PART-I: PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS.
Marie Corelli's Writings in relation to her times.

"The 'spirit of the age' is a shadow which walks inexorably by the side of the novelist and which he cannot escape."

— Elizabeth Drew.

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Marie Corelli's life covers three significant phases of English literary history - the Victorian age, the eighteen nineties and the first quarter of the twentieth century. The Victorian age gives shade and light to her portraiture of the life of the eighteen nineties and the early part of the twentieth century. The literary history of England shows that the Victorian age was already in its decline at the end of the eighteen sixties, and that a few intellectuals like Meredith, Samuel Butler and Hardy had begun to revolt against its superficial conventionalities. A new scientific era was setting in. Although Corelli grew up in Victorian traditions both in her childhood and girlhood, she experienced the changing social order and the bewildering literary growth of the new age in her later life. Hers was an age of transition. It was a period of conflict between Victorian tradition and the new Age of Interrogation. She imbibed some of the progressive notions of the new age and adjusted them, with a few changes, to the traditional ways which were her heritage. Her novels reveal the fact that Victorian idealism

had won her heart. Her cry for spirituality symbolises the
voice of the tormented soul of the eighteen nineties.

Philistines dominated the Victorian age. Utility and
progress were the key-words of the age. The new factory 'lords'
stepped into the sphere of the crumbling aristocracy. Queen
Victoria "maintained her court as the last stronghold of aris-
tocratic exclusiveness." But her successors could not keep
up its prestige. The peerage was put to auction. "The English
aristocracy was once a magnificent tree", says El-Rami in
The Soul of Lilith", "but its broad boughs are fallen,-lopped
off and turned into saleable timber, - and there is but a decaying
stump of it left." The industrial revolution completely
transformed man's environment and the conditions of life. This
process of transformation continues still. "Life is a perpetual
endeavour of the creature to adapt itself to environment. When
environment changes too fast or too abruptly for adaptation to
keep pace with it, there is extinction." The exuberant vitality
and complacency of the mid-Victorian age were no longer the
guiding forces in the later part of the nineteenth century. "A
new spirit of restlessness, anarchy and adventurous experiment
is tending to replace the imposing airs and decorous wisdom of
the Victorian compromise in all things." The Victorian age

2. The Soul of Lilith. p.22.
3. The Victorian Aftermath by Wingfield-Stratford. p.XI.
4. A History of English Literature by Legouis and Cazamian. p.12-
1258.
emphasised the respectability of family life. "The Voice of Authority was accepted in religion, in politics, in literature, in family life.¹ But Victorianism was torn to shreds and was ridiculed by the end of the nineteenth century. The repressed instincts of the flesh were set loose again. 'Solemn and Scarlet Sins were trumpeted with evangelical fervour' in the jingling verse of Swinburne. The Victorian complacency was undermined by the 'ripple of Butlerian and Shawian laughter and the suppressed yawn of Oscar Wilde.'² Darwin shocked the Victorian mind. Man no longer remained the 'image of God'. The new man belonged to the Age of Interrogation. He had become self-conscious. He questioned everything before he could accept it.

"The early twentieth century had for its characteristic to put everything, in every sphere of life, to the question, and secondly, in the light of this scepticism, to reform, to reconstruct - to accept the new age as new, and attempt to mould it by conscious, purposeful effort."³ The Victorian Age was one of sham.

"Its religion, its morality, its social system whatever it had of philosophy, were the supports of a spiritual Fonthill, under the protection of a vast decency that forbade any probing into foundations or examinations of fissures."⁴

¹ Twentieth Century Literature by A.G.Ward. pp.2 & 3.
² The Victorian Tragedy by Wingfield-Stratford. pp.287.
³ Fifty Years of English Literature by Scott-James. pp.4.
⁴ The Victorian Aftermath by Wingfield-Stratford. pp.XII.
Corelli's literary career begins about the beginning of the eighteen nineties which are a unique period in English literary history. In 1895 Corelli seems to give her verdict about her age through a character in *The Sorrows of Satan*. Lucio - Satan incognito - tells the hero of the novel: "You belong to the age, Tempest, - it is a decadent ephemeral age, and most things connected with it are decadent and ephemeral." The statement is a partial truth and it applies only to the ephemeral, decadent growth of literature, and to the perverted life of the upper class society of the day. But it gives a clear idea about Marie Corelli's restricted region of experience. Her novels reveal her reactions to the social, moral, religious, literary and political developments and movements of the eighteen nineties and the early part of the twentieth century.

