An attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to place Marie Corelli in her contemporary setting, to examine the particulars of her life with a view to discover their bearing on her works, to give a connected account of her writings themselves and of the kind of fiction to which they belong, along with her views on fiction and art, to set forth her metaphysical beliefs in a cogent manner and to consider in detail her artistic achievement. It now remains to offer a critical estimate of her work and personality based on all this scrutiny and analysis.

Corelli's astounding popularity was not without reason. In spite of her enigmatic and affected way of writing, she attracted a large reading public. She stimulated them to consider the religious and moral problems of life. She lived in an age of transition. The public, which was tossed between faith and scepticism and spirituality and materialism, found in Corelli a moral and spiritual guide. As Coates and Warren Bell say: "At a time when leading dramatists and novelists drag their art in the mud for the sake of the lucre it is refreshing and hope inspiring to find that Corelli, with the
largest public in the world, has ranged herself on the side of Right. She preached the gospel of her beliefs.\(^1\) She stood for purity, for spirituality and for an idealistic view of life. The majority of the public who shrank from the naked descriptions in the novels of sex thought of Corelli as "the only female Richmond in the field."\(^2\) Like Richmond's *Dairyman's Daughter*, her novels gave moral and spiritual advice. Her writings were a veritable cure and a tonic to their ills in life. The poet Tennyson encouraged her to write. Gladstone visited her house once to acknowledge the beneficial power of her novels. "I was curious to see for myself," he told her "the personality of the young woman who could write so courageously and so well, and in whose work I recognize a power working for good, and eminently calculated to sway the thoughts of the people."\(^3\) Some persons gave sermons on some of her works, like *Barabbas* and *The Sorrows of Satan*. One Father Ignatius of Llanthony Abbey claimed Corelli as "a prophet of good things to come in this filthy and materialistic generation."\(^4\) He praised her works extravagantly: "Maria Corelli is doing more for the faith than Archbishops and Bishops and convocations put together."\(^5\) The recent work of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{1.} Marie Corelli by Coates and Warren Bell. p.45.
\item \textbf{2.} Ibid. p.116.
\item \textbf{3.} Miss Marie Corelli- bu K.Carr. p.66.
\item \textbf{4.} Marie Corelli by Bigland. p.161.
\item \textbf{5.} Memoirs of Marie Corelli by B.Vyver. p.139.
\end{itemize}
the Rev. Scott about his friendship with Marie Corelli affirms the fact of her great influence over her contemporaries.

"Art," says Tolstoy, "is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious Idea of Beauty of God; it is not, as the aesthetic physiologists say, a game in which men let off his excess of stored-up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress towards well-being of individuals and of humanity." Marie Corelli's writings went home to the reading public in this very manner. Her works were creations of the time, meant to tackle the problems of life and they filled the public with the hope of good things to come. The public read them eagerly and waited for the promised turn in the tide of life. But as days passed the new era of science became more and more dominant and far-reaching in its effects. The Golden Age was as remote from the ken of men as ever. Men adjusted themselves naturally to the new age. Traditional beliefs in religion and morality were mechanically set aside, as necessitated by this revolution in the conditions.

of men. The decline in belief was also the reason for the
decline in the popularity of Marie Corelli. She did not belong
any longer to the new age. Her Victorian idealism was out-dated.
A quarter of a century after her death there is, however,
even a revival of interest in her works. This is because a
spiritual revival seems to be the next most significant develop-
ment and because there is something of enduring value in
some of her writings, something closely related to the elemental
nature of man. The mere change in manners, in the scale
of morality and in the outward mode of life cannot suppress
permanently the significance of a good work of art. There is,
in her novels, the power which is a means of union among men.

Corelli had gauged the mind of the 'uncritical mob' of
readers of fiction. She knew their tastes, their likes and
dislikes. She appealed always to the primary motives of men.
While lecturing on The Vanishing Gift, she said about the
tastes of her days: "Two of the most notable
signs of such mental and moral decay are, first, a morbid craving
for incessant excitement, and secondly, a disinclination
to serious thinking." She provided excitement in her novels
by various means and, in terms of a thriller, she preached a
ready made Christian creed of her own. She was both an
entertainer and instructor.

