly relied on them for
the propagation of his principles. Heliobas says that the
brothers of his Fraternity follow the teaching of Christ as he
taught them himself: "We obey Christ in the simple rules He
preached, Christ according to His own enunciated wish and
will... our Fraternity, received our commission from Christ
Himself in person."³ As proof of this, Heliobas gives an
instance of Jesus' visit to his monastery and describes his per-
sonality and wisdom at the time. Jesus had fasted forty days
before his visit to their retreat: "One of the Fraternities...
had its habitation in the wilderness, where some years later,
the Master wandered fasting forty days and forty nights. To
that solitary abode of prayerful men He came, when He was about
twenty-three earthly years of age,—the record of His visit

has been reverently penned and presented,— and from it we
know how fair and strong He was,— how stately and like a king
how gracious and noble in bearing — how far exceeding in beauty
why all the sons of men! His speech of music that thrilled
to the heart,— the wonderous glory of His eyes gave life to
those who knelt and worshipped Him — His touch was pardon —His
smile was peace! From His own lips a store of wisdom was
set down,— and prophecies concerning the fate of His own teach-
ing. 3 From what source did Corelli get information about
the physical appearance of Jesus and his period of stay with
the fraternities of Chaldean till the day of his preaching?
Has Corelli formed an imaginative and poetic picture of Jesus
Christ from her own impressions of the New Testament? Does
she elaborate the biographical sketch on the basis of the records
drawn in the New Testament? The spiritual personality of
Jesus stands out in the New Testament: "It is precisely the
greatness of Jesus, and the peculiarity of the tradition regard-
ing
Him, that everyone of His brief sayings and everyone of
His parables and the stories concerning Him display His
inner character entire, and display it so clearly that even the
unlearned men may receive from it the deepest impression." 2
Surely some of the passages in the New Testament have given

hints to Corelli to complete her own picture of Jesus. Her reference to Jesus's fast seems to have been based on the record noted by St. Luke: "And Jesus, full of the Holy spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the spirit in the wilderness during forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he did eat nothing in those days." For connecting Jesus with the monasteries of the Chaldeans and the magicians of Egypt, and in writing her historical survey of the Chaldeans, Marie Corelli seems to have been indebted to some theosophical works like Isis Unveiled. Blavatsky gives a Jewish version of the version of the early life of Jesus Christ. The story deals with the early flight of Jesus to Egypt with a Rabbi and His training in occult knowledge in Egypt. Mary entrusted her child Jesus to the care of the Rabbi Elhanan. And it is said that since the beginning, the child was "well gifted with spirit and understanding": "Rabbi Joshua, son of Perachiah, continued the education of Jesus, after Elhanan, and initiated him in the secret knowledge"; but the King Janneus, having given orders to slay all the initiates, Joshua Ben Perachiah, fled to Alexandria, in Egypt, taking the boy with him. While in Alexandria, continues the story, they were received in the house of a rich and learned lady personified retiring Egypt. Young Jesus found her beautiful, notwithstanding

standing 'a defect in her eyes', and declared so to his master. 
Upon hearing this, the latter became so angry that his pupil
should find in the land of bondage anything good, that 'he
cursed him and drove the young man from his presence.' Then
follow a series of adventures told in allegorical language,
which show that Jesus supplemented his initiation in the Jewish
Kabala with an additional acquisition of the secret wisdom of
Egypt. When the persecution ceased, they both returned to
Judea. Many passages in Isis Unveiled tell us about Jesus'
training in Egypt. Jesus, practised the magic of Egypt. In
ancient days, the term 'magician' did not mean a juggler or a
sorcerer. It was not a term of abuse. It meant a 'man well
versed in esoteric knowledge.' Blavatsky discusses the main
contents of the sarcophagus which gives a picture of young
Jesus with the equipment of a magician and asserts that Jesus
was initiated in the magic of Egypt: "One of the best and most
unquestionable proofs of our assertion may be found in the so-
called Museo Gregoriano. On the sarcophagus, which is panelled
with bas-reliefs representing the miracles of Christ, may be
seen the full figure of Jesus, who, in the resurrection of Lazarus,
appears beardless and equipped with a wand in the received
guise of a necromancer ... whilst the corpse of Lazarus

is swathed in bondages exactly as an Egyptian mummy."\(^1\) Again in some of the passages in *Isis Unveiled* it is said that Jesus was a pupil of the Essenes who were converted by Buddhistic missionaries to Buddhism. Although Jesus is found to disagree with the Essenes on questions of formal observance it appears that "he preached the philosophy of Buddha Sakyamuni."\(^2\) The Essenes and Chaldeans seem to have belonged formerly to the same race of the far East. The Chaldeans were a tribe of ancient Hindu-Brahmins, now called Aryans.\(^3\) Again it is said in *Isis Unveiled* that "the Gnostics, or early Christians, were but the followers of the old Essenes under a new name."\(^4\) These passages and the like seem to have given free scope to Corelli to imagine the handsome personality and the profound spiritual wisdom of Jesus Christ, and to find a relationship between Jesus and the Chaldean Fraternity. On the authority of these passages, Corelli seems to make some bold statements about the remote antiquity of Christianity. While describing the unique personality of Jesus, Meliobas comments on the meaning of a passage in 'the Creed accepted today by the Christian Church.'\(^5\) "And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages." This means that," says