Corelli's experience of life was limited mostly to glamorous circles of fashionable society like those of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. The main features of the notorious side of the eighteen nineties were 'perversity, artificiality, egoism and curiosity'. Victorian writers had not indulged in the depiction of the obscene side of life. But the decadent writers deliberately took a fantastic pleasure in it. "It was as though they had grown tired of being good, in the old accepted way, they wanted to experience the piquancy of being good"

after a debauch. There was a revival of Restoration tavern and club-life. Men and women cultivated the habit of dining out. The pale youths lived passionately in a succession of 'scarlet moments'. Some of Sorrelli's novels like Thelma and The Sorrows of Satan, give vivid pictures of such social life. Tempest in The Sorrows of Satan "frequented low houses and allowed a few half-nude brandy-soaked dancers and vulgar music hall 'artistes' to get a couple of thousand pounds worth of jewels out of him. Such an experience of life was called 'seeing life'. Men sought for their 'Noras' in street corners. Individual freedom degenerated into licentious conduct. The new emancipated women were after seductive sensations. The woman cyclist was a novelty. The woman looked "sweet upon the seat of a bicycle made for two." 'New Women' wore 'neat knickerbocker suits' instead of skirts. The influential bawd, Mrs. Madden, in June, "in a short tweed skirt and knickers appearing beneath, sitting astride on a bicycle, her thick ankles and flat feet well exposed" was the "most comical sight of all." Upper class society was not less degenerate in the early part of the twentieth century. King Edward VII was the 'supreme symbol' of enjoyment and security for his subjects. Society had been a closed and limited circle in the mid-Victorian era. It was not easy for the philistine.

2. The Sorrows of Satan. pp. 179.
5. The Victorian Aftermath - by Wingfield-Stratford. pp. 41.
to enter it. But by the beginning of the twentieth century society ceased to have any organic unity. It covered all sorts of cliques of the fallen aristocracy and of new 'commercial kings'. "The London season from May to mid-July, was, like the mating-time of animals, one of feverish courtships in which the young of both sexes were brought into contact under circumstances best calculated to provoke the sexual urge."1 Society had become a 'promiscuous set'. Men spent money lavishly for dress and entertainment. "Social value was publicity value— even beauty craved for advertisement."2 This glamorous society of the eighteen nineties served as a sensational theme for the popular novelists of the day. They gave detailed descriptions of the seamy side of life. 'Crushes', 'seasons' and 'social parties at home' are often mentioned in Corelli's novels. Sibyl— the heroine in The Sorrows of Satan— gives the illustration of a London lady who exhibited her bodily charms for sale: "There is a famous lady in London who advertises her saleable charms to the outside public by means of her monograms worked into the lace of all her window-blinds, thinking it no doubt good for trade."3 However, it would be wrong to conclude that the entire upper class society was a hotbed of vice. "Society as a whole, was not specially sinful, though it may have included and tolerated cliques of practising sensualists."4 The Press and the novelists wrote exaggerated descriptions of this sordid life, and

1. The Victorian Aftermath—by Wingfield-Stratford. pp.44.8.
2. Ibid— pp.52.
played on the feelings of the reading public who always craved for thrilling news.