Corelli wielded a facile pen. She always selected new themes for her stories. She aimed at sensational, sentimental and pathetic incidents, irrespective of time and place. She introduced unusual descriptions of nature. With dramatic swiftness, her narratives skip from one scene to another. She was aware of contemporary developments in fiction. She accepted the vogue of the scientific romance and wrote The Young Diana and The Secret Power. She exposed some of the contemporary celebrities in society, politics and journalism in novels like The Sorrows of Satan, God's Good Man and Temporal Power. She introduced the doctrine of twin souls and gave a new flavour to sentimental love in her novels. She gave a new shape to Christian philosophy in the light of theosophy. She examined critically all Christian doctrines except one—that of man's redemption through Jesus Christ. She denied the sacerdotal system and sectarian philosophy. She denied the cult of Virgin Mary. She did not believe in man's original sin. Her Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and man. Man should attain godhood through Jesus Christ. Her acceptance of doctrine of rebirth, and her conception of God and the universe reveal the profound influence that theosophy had on her thinking. Corelli was attracted by the subtleties of theosophy. But she was not prepared to accept it in its entirety, either because she did not wish to risk her popularity or
because she wished to win a hearing for cardinal theosophical ideas by placing them in a Christian framework. She absorbed as much of it as she could into her version of Christianity and shrank from it when she had to deny the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the sole divine mediator. By her emphasis on Chaldean philosophy through Chaldean monks in her novels, one could even conclude that she believed in primitive Christianity.

Cuming Walters has noticed this influence of theosophy in her works: "Though disclaiming to be 'either a Spiritualist or Theosophist,' Corelli presented the main beliefs of both with the insight of the hierophant." Corelli's acceptance and incorporation of theosophy into her new creed of Christianity seems to have been the result of a genuine conviction on her part. The propagation of the new creed of Christianity in her novels does not seem to have been affected with a view to exploit it for its commercial possibilities, although its novelty proved to be an astounding commercial success. In her faith, Corelli was neither a hypocrite nor a charlatan. At the worst she was a great poseur like Byron.

Corelli demanded respectability and decency in literature. But on what scale and in which way, she did not say. The

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has not the restraint of a great writer. Her denunciation is often unbalanced. Besides this, she herself describes the seamy side of life, in detail, in the form of history. In *Holy Orders* she seems to have considered the whole press and society of London as fallen: "Stupid London - led astray and fooled by a corrupt society and a corruptible press."¹ But it cannot be said that the whole of society and the press in London were decadent. The decadence in the eighteen nineties concerned only a small section of the London population. Some of the statements made in Corelli's novels regarding upper class London society do not seem to be based on facts. They seem to be exaggerated and inconsistent. Such statements occur in many of her novels. It is quite likely, therefore, that they may be the writer's own views. It is said in *Holy Orders* that the contemporary generation was a "generation of vipers."² Here are some passages from *The Sorrows of Satan*:

"All the women of the upper classes, the unmarried ones, are for sale now in England as utterly as the Circassian girls in a barbarian slave-market."³

"Polygamous purity is the new creed!"⁴

Corelli expresses the same kind of opinion about upper class

¹ - *Holy Orders.* p.472.
society in God's Good Man: "... the men concentrating their thoughts chiefly on racing, gaming, and other men's wives, the women dividing all their stock of emotions between Bridge, Dress and other women's husbands."  

Some of Corelli's statements on men are also unbalanced. It is said in Vendetta that "men are not superior to beasts ... beasts ... tell no lies." In The Murder of Delicia, Corelli seems to pour forth all her bitterness about men. Her introductory note contains gross misstatements. There cannot be "thousands of such murders" as that of Delicia in actual life. At the end of the same novel the novelist says: "Honesty is an ordinary quality in dogs, but it is exceptional in men."  

Corelli denounces realistic novels. But her own descriptions of decadent men and women do not seem to be refined enough. She does not represent them with a detached mind, and she does not seem to be restrained in her descriptions. Her moral purpose is often overshadowed by these exaggerations. Some of her novels like Vendetta, Thelma, Ardath and The Sorrows of Satan are crowded with the incidents and characters of perverted life. The Sorrows of Satan is her consummate work in this line. The character of Sibyl Elton is an extreme example of

vile woman. She defends her sinful life quoting her social
class as authority. Her passion for Lucio and her values of
life are sickening. But the seductive influence of such pre-
presentation on uncritical readers may not be all for the good.