2. --Ibid-- p.132.
3. --Ibid-- p. 46.
Heliobas, "the only absolute Emanation of His own Personal Radiance that ever wore such mean garb as our clay was found in Christ - who as part of God, certainly existed 'before all ages.'" This shows that, while willing to incorporate into the Christian creed other principles formulated by theosophists, she was unwilling to surrender the one dogma on which Christianity primarily stands, - the unicity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. She makes Heliobas say that Jesus Christ was the 'only' absolute 'emanation' of God. She uses phrases like 'the only begotten from the Father' which can also be found in the New Testament. It is worth noting that, in Isis Unveiled, it is said that phrases like 'the first-born,' 'the only begotten,' were common theosophical expressions used by Kabalists and Gnostics from the very dawn of religious consciousness among men. The Apostles of Christ seem to have accepted this terminology and phraseology to describe the Founder of their religion.

In her explanation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Corelli faces again the conflict between Christian and non-Christian beliefs. It is repeatedly said in The New Testament that Christ rose up on the third day of his burial with his former body. Corelli also describes this in her novel, Barabbas:

"There were nothing to be seen save the empty stone niche
where the 'Nazarene' had slept, and the linen grave-cloths
which had enswathed Him. These were rolled together and flung
aside in one corner." But in the same novel it is described
that the risen Christ had a spiritually changed personality.
Mary Magdalen sees him: "The Crucified, the Slain and Buried,
stood there living; looking even as He looked before He had
been nailed upon the Cross to die, - the same, the same in
every feature, as human-seeming as Humanity itself, save that
His vesture appeared woven out of glittering mist and fire!" When Magdalen tries to touch him, he forbids her as he is newly
risen. In another context in this very novel, the novelist
seems to say that the risen Christ had a subtle spiritual body:
"The Man Crucified and Risen, now manifested in Himself the
mystic mingling of God in Humanity; and taught that for the
powers of the soul set free from sin, there is no limit, no
vanquishment, no end!" Corelli seems to emphasise here only
the resurrection of Jesus Christ's soul. This is also borne
cut by her statements in other novels. Heliobas says in A
Romance of Two Worlds that Jesus rose up from his grave as pure
spirit: "As pure spirit rose again and returned in peace to
Heaven." Corelli herself says in the Appendix to the same

3. Ibid. p.366.
novel that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an important proof of the immortality of the soul. It was intended as the lasting symbol and open manifestation of the fact that each one of us holds the eternal germ of spirit within him, and that for that individual and conscious spirit there is no such thing as death. As a witness to this truth she quotes a passage from St. Paul in The Life Everlasting. Corelli was convinced of the immortality of the soul. She believed in the transmigration of the soul. "Life is not and never can be death, but only constant change and reinvestment of Spirit and Form." But her conviction regarding the immortality of the soul seems to have been shaken violently by the Gospel version of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Prologue to The Life Everlasting she tries to explain the fact again in a rather roundabout way and she becomes vague and confused: "He rose from the dead, ... as a matter of fact, He never died, seeing that death for Him as for all who have mastered the inward constitution and commingling of the elements was impossible. His real Life was not injured or affected by the agony on the Cross, or by His three days' entombment; the one was a torture of His physical frame, which to the limited perception of those who watched Him 'die,' as they thought, appeared like a dissolution of

2. The Life Everlasting. p. 16.
3. Ibid. p. 27.
the whole Man, - the other was the mere rest and silence necessary for what is called the 'miracle' of the Resurrection, but which was simply the natural rising of the same Body, the atoms of which were re-invested and made immortal by the imperishable Spirit which owned and held them in being. The whole life and so-called 'death' of Christ was and is a great symbolic lesson to mankind of the infinite power of that within us which we call soul. In this lengthy explanation of the resurrection of Christ, Corelli stresses again the immortality of the soul. Jesus' 'real life' was 'soul' which was not injured or affected by the agony on the Cross. 'His physical frame,' which is a faaiov B?^ changing from birth to birth, was tortured on the Cross. The miracle of resurrection was the rising of the same soul but not of the same body. But Corelli's words - "which was simply the natural rising of the same Body, the atoms of which were reinvested and made immortal by the imperishable spirit which owned and held them in being," - conflict with her former explanation of the rising of the same soul. If she means literally the rising of the 'same Body,' then, she can be taken to subscribe to the accepted belief of the Church in this regard. Anyhow, the result is an uncomfortable compromise which frustrates theosophy, and stultifies Christianity. The resurrection of the dead in their entire soul and body was a common belief.

in the land of Judea even before Jesus Christ was born. The Old Testament gives instances of the resurrection of both the body and the soul. "The earliest passage in the Old Testament reflecting the thought of the resurrection belongs perhaps to the 4th century B.C." It seems to be mainly a Jewish and Christian conception. But for this, her interpretation of Christianity arrests our attention by its novelty and significance.