The eighteen nineties and the first decade of the twentieth century were an age of nerves. Science had supplied new equipment. The common man became acquainted with the bicycle, the motor-cycle, the motor-car, the phonograph, wireless telegraphy and the X-rays. Economic collapse put family life in disorder. Cycles and motor-cars promoted freedom of movement. Woman entered into the sphere of public activities. The moral code was naturally relaxed. Men and women formed unsanctified relationships. "Sexual morality began to seem more a matter of simple personal hygiene than of inexorable laws of the Deity". Contraceptive devices removed the fear of child-birth. The journalist and the advertiser, not only published collected sensational news but even created them. Thrilling incidents, like seasoned accounts of the foulest crimes, sins, divorces, and a miscellany of horrors filled the popular newspapers of the day. Although Corelli condemns the morbid craving of the public for sensational writing, her novels themselves are calculated to satisfy this craving. But she did not admire mere material progress. In some of her novels like The Treasure of Heaven, Holy Orders, The Devil's Motor and The Secret Power she describes the evils of motor-cars, airships and dreadful weapons.

Beligion and morality, though they were not based on personal conviction, had a disciplinary effect during the Victorian period. "With all its shortcomings the Victorian religion...\[1\] But the new age of science interrogated Victorian piety. "Darwin and the theories of natural selection and social evolution" threatened "the citadels of orthodox Christianity.\[2\] Men questioned even the authority of the Bible and began to comment upon it. The Encyclopaedia Biblica, edited by the great Biblical scholar Canon Cheyne, "went further in its destructive criticism of Holy Writ than most avowed Rationalists would have dared.\[3\] Lectures were delivered on religious problems and sometimes even on anti-Christianity in Hyde Park. "Do we believe?"\[4\] was a burning question. The public slackened in their habit of Church going. Christianity ceased generally to exercise any influence on national life. "The spirit of individual and collective egotism reigned supreme and almost unchallenged, driving the nations headlong to the suicide of civilization, and Christianity, with its authority undermined, had apparently no message of salvation of distracted humanity, but could only offer one of several competing brands of emotional dope.\[5\] However there were attempts at a revival of faith.

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5. --- Ibid --- pp. 128.
Numerous Christian and some non-Christian sects were started in the United States and the United Kingdom. The Anglo-Catholic Church became effective within the Anglican fold. The new sects of Christianity emphasized the teaching of the New Testament in a new way. It was at this time also that Theosophical Society was founded in 1875 in New York, and, within a few years, its branches were established in Great Britain, India and other nations. The decadence and scepticism of the eighteen nineties and the early part of the twentieth century were "a form of soul-sickness, and the only cure for the disease was mysticism." The bewildered public sought for a convincing faith here and there. Marie Corelli was aware of this search. "Inspite of the doctrines of agnostics and materialists," she says in the introduction to A Romance of Two Worlds, "there is a perpetual, passionate craving in the souls of many for that inward peace and absolute content." She condemned the 'crave for spiritualism', hypnotism and the table turning phenomenon of the seances. She discussed them in her introductions and in her novels like A Romance of Two Worlds, Ardath and The Soul of Lilith and pointed to the true spiritual progress of man. In her missionary zeal, she introduces in her novels atheists and agnostics like Sibyl, Tempest, Alwyn and

2. A Romance of Two Worlds. pp.XVI.
3. The Sorrows of Satan.
4. Ardath
El Ramí, who, in the course of their lives go through peculiar, even horrible experiences and are converted to a true religious earnestness at the end. The propagation of her "Electric Theory of Christianity" was Corelli's main religious mission throughout her literary career. Hers was a new interpretation of the New Testament. She denied the doctrine of man's Original Sin and of Christ's sacrifice for the redemption of mankind. "Christ did not come to us as sacrifice but as a means of close communication with God." Corelli knew that she lived in "an age of universal inquiry." She had heard the atheistic cries "No God, No Creator". The investigations of the scientists tended to promote a sceptical and cynical attitude towards life and towards the supernatural. Corelli waited for a clearer revelation of God and of the meaning of His creation.

But the eighteen nineties were not just a period of mere decadence. They were rather an age of renaissance. There was a general awakening then among the peoples of the world. Man had become conscious of his individuality. "People felt they were living amid changes and struggles, intellectual social and spiritual, and the interpreters of the hour - the publicists,

2. * A Romance of Two Worlds. pp.XXIV.
Journalists and popular purveyors of ideas of all kinds did not fail to make a sort of traffic in the spirit of the times.¹

England was prosperous on account of her industrial progress and imperial expansion. The public had an ardour for "a fuller communal and personal life". It was a period of new experimentation and adventure. A new romanticism made itself felt both in life and in literature.