In Thelma there is the bestial behaviour of the dandy, Sir
Francis Lennox. He tries once to seduce Thelma in the barred
room of her house in the absence of her husband. Lennox gives
a false report to Thelma about her husband's disloyalty to her.
She swoons at the shocking news. While she lies in an unconscious
state, Lennox encircles her in his arms and endeavours
to satisfy his animal instincts.

Similarly, her tribute to virtue is frequently unbalanced
and sentimental. Her sentimentality is unrestrained in
some of her novels. It appears increasingly in her later romances
like The Life Everlasting, Innocent, The Treasure of
Heaven and Love and the Philosopher. In the following passage
from The Treasure of Heaven, Mary Beam expresses her love
for her loving man to the old Helmsley whom she nursed with
with the devotion of daughter at the time of his illness.

"If I loved a man, David," - she continued, slowly,
crushing her hands meditatively behind her back, and looking
thoughtfully into the glowing centre of the fire - "I should
love him so completely that I should never think of anything
in which he had not the first and greatest share. I should see
his kind looks in every ray of sunshine - I should hear his loving voice in every note of music, if I were to read a book alone, I should wonder which sentence in it would please him the most - if I plucked a flower, I should ask myself if he would like me to wear it, - I should live through him and for him - he would be my very eyes and heart and soul! The hours would seem empty without him -'

She broke off with a little sob, and her eyes brimmed over with tears.

'Why Mary! Mary, my dear!' murmured Helmsley, stretching out his hand to touch her -

'Don't cry!' 

'I'm not crying, David!' and a rainbow smile lighted her face - 'I'm only just feeling! It's like when I read a little verse of poetry that is very sad and sweet, I get tears into my eyes - and when I talk about love - especially now that I shall never know what it is, something rises in my throat and choked me' -

A novel cannot be dissociated completely from the sentimental side of life. But an excess of sentimentality does harm to the dignity and loftiness of a work of art.

Corelli does not generally deal with love after marriage.

Her novels end with the union or frustration of lovers. Corelli is excessively sentimental in her description of scenes of courtships. Here are some of the recurring phrases and sentences which are used to express the behaviour and feelings of lovers. Corelli's language in this context becomes wooden and coarse and lacks delicacy of touch:

"I met his searching gaze imploringly;" "I lifted my eyes to his, and all doubt seemed swept away in the light of our mutual glances - I smiled in response to his look;" "I left my hands in his another moment. The fact that he held them gave me a sense of peace and security;" "The hand holding mine strengthened its clasp, - and the warm, close pressure sent a thrill through my veins;" "He caught her in his arms - straining her to his heart with all the passion of a long-denied lover's embrace."

In *Love and the Philosopher*, Corelli expresses in a peculiar way the sentimental nature of the girl Sylvia who is in love with the Philosopher. One day when Sylvia and the Philosopher were talking together she interrogated him with the word 'No'. Her facial gesture at that time is described rather in a sugary way:

"'You're playing!' said the Philosopher, severely - 'And I am not always in a playing mood'
The question slid through a little round 0 of a mouth that suggested kisses. The philosopher quickly averted his eyes.¹

Corelli's sentimentalism is not limited to young lovers. She describes the sentimental affection of a young woman for an old man of her father's age in The Treasure of Heaven. A wealthy spinster showers her affection on a boy of low class society in Boy. Eileen Bigland describes this aspect of Corelli's style as "sticky sentimentality."² Sentimentality springs in a person from a sympathetic understanding of the pathetic and tragic experiences of others. Hence it has an important place in creative literature. But it should not be overemphasized. If it is, the quality of a work of art is bound to suffer. Since she did not have a deep insight into the springs of human character and personality, the citizens of the Corelli world are either anemic creatures or sentimental types and abstractions. They live in the light of lyrical description rather than by their own dynamism.

Some biographers of Corelli like Kent Carr and Coates and Warren Bell have praised her exuberant, poetic, picturesque and vigorous way of writing. In A Guide to the Best Fiction, E. A.

1. Love and the Philosopher, p.20.
2. Marie Corelli by E. Bigland, p.16.
Baker refers to the elaborate descriptions in Thelma and to her transcendental manner in Wormwood and The Sorrows of Satan. He also refers to the splendiferous scenic accomplishments in Berabas. While reviewing The Sorrows of Satan, W.T. Stead wrote about her great command of language and the limitless audacity in her writing.