Marie Corelli's opinion about the Virgin Mary is somewhat unorthodox. Was the Virgin Mary an historical personage? Or was she a conception of the Virgin Goddess, worshipped according to many of the non-Christian religions from the very dawn of religious consciousness among men? Heliobas says in A Romance of Two Worlds that she was a goddess of Heaven but had come on earth in the form of a woman to perform her God-ordained duty: "She was actually one of the spirits of the Central Sphere, imprisoned by God's will in woman's form." Heliobas says that both Jesus and his mother, Mary were angels. Both knew their duty on earth and hence behaved like human beings. The Christian idea of the Virgin Mother seems to have been promoted by the current worship of a Roman goddess. The Romans ruled the country of Judea at that time. Some of their

rituals seem to have been accepted by Christianity and thereby remained a part of it. The novelist herself says in The Soul of Lilith that in the monastery of the Isle of Cyprus the Greek Goddess, Aphroditissa, is worshipped in place of the Virgin Mary: "They but dimly comprehend Christianity,—the joyous paganism of the past is not yet extinct, and the Virgin Mother of Christ is here adored as 'Aphroditissa.' "  

Again the religious reformer, Aubrey Leigh, in The Master Christian accuses directly the Roman Catholic Church for its priestcraft taken from Egypt and for its Roman instinct of adoring a goddess. He says to Cicerardi, a Roman Catholic priest: "Your methods of action are precisely those of the priests of ancient Egypt, who juggled with what they were pleased to call their sacred 'mysteries' in precisely the same way as you do. Race copies race. Roman Christianity is grafted upon Roman paganism. When the Apostles were all dead, and their successors who had never been in personal touch with Christ came on to the scene of action, they discovered that the people of Rome would not do without the worship of women in their creed, so they cleverly substituted the Virgin Mary for Venus and Diana. They turned the statues of gods and heroes into figures of Apostles and Saints."

The synoptic Gospels describe the mother of Jesus as a woman but not as a goddess. But reverence is shown towards her

as the mother of Jesus. St. Luke records the salutation of the angel Gabriel: "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee." The cult of the Virgin Mary does not seem to have been in existence either in the Apostolic age or during the period of the four great councils [325 A.D.- 451 A.D.].

The worship of the Church in the conciliar period shows hardly any trace of any cult of the Virgin. There are indications that she was prayed for. ... Cardinal Newman admitted that no prayer to the blessed Virgin is to be found in the voluminous works of St. Augustine. The conception of the Mother Goddess seems to have been current in different religions at least since the Vedic period. Holy Mary was the Mother of perpetual fecundity. Holy Isis seems to have been recognized as the Mother of the Universe in the ancient religion of Egypt. Blavatsky has given a comparative study of the conception of the Virgin Mothers of the Hindu Egyptian and Christian religions in her Isis Unveiled. The conception of the Virgin Mother seems to be the same in all the three. In another context in Isis Unveiled, Blavatsky discusses the idea of the Virgin Mother with a child, that was prevalent in the various religions of the ancient world. She opines that the Christian idea of the Virgin Mother is an adaptation of the rituals

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prevalent in some of the religions then current in the Roman Empire. Corelli seems obviously to have known all the discussions in *Isis Unveiled* and some of the other historical works. The rejection of the Christian belief in the Virgin Mother of Jesus is echoed in some of her novels. Only, it is with reference to the unique manifestation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ that she is dogmatic. Bertrand Russell explains in his *History of Western Philosophy* how the conception of the Virgin Mary was incorporated in the Christian religion: "In Babylon, Ishtar, the earth-goddess, was supreme among female divinities. Throughout Western Asia, the Great Mother was worshipped under various names. When Greek colonists in Asia Minor founded temples to her, they named her Artemis and took over the existing cult. This is the origin of 'Diana of the Ephesians'. Christianity transformed her into the Virgin Mary, and it was a Council of Ephesus that legitimated the title 'Mother of God' as applied to Our Lady."¹

We may now take up the third topic, the origin of Christianity, Jesus was born in the land of Judea and was brought up in the tradition of Judaism. His ancestral religion did not give him satisfaction. It seemed to him that it had fallen into the hands of degenerated priests. He longed for a new religion, a new gospel for regenerating the decadent society in

¹ *History of Western Philosophy* by Bertrand Russell. p.23.
his land. His knowledge of other philosophies and of other
religions seems to have given him the impetus of reforming
the Jewish religion and to formulate his own creed. His religion
seems to have been, in a sense, a modified continuation of Judaism. "Christianity fully accepts the ethical monotheism of
the Hebrew prophets, and stands in a historical continuity with
Judaism, we need not trace its origin here farther back than to the Person and Work of Christ as its founder." The New
Testament seems to be the only literary source for knowing the
history of the beginnings of Christianity. But Marie Corelli
assigns a long tradition of antiquity to Christianity. She
links Jesus and his religion to the Fraternity of Chaldeans of
more than six thousand years B.C. The Cross "as a holy sign
of some Deity unrevealed" was accepted in the Fraternity of Chaldeans "some five thousand years before Christ."