It is not possible to draw a rigid dividing line between one literary epoch and another. Like life, literature is a continuous flow. Old currents continue to exist when new ones start in a period of renaissance. Some Victorian literary movements continued with a new vigour in the eighteen nineties. The movements which sprang up in the eighteen nineties gained prominence in the early part of the twentieth century.

Whistler imported the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' into England from France and the doctrine reached its extremity in Oscar Wilde and his group. 'Art for art's sake was an exclusive cult for a select people. ¹ Ruskin emphasized the moral purpose of art. Walter Pater, departing from the ethical function of art, professed an aesthetic hedonism. But his aestheticism had a "pronounced moral attitude toward life and art".² Oscar Wilde separated art from life. For him, art was not an integral part of life. It existed for its own sake. Therefore

¹ The Eighteen Nineties by Holbrook Jackson. p. 18.
² Modern English Writers - by Harold Williams. pp. 7.
the doctrine of 'art for art's sake' led to 'artistic anarchy' and moral chaos. When the British public saw that Oscar Wilde was the arch-priest of sociological hedonism, they "hounded him out of England to die in Paris." Corelli had no sympathy for hedonists. There was almost a puritanic fervour in her crusade for purity and for religion.

There was also an idealistic and mystical movement. Although Carlyle died in 1881, his prophetic voice continued to influence later generations. Carlyle denounced the utilitarian philosophy and complacency of the Victorian era. Industrialized society was in his eyes, a diseased society. To him, industry seemed to crush humanity. He praised the glory of the spirit in man. He emphasized self-denial, renunciation and the purification of the soul. Like Carlyle, Ruskin also attacked commercialism. G.K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc criticized the mechanized life of a scientific age, - its materialism, its uncertainties and its reasoning mania of unregulated intelligences. Both Chesterton and Belloc were orthodox Roman Catholics. Chesterton often contradicted the radical ideas and theories of revolutionaries like Shaw and Wells. Hardy and Meredith revolted against the mechanical civilization of their age. Reason and for Meredith was an illumination. He believed in the free self-possession of the soul. In his earlier life, he was

1. The Eighteen Nineties - by Holbrook Jackson. p. 57.
influenced by Carlylo, and later by German metaphysics. Hardy also regarded modern civilization as a curse on humanity and accepted science grimly. Mystical poets like Coventry Patmore and Francis Thompson sang of the spiritual affinity between God and man. Marie Corelli was in deep sympathy with this trend of her age. She condemned the mechanical and fleshy life of her period. Although she did not belong to any known sect of Christianity, as she herself said, she stood for the spiritual life and for the purification of man's soul.

Ernest Henley and Rudyard Kipling were the poets and prophets of imperialism. Both endowed imperial motives with a religious fervour. Henley found the remedy for an over-refined civilization in the primitive virtue of adventure. The British empire was, for Kipling, the 'white man's burden'. "The British empire is not only a physical fact to Kipling, it is a psychic phenomenon and a natural religion." His 'soldier-like code of ethics' mattered much to the British public of his days. Needless to say, this was a trend of the age in which Corelli was not much interested. She took the Commonwealth and the British empire as she found them, - a far-flung area from which she drew millions of her admiring readers.

The Celtic Revival was a romantic movement and, in a way, it strengthened, indirectly and partially at least, the attitude for which Corelli stood. Yeats's first publications

like The Countess Cathleen and The Celtic Twilight created a new romanticism in English literary history. George Russell and W.B. Yeats composed poetry of rare beauty and their study of theosophy enriched their natural inclination towards mysticism. Marie Corelli was similarly influenced by theosophy. But she made an objective rather than a subjective use of it, as a motive in fiction rather than as a path of experience and exploration.