But some of her contemporaries who probably had better artistic sensibility refused to recognize Corelli's genius. The women novelist, Rhoda Broughton, who had a gift of lively characterization, refused to acknowledge Corelli's genius. The writer of the article on Marie Corelli in the Encyclopaedia Britannica remarks: "Marie Corelli wrote quite sincerely and with conviction, if in bad style." "Bad style" is a vague phrase. Corelli's sincerity is also questionable. Harold Williams is severely critical in his strictures on her works in Modern English Writers: "Her melodramatic moral tales, though preposterous in matter, have probably worked no harm in themselves; they may certainly have done something to lower the standard of taste for readers who were unable to recognize under a parade of novelty a complete absence of originality, grotesque travesty of social life, and a slipshod style full of inaccuracies and gross solecisms." In comparison with the works of great novelists, Corelli's novels reveal many deficiencies. She does not have an organic and individual style.

2. Encyclopaedia Britannica. Vol. VI.
Her depiction of the decadent life of upper class London Society is exaggerated and prejudiced. The better side is completely ignored. Except for some of her philosophical speculations and discussions on Christianity, the subject matter of her romances seems to be trivial and ephemeral. Some of the words newly coined by her are strange and her punctuation is whimsical and loose. All these defects may almost seem to bear out the remarks of Harold Williams on Corelli which remind one of what Oscar Wilde said about her on a certain occasion. When Wilde was in prison, a warder asked him once whether he would consider Marie Corelli a great writer. To this Wilde replied: "Now don't think I've anything against her moral character, but from the way she writes she ought to be hore." But Harold Williams has not done justice to the remarkable gifts that Corelli possessed as a writer, her gift of story-telling, her descriptive power and her vivid and imaginative presentation of new and significant ideas. In a review of Ursula Bloom's *The Elegant Edwardian* in *The Listener* of September 26, 1957 there is a reference to Corelli's works: "That the trumpery writings of this (i.e. Marie Corelli) inordinately vain, silly, touch, and humourless woman should have been thought so highly of is in itself an indictment of the period." But to indict Corelli's works as 'trumpery' seems to be an inappropriate judgement on imperfect knowledge.

While reviewing W.S. Scott's book on Marie Corelli in The Manchester Guardian Weekly, Mr. Norman Sharpnel referred to Scott's views on the 'legendary' existence of Corelli and made a bold remark concerning her personality: "The only relevance Marie Corelli has for our day, a century after her birth, is as a reminder of the power of spiritual delusion. ... Mr. Scott ... considers that she will always be a legend to give it as much documentation as possible." Marie Corelli is not 'a reminder of the power of spiritual delusion.' If it is held that faith and spirituality are themselves a delusion, one can only answer that they are matters of intuitive experience, not of intellectual argumentation. Even a saint cannot convince a sceptic about his experience of the spiritual world. Here reason cannot explain spiritual reality. As Radhakrishnan says: "Men has the faculty of divine insight or mystic intuition, by which he transcends the distinctions of intellect and solves the riddle of reason." Intuitive perception alone enables men to grasp spiritual reality. The reprints of Corelli's novels are a proof of the survival of faith and of the enduring significance of her expression of it.

Corelli is no more a 'legend' or an 'enigma'. Scott's view of her life and work is of the past. The details of Corelli's life were not clearly known till her death. It would be true to

say that Corelli's vanity and her love of mystification were themselves responsible for making her a legendary and enigmatic figure and for even promoting harsher views of her life and character. She was born as an illegitimate child. Some stories of legendary nature therefore clustered round her birth and Corelli herself spread some fanciful stories about her peculiar birth and adoption. She was supposed to be the adopted child of Dr. Mackay. But she was his illegitimate child. The facts about her birth were unknown even to herself till her father's death. When she became aware of them, she had already attained abundant popularity. Being very sensitive, she kept her illegitimacy as a guarded secret throughout her life. Corelli had neither academic training nor a profound knowledge of literature. Her phenomenal popularity made her self-centered and conceited. She was at no time on good terms with the press which never took her work seriously. The press always made fun of them. Her knowledge of the world was very much restricted and even prejudiced and one-sided. Her scientific knowledge was negligible. Her philosophy was reared on inadequate foundations. She was, after all, a 'popular' writer. Her awareness of her own limitations made her assume a pose which it was difficult to keep up. She was greatly influenced by theosophy and she even propagated theosophical doctrines. But nowhere did she acknowledge in her works her indebtedness to theosophy. She always claimed that the principles of her new creed of Christianity
were based on the sole authority of the New Testament. She posed as an original thinker and as an authority on occult wisdom throughout her life. Although she firmly believed in the doctrines of her creed, her way of writing and living had something pretentious about it. Some critics therefore called her an 'imposter.'