Many references to Chaldeans are scattered throughout
the philosophical novels of Corelli. The monk, Heliobas, gives
in Ardath a rather detailed history of the life in their monasteries:
"More than six or seven thousand years ago, there
were certain communities of men in the East, scholars, sages,
poets, astronomers and scientists, who desiring to give themselves

2. —Ibid— p. 582.
—were up entirely to study and research withdrew from the world, and formed themselves into Fraternities, dividing whatever goods they had in common, and living together under one roof as the brotherhoods of the Catholic Church do to this day. They were princely fellows. They seemed to speak all languages of the world. The prime object of their investigation was the search for the Divine Cause of Creation. As their work was undertaken with prayer, penance, humility and reverence, they discovered many secrets of both the material and spiritual sciences. They knew most of the scientific facts of to-day—"such things as the electric wire and battery, the phonograph, the telephone and other new discoveries." They discussed scientific, social and philosophical problems with a Socratic incisiveness and composure. Emperors sought their advice, and gave them great stores of wealth.

Who were these Chaldeans? To which nation did they belong? Were they known as 'Chaldeans' six thousand years before Christ? Corelli's depiction of their life is vivid enough. But her references to the period of their existence and to the culmination of their cultural tradition in the days of Jesus Christ, appear to be questionable.

'Chaldea' was the name of a country in ancient Iraq.

alluvial land situated at the then separate mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates, which rivers now combine to flow into the Persian Gulf. The Chaldeans are supposed to belong to the Semitic races; and they seem to have come to Babylonia from Arabia - "the supposed original home of the Semitic races." In his "Twin Rivers" Seton Lloyd does not mention the name of Chaldea in the map of Sumerian times but notes it in the map of Assyrian times, which period seems to begin from 1970 B.C. And it is said in An Encyclopedia of World History, by William L. Langer, that "the Semitic Arameans overran the countryside along the course of the Euphrates beginning about 1100 B.C. One of their tribes, the Chaldeans, produced the dynasty of Nebuchadrezzar. Nebuchadrezzar built up the new Babylonian empire about 604 B.C. After the rise of the Neo-Babylonian empire, the term 'Chaldean' seems to have been applied to all Babylonia and to "the territory of certain foreign nations which were later included by Ezekiel ... under the expression 'Chaldeans' It is clear from the above references that the history of the Chaldeans seems to begin about 1200 B.C. They do not seem to have been known in Babylonia by their name 'Chaldeans' before eleven hundred years B.C. The beginning of the authentic history of Iraq itself is supposed to date back

2. Ibid
to 3000 years B.C. The history of Iraq, of an earlier period is shrouded in darkness. What is said about it is "more or less convincing speculation." Therefore Corelli's reference to the Chaldean fraternities of more than six thousand years B.C. can be said to be purely conjectural.

The term 'Chaldean' commonly means 'astrologers' and 'astronomers', in some of the books of the Old Testament. The priestly class of the Chaldeans seems to have been quite well known for its astrological, astronomical and spiritual knowledge. It is said that the Chaldean priests were invited to different parts of the country to perform ritualistic and other mystical ceremonies. Seton Lloyd says about their cultural contribution to the Babylonian empire: "The Chaldeans appear to have adopted and greatly contributed to the older Babylonian culture. Arts and industries were highly developed, religion and literature were treated with equal seriousness, and great strides were made in the science of astronomy, which was just beginning to emerge from the realm of astrological superstition." Blavatsky also discusses the origin of the Chaldeans and their spiritual wisdom. "The Chaldeans are a tribe of the Akkadians, according to Rawlinson, who lived in Babylonia from the earliest times. They were Sumerians, according to others, and instructed the Babylonians into the first

2. Ibid. pp.71 and 72.
In the ancient history of Iraq, it is clear that the Akkadian and Sumerian tribes existed before the rise of the Chaldeans. But the Akkadians themselves, according to Blavatsky, were Aryans.

In another context in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky describes the occult knowledge of the Chaldeans: "The Chaldeans whom Cicero counts among the oldest magicians, placed the basis of all magic in the inner powers of man's soul, and by the discernment of magical properties in plants, minerals and animals. By the aid of those they performed the most wonderful 'miracles.' Magic, with them, was synonymous with religion and science."

This is how the Chaldean philosophers like Heliobas are made to preach the immortality of the soul in Corelli's novels.

Corelli says that many prophets of the Old Testament, like Esdras and Isaiah, belonged to the fraternities of Chaldeans. Heliobas says in *Ardath*, that Esdras himself delivered his 'visions' to the "supreme chief of these fraternities." He possessed the original text of a portion of the Apocrypha of Esdras. It dated from the "thirtieth year after the downfall of Babylon's commercial prosperity." Heliobas gives a novel description of the text and its script: "Its pages consisted of

2. --Ibid-- p.46.
5. --Ibid-- p. 60.
twelve moderately thick sheets of ivory. It was neither written in Hebrew nor in Sanskrit nor in any discovered forms of hieroglyphic writing. But Heliobas understood it. It was the language once commonly spoken by certain great nations which existed long before the foundations of Babylon were laid. The text which Heliobas possessed was in a prophetic language and was meant "for the use of deeply learned and scientific alone." Heliobas is earnest in his narration but vague in his explanation. The word 'Apocrypha' comes from the Greek 'apokrufhos' which means 'hidden writings.' Apocrypha is a collection of books. They are the books of Old Testament included in Septuagint and Vulgate, but not originally written in Hebrew, nor counted genuine by Jews, and excluded from Canon at Reformation. Heliobas seems to include the visions of Esdras in the Bible because he says that they are "as reliable as any history ever written," and because when he shows the book of the visions of Esdras to Theos Alwyn, Alwyn says that it is 'the Bible' and 'everybody knows it' and to which remark Heliobas says: "Pardon! ... It would be more correct to say nobody knows it! To read is not always to understand. There are meanings and mysteries in it which have never yet been penetrated, and which only the highest and most spiritually gifted

intellects can ever hope to unravel. The Apocrypha are a collection of sacred books; but they are given a secondary place in the Bible. Corelli's mention of the prophet Esdras itself is not clear. 'Esdras' seems to be a form of the name Ezra. The Third Book of Ezra is called by various names, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, 3 Esdras and the Greek Ezra or Esdras. There are different books of Ezra. Heliobas says vaguely that the text of Esdras was dated from the thirtieth year after the downfall of Babylon's commercial prosperity. The Neo-Babylonian empire ends in 539 B.C. Corelli seems to refer to Ezra "the priest and scribe, one of the principal characters in the Chronicler's history of Israel;" who seems to have lived during the reign of the Persian king Artaxerxes (404 - 359 B.C.). But some historians opine that he did not live under the Persian kings. It is possible that some of the prophets of the Old Testament might have emerged from the monasteries of the Chaldeans, as many of them seem to be active after 350 years B.C. The original script of Ezra's "Visions" was not Hebrew, we do not know what it was. Heliobas's entire description of Esdras and his works appears to have been mainly conjectural, a hypothesis built on such data as we have referred to.

1. Arsdth, pp. 51 and 52.
Some prophet of the pre-Christian days predicted the descent of a saviour on earth. They hinted vaguely at the birth of a child, - offspring of a pure virgin - a miraculously conceived God-in-Man, - an absolutely Sinless One who should be sent to remind humanity of its intended final high destiny, - and who should, by precept and example, draw the earth nearer to Heaven." They apprehended the approach of some great era of enlightenment. The whole world seemed to have been stirred then by an unusual experience of the unknown Deity. Heliobas, in *A Romance of Two Worlds*, implies that prophecies were current about the coming of Jesus Christ Himself: "Through the divine influence of an Electric Thought, then, the world unconsciously grew to expect something - they knew not what. The old creeds of the world, like sunflowers, turned towards that unknown Sun; the poets, prophets, seers, all spoke of some approaching consolation and glory and to this day the fated Jews expect it, unwilling to receive as their Messiah the Divine Martyr they slew, though their own Scriptures testify to His identity." Corelli introduces, in her narration of the history of Chaldean fraternities, passages prophetic of the coming of Jesus Christ in order to suggest that the fraternities also had foreseen the coming of Jesus and waited for him.

1. *Ardath*. p. 557
The Cross and Star are mentioned as having been used
as the symbols of the forthcoming Divinity in Chaldean fraternities,
long before the birth of Jesus Christ. Aselzion, a man of austere and strict life, belonged to the fraternity
in Syria. Once while he was experimenting on the Sun's rays,
at noon, to calculate the average quantity of heat and light
per minute, he "beheld a cross of crimson hue suspended in the
sky, whereon hung the cloudy semblance of a human figure."1 The
members of other fraternities stationed in Egypt, Greece, Spain
and Etruria also saw this unique phenomenon at the same time.
This news was sent from one monastery to the other, and all of
them with unanimous decision accepted the cross as "a holy sign
of some Deity unrevealed: Hence the monasteries were then often
described as the 'Fraternities of the Cross.' The monk
Heliobas seems to suggest that, from that day onwards, the cross
was used as a symbol of divinity in the rituals of many other
religions. "This happened some five thousand years before
Christ," and hence the Sign of the Cross became known in all,
or nearly all the ancient rites of worship, the multitude con-
considering that because it was the emblem of the philosophical
Fraternities, it must have some sacred meaning. So it was
used in the service of Serapis and the adoration of the Nile-
God,—it has been found carved on Egyptian discs and obelisks,

1. Ardath. p.556.
and it was included among the numerous symbols of Saturn.¹

Three "Fraternities of the Cross" existed in the ancient
province of Chaldea when the star in the East arose
announcing the birth of Jesus Christ. The members of those fraternities
observed it. Some of them went to Bethlehem to pay homage
to the newly born divine child - Jesus. These were the wise
men of the East mentioned in the New Testament. The star was
then added to the holy Cross and both became the emblems of
Divinity. The Cross and star seemed to be the symbols of salvation
and immortality. Henceforward all the fraternities were
known as the Fraternities of the Cross and the Star.