Her impulsive and dogmatic character led to greater misunderstanding and conflict as she grew older and older. The better side of her character was known only to a few of her friends. She thus came to be considered as an enigma and a legend. But recent biographies have clarified the facts about her life and lifted the veil from her character and personality.

To sum up, Corelli did not contribute much to the form of the novel, apart from adding some of her own works to popular fiction, especially the philosophic romances. Her works may not appear so exciting today as they were in her own time. They belong to a past generation with values of life that are considerably different from our own. But her stories appeal to the primary instincts of men. They make emotional and exciting reading even today. Eileen Bigland cites in her biography valuable evidence about the interest of the present day in her novels: "Ask people why they read Marie Corelli's romances and they will answer 'They're so incredibly lush,' or 'They're such delicious period"

One young man home from Malaya told me the other day that he read them while in the jungle 'because they make me laugh like a drain and take my mind off the bandits'. For myself I think the real reason behind the renewed attraction of the Corelli novels is that they provide a form of escape from the uncomfortable and precarious existence most of us now endure. Despite their melodrama, their sticky sentimentality, their fantastic theories on anything from religion to electricity, they mirror a spacious, elegant way of life which has gone for ever, and even if we declare stoutly 'A good thing too!' we cannot help finding descriptions of that life irresistibly fascinating.¹ To these reasons should be added the charm and novelty of Corelli's philosophical doctrines. Her attempt to interpret the New Testament in the light of Theosophy, though inevitably partial in its results, is of great significance for the future; for the world is moving today towards a universal religion, the fundamentals of which are being discovered by scientists with a new thrill of surprise. The East and West have met and are converging towards this synthesis, and it is this convergence that is charmingly though partially, prefigured in the romances of Marie Corelli, in terms of her electrical creed. Her romances survive both for their literary and their philosophic interest. And Corelli herself will be remembered as a woman who did not sacrifice her womanliness for masculinity, and as a personality of unusual vitality and courage.

¹ Marie Corelli - by Eileen Bigland. p.16.
The final impression left on the reader's mind by Corelli's writings is perhaps one of an invincible optimism, of a deep faith in life. Corelli is passionately in love with life. None of her characters even remotely inculcates the idea of pessimism. She is conscious of the good and evil forces in the world and of the conflict between them. Sometimes evil may seem triumphant over good. But this does not last for ever and good ultimately succeeds. The sinners in her fiction are either repentant at the end or they are punished for their sins. The good men and women are rewarded for all their goodness. If sometimes the good persons die, their deaths have something sublime about them. Great moral integrity and the progress of the soul are all the meaning of life. The soul, being a spark of God, knows no death. It may migrate from one body or life to another before its attainment of perfection. But it is immortal. Nor does Corelli condemn the pleasures of the body. The body is the temple of the soul. It is meant for the nourishment of the soul. Having a vision of his final goal, man should enjoy the pleasures of earth, endure suffering stoically and prepare himself for the future glory. Corelli had strong faith in the life after death. Although she was disillusioned in later life regarding her ideal of a platonic love-union, her belief in the possibility of its fulfilment in her future birth never flagged.

Corelli blames the ignorance and wickedness of men for the
existence of misery in the world. There is no such thing as misery in the creation of God. Man cannot escape the legitimate consequences of the law of compensation. He suffers for his sinful deeds and through his suffering he has to overcome the impulses of his body. In all her novels there is a passionate plea for the happiness that is life. Like Miranda in The Tempest, the heroine of The Life Everlasting exclaims in her joy: "How glorious was the world, I thought! - how full of perfect beauty!" It is this vitality of her message that will keep her philosophic romances alive. The best of the melodramatic novels, on the other hand, will continue to provide rich entertainment to the reader both by their story interest and descriptive charm.

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