Corelli's description of the Cross as the symbol of unrevealed Deity with the Chaldean fraternities seems to have been a deliberate invention. It is, rather, a reversion of the history of the Cross. From the very earliest times, different forms of the Cross were used as symbols in the religions of Egypt, Greece, India, and other countries. "The Cross in the Christian sense is ... a wooden post surmounted by a cross-beam, to which the Romans, following the example of the Greeks and the Easterns nailed or attached certain classes of condemned criminals till they died. The fact that Jesus suffered death on the Cross has converted this infamous figure into a symbol

of resurrection and salvation.\(^1\) The sign of the cross was the favourite symbol of early Christians. The Cross as the symbol of Jesus Christ is worshipped in the Catholic Church. The star as a symbol of worship is not usually seen even in the Catholic Church. But it is seen installed as the stage performance of the scenes of Jesus' birth. It is said in *The Soul of Lilith*\(^2\) that the Chaldeans did not have the form of worship of the Roman Catholic Church. They believed a different form of Christianity.

Jesus, having found the Chaldean trustworthy, seems to have taught them his true Gospel at the time of his wandering and before his public appearance as prophet. He seems to have instructed them to keep his doctrine concealed from the profane multitude. Heliobas says in *Ardath* that, though the Chief vow of his Fraternity is secrecy, his brethren are bound to reveal the doctrine of Jesus in a slow measure to the world. Jesus "knew how the proud of this world would misread His words—that is why He came to men, who for thousands of years in succession had steadily practised the qualities He most desired, namely, faith, humility and obedience, and finding them ready to carry out His will, He left with them the mystic secrets of His doctrine, which He forbade them to give to the multitude till men's quarrels and disputations had called His very existence into doubt. Then, through pure channels and by slow degrees, we were

\(^1\) Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Vol. IV. p. 328.

\(^2\) *The Soul of Lilith*, p. 424.
to proclaim to the world His last message."¹ Some of the Chaldean retreats seem to exist in the present days also, but Heliobas does not tell us about their exact location: "There are very few of us left nowadays,—only a dozen Brotherhoods scattered far apart on different portions of the earth, but such as we are, we are all united,—and have never, through these eighteen hundred years, had a shade of difference in opinion concerning the Divinity of Christ. Through Him we have learned 'true' Spiritualism, and all the miraculous power which is the result of it."² Corelli seems to suggest that the occult knowledge of the Chaldeans before Jesus Christ was imperfect. Jesus, for her, is the culmination of the high spiritual attainment. Some of the prophets of the Old Testament were trained in divino knowledge. Zara, the sister of Heliobas, speaks about it in A Romance of Two Worlds: "It was known to Moses and his followers; it was practised in perfection by Christ and His disciples."³ Blavatsky not only mentions the spiritual training of Moses and others but also speaks about the extensiveness of the early esoteric knowledge: "The Chaldean Magic, the science of Moses and other learned thinkers was wholly based on an extensive knowledge of the various and now forgotten branches of natural science."⁴

¹ A Romance of Two Worlds, p. 162. ² A Romance of Two Worlds. ³ A Romance of Two Worlds. ⁴ A Romance of Two Worlds.
secret wisdom: "Ancient and mediaeval scholars believed in the arcane doctrines of wisdom. These included Alchemy, the Chaldean-Jewish Kabala, the esoteric systems of Pythagoras and the old Magi, and those of the later Platonic philosophers and theurgists."

The Chaldean characters dominate Corelli's philosophical novels. They are the propagators of the principles of her 'Electric Creed of Christianity.' They are described as men of profound knowledge and of great spiritual wisdom. All of them worship Jesus Christ as their guiding Angel. Heliobas appears in the three important novels: A Romance of Two Worlds, Ardath and The Soul of Lilith, as a prophet of Corelli's new Creed. In Barabbas, there enters a Chaldean philosopher, Melchior, as an interpreter of Christ's personality and philosophy. His ancestors knew the coming of Jesus: "Those of my race for His coming." Even Corelli's Satan, who appears in the guide of Prince Lucio in The Sorrows of Satan, belongs to the royal family of Chaldea. His forefathers were originally princes of Chaldean Chaldea. The mysterious Aselaion of The Life Everlasting himself was a disciple of the monk Heliobas of Corelli's earlier novels. Corelli bases her new creed of Christianity on Chaldean philosophy. Her Jesus Christ is the greatest spiritual heir of Chaldean thought.

3. The Sorrows of Satan. p. 22.
Corelli rejects all the existing forms of Christianity. She welcomes the true teachings of Jesus Christ and wants to revive the primitive form of Christianity. "The Brethren of the Cross and Star" observe strictly the doctrine of Christ. The sceptic Alwyn, in *Ardath*, becomes a devotee of Jesus in his later life. He does not belong to any sect of Christianity but remains an ardent follower of Christ's principles. "I am not a 'convert' to any particular set form of faith," he says, "what I care for is the faith itself. One can follow and serve Christ without any church-dogma." Aubrey Leigh, the religious reformer in *The Master Christian*, establishes a simple church of primitive Christianity in England. In a letter to the Vicar, Arbuthnot, of the parish church of Stratford-on-Avon, Marie Corelli seems to say that she belonged to a fraternity of Chaldeans: "And though I do not belong to your form of the Christian Faith, nor to the Roman Catholic form either now, I have the greatest respect and reverence for both. I am one of a very numerous 'fraternity'. We are perhaps, between 50,000 and 100,000 altogether - who are bound to try our best to follow the teachings of Christ as enunciated by Himself." Although Corelli is vague in telling us about the location and the number of the fraternity, her form of Christianity seems to resemble closely the Chaldean form described in her novels.

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Mr. J. Cuming Walters, in his article on Marie Corelli, rightly emphasizes her predilection for primitive Christianity and the primitive religions: "She seemed to draw much from the ancient founts of wisdom, but chiefly she relied upon primitive Christianity and its fundamental truths."  

Corelli describes the form of worship observed in the Chaldean fraternities in some of her philosophical novels. It differs but slightly from the Catholic form of worship. The brethren of the fraternities worshipped the Cross and the Star as symbols of Divinity. There were no altars in their Churches. If they were there, the symbols of the Cross and the Star were placed on them. In the monastery of Cyprus, a monk appears "in white garments; with a long rosary twisted into his girdle and a Cross and Star blazoned in gold upon his breast." There was no altar in their chapel but "only an arched recess, wherein stood a large, roughly carved wooden, cross, the base of which was entirely surrounded with the rarest flowers." In the retreat of Caucasus, there were fifteen monks but all of them were not Chaldeans. Three of the brethren were Egyptians, two were the natives of Damascus and the rest were Chaldeans. Each monk had worn "on his breast a massive golden crucifix, hung

2. The Soul of Lilith, p. 417.
3. Ibid., p. 425.
to a chain and fastened with a jewelled star.\(^1\) The star appeared seven-pointed. Asaelion was the priest of the monastery of the Biscayan Coast. The heroine of The Life Everlasting gets her spiritual training under his guidance. The heroine gives a poetic picture of the interior of a mediaeval chapel and of the Chaldean form of worship: "I saw the interior of a small but perfectly beautiful Gothic Chapel, exquisitely designed, glazed, and lit by numerous windows of stained glass, through which the sunlight filtered in streams of radiant colour, pattering among with gold, crimson and blue, the white marble flooring below. Between every tapering column that supported the finely carved roof, were two rows of benches, one above the other, and here sat an array of motionless white figures, men in the garb of their mysterious Order, their faces almost concealed by their drooping cowls. There was no altar in this chapel, but at its eastern end where the altar might have been, was a dark purple curtain against which blazed in brilliant luminance a Cross and Seven-pointed Star.\(^2\)

Corelli's depiction of the origin of the Chaldean fraternities and their relationship with Jesus Christ seems to be based mostly on conjecture. The ancient history of Palestine and of the surrounding countries like, Egypt, Iraq and Asia Minor, is complicated and sometimes obscure. There does

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not seem to be evidence enough as yet to speak of the mingling of races and of the impact of one cultural tradition on another. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decade of the twentieth, the ancient history of Egypt, Iraq and their neighbouring countries was even less known. It was more speculative. The archaeological investigations of the twentieth century have thrown some more light on the past history of these countries. Marie Corelli seems to have gathered some details regarding the history of the Chaldeans and the life of Jesus Christ from some publications of her days. She seems to have been influenced, as in other theories, by some of the theosophical works, like Isis Unveiled. Blavatsky, in her comparative study of the different religions of the world, brings out elaborately the unity that underlies the main principles of philosophy from the pre-Vedic period to the rise of Christianity. She discusses the cultural exchange of ideas, among leading ancient countries and makes some conjectural statements about the races in them. In the course of her writing in Isis Unveiled she says that the Essenes, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Akkadians and Aryans had the same tradition of philosophical thought, differing in minor points according to the periods of human civilization to which they belonged. She considers India as the mother of all philosophical doctrines. Corelli had read her works and she seems to have based her remarks about the Chaldeans, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary on Blavatsky's
Some of the passages in *Isis Unveiled* are quoted below for the sake of reference.

The early exponents of Christian theology seem to have destroyed all the works of occult knowledge which they possessed, in order to emphasize their own theology: "In their insatiable desire to extend the dominion of blind faith, the early architects of Christian theology had been forced to conceal, as much as it was possible, the true sources of the same. To this end they are said to have burned or otherwise destroyed all the original manuscripts on the Kabala, magic and occult sciences upon which they could lay their hands." Hence the theological system of Christianity seems to us to be entirely different from the theological systems of other ancient religions. Judaism seems to have been influenced by Indian and Egyptian philosophy. "The ancient Jews got all their knowledge - religious as well as profane - from the nations with which we see them mixed up from the earliest periods. Even the oldest of all sciences, their Kabalistic 'secret doctrine,' may be traced in each detail to its primeval source, Upper India or Turkestan, far before the time of a distant separation between the Aryan and Semitic nations." In another context in *Isis Unveiled* it is said that "the Jews borrowed most of their laws

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from the Egyptians.\textsuperscript{1} But Egyptians themselves were influenced by the Indians of the pre-Vedic period.\textsuperscript{2} While discussing the origin of the Chaldeans, it has already been stated that the Chaldeans were considered to be Akkadians. But the Akkadians themselves are said to be "a tribe of the Hindu Brahmins now called Aryans."\textsuperscript{3} While considering the life of Jesus Christ, it has been said that Blavatsky regards the doctrines of Jesus as Buddhistic. Blavatsky stresses frequently the fact that the "multitudinous religions faiths" of the world are derived from one primitive source.\textsuperscript{4} The same philosophy has taken different shapes while passing through the different epochs of the world, like a white ray passing through a prism. It is said that all religions differ only in their rituals and that in their essence all are the same: "From the first ages of man the fundamental truths of all that we are permitted to know on earth was in the safe keeping of the adepts of the sanctuary; that the difference in creeds and religious practice was only external; and that those guardians of the primitive divine revelation, who had solved every problem that is within the grasp of human intellect, were bound together by a universal freemasonry of science and philosophy,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1} Isis Unveiled. Vol.II. by Blavatsky. p.434.
  \item --Ibid-- p.435.
  \item --Ibid-- p.46.
  \item --Ibid-- p.639.
\end{itemize}
which formed one unbroken chain around the globe. This passage seems to be quite significant because it may have helped Corelli to imagine the Chaldean fraternities of more than six thousand years B.C., and their continuity to the very dawn of Christianity. Blavatsky also refers to primitive Christian groups: "The primitive Christian community was composed of small groups scattered about and organised into secret societies, each with pass words, grips and signs." There were secret fraternities like Corelli's Chaldean fraternities. A passage in Isis Unveiled reminds us of Heliosas in Ardath, when he narrates the history of his fraternity: "The keys to the Biblical miracles of old, and to the phenomena of modern days; the problems of psychology, physiology, and the many 'missing links' which have so perplexed scientists of late, are all in the hands of secret fraternities. This mystery must be unveiled some day. But till then dark scepticism will constantly interpose its threatening, ugly shadows between God's truths and the spiritual vision of mankind." There is, of course, a fundamental difference in the approaches of Blavatsky and Corelli. Theosophists demand one church for the whole world because they say that there is One Great Truth. On the other hand, Corelli, being a true Christian, wants a universal Church based on the

1. Isis Unveiled, Vol. I. by Blavatsky. p.36.
true teachings of Christ: "The world needs no sectarian Church, whether of Buddha, Jesus, Mahomet, Swedenborg, Calvin, or any other. There being but One Truth, man requires but one church—the Temple of God within us." The passages from *Isis Unveiled*, quoted above, clearly show how much Corelli is indebted to the theosophists, even where she differs from them basically.

There are some contradictory statements in Corelli's account of the Chaldean fraternities. While explaining how the cross was accepted as a symbol of unrevealed Deity, it is said in *Ardath* that the cross was observed in the sky by all the Chaldean fraternities at the same time and was unanimously accepted. But in another context in the same novel a different version of the symbol of the cross is given. In the city of Al-Kyris, 5000 years B.C., an old man Zuriel had worn a cross on his breast. When the sceptic Theos inquires about it, he says: "It is but the Talisman or Badge of the Mystic Brethren of Al-Kyris, and has no significance whatsoever save for the Elect. It was designed some twenty years ago by the inspired Chief of our Order, Khoarul." The cross was the symbol of Khoarul's famous prophecy about the coming of Jesus Christ. Contradictions of this kind in the same novel show that Corelli did not care much for consistency.

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In her account of the inheritors of the Gospel of Jesus Christ also Corelli seems to contradict herself. It is said in Ardath that Jesus left his true doctrines in the hands of the brethren of the Chaldean fraternities. But Manuel—who is none but Christ incognito—says in The Master Christian that Jesus left His teaching in the hands of his twelve disciples. While speaking about the rise of the Roman Catholic Church he says: "He did not found a Church. He tried to make a Human Brotherhood. He trusted twelve men. They all forsook Him in His hour of need, and one betrayed Him! When he died and arose again from the dead, they sought to give themselves a Divine standing on His Divinity. They preached His Word to the world—true!—but they preached their own as well! Hence the Church!" These two views of Corelli, about the teaching of Jesus represent the two sides of her own mind. Manuel speaks in the light of The New Testament; and it is also the belief of the Catholic Church. But what Heliobas says in Ardath seems to be his own peculiar version, a part of that theory of the "Electric Origin of the Universe," which the Church did not accept and which Corelli wanted to propagate. This example is one more proof to show how Corelli laboured all the while

1. Ardath, p. 559.
2. The Master Christian, pp. 429 and 430.
to propagate her new "Electric Creed of Christianity", Corelli was dissatisfied with Christian orthodoxy and was fascinated by theosophical speculations. But she was unwilling to reject the primary Christian dogma. Hence she read as much theosophy and Isis lore as possible and tried to incorporate theosophical doctrines into Christianity. But the insistence on the unicity of the Christ-manifestation leaves the new creed in the realm of dogma. Corelli did not regard as essential that spiritual atmosphere of liberty which, for Blavatsky, was her very life-breath.

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