Samuel Butler, Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells disturbed the very foundations of Victorian orthodoxy. They put Victorian idealism to the acid test of their intelligence. Butler sought for a rational religion. He gave a new interpretation of the miracle of Jesus's resurrection. His works, like Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh assail, with incessant allusions, the Church, its ministers and the practice of the 'faithful'. Shaw was Challenge incarnate - a rampant note of interrogation, eternally asking us uncomfortable questions about our most cherished habits. Shaw warred against moral slavery, superstition, sentimentalism, social apathy and selfishness. Like Shaw Wells also dealt with the problems of contemporary society. Corelli was at one with them in their exposure of the evils of contemporary society and of its moral degeneration and hypocrisy. But the remedy she prescribed for these evils was different from

theirs. If Butler believed in a rational religion and Shaw in the Life Force, Corelli evolved a new theory of Christianity and commended it to the public for assimilation and for practice.

Another movement of the period is perceptible in the translations of the works of great foreign writers. The masterpieces of Turgenev, Ibsen, Balsac, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant, Huysman, and Nietzsche were translated and made available to the English reading public. These translations created a new sensation. Their influence can be clearly seen in the works of Shaw, George Moore, Gissing and other writers. The new realism in fiction and drama was not quite palatable to Marie Corelli. She believed in Romance and she protested vehemently against the fleshly school of writing in her pronouncements on fiction and art.

Perhaps no other form of literature awakened such widespread interest as fiction in the eighteen nineties. Continental influences aroused new sensibilities and promoted new artistic techniques. The ideas and methods of French novelists were eagerly assimilated by English writers and they began to experiment on the same lines. Oscar Wilde was inspired by Huysman's A Rebours to write his novel - The Picture of Dorian Gray. The luscious suggestiveness of his novel pleased some and shocked others. George Moore was a great novelist of the
French naturalistic school. His novels like *A Mummer's Wife* and *Esther Waters* laid bare the sordid life of low class society. In *A Mummer's Wife* - a wife, as the title suggests, being disgusted with her bedridden, coughing husband, the dirty house, and its fetid atmosphere elopes with a travelling actor and lives a life of drunken wretchedness. *Esther Waters* deals with the illegal relationships of a maid-servant. George Gissing also wrote realistic novels about the life of low class society. In *Thyra* he depicted the life of a factory girl. In *The Unclassed*, two girls rescue themselves from the pavement to live a decent life. Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* was a naturalistic novel. Other novels like Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and Somerset Maugham's *Liza of Lambeth* also reveal the influence of the French naturalistic school at work.

In the hands of the minor writers of the latter part of the nineteenth century, the novel had degenerated from an artistic creation into a commercial product. Printing was comparatively cheap and the press had become powerful. The majority of readers cared little for art. They read novels for entertainment. The trick of stringing together in a plausible manner thrilling or laughable incidents was not difficult to learn. A great number of entertainers appeared on the scene. The novelists like Mrs. Humphry Ward, Sarah Grand and Hall -

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1. Modern English Writers by H. Williams, p. 358.
Caine wrote novels 'with a finger on the public pulse'. They dealt seriously with all the burning topics of the day. "Ethical and propagandism, abstract intellectualism, debate upon economic, social, religious and sexual questions, strenuous realism... have often warred against the things that are more excellent. ... For these dilettante in seriousness there is no question of art. A book is nothing in itself apart from the moral instruction it conveys. For the magic of style they have no faculty of appreciation; emotion and imagination only puzzle them. And humour, without which life cannot be clearly seen, they probably regard as unworthy the dignity of better-class fiction."

The women-novelists made their own significant contribution to the popular fiction of the period. Compulsory education, reading, the feminist movement and the new vogue of the novel stimulated them to write on the social, moral and religious problems of contemporary life. The novel was for them, an easy vehicle for posing these problems before a vast reading public. As E.A. Baker says: "The authors took themselves and their duties as seriously as if they were George Eliots; and their readers seem to have preferred them, for as much as they provided cut-and-dried solutions of the most harassing riddles.

For they narrowed their vision so as to see life as made up of problems, which is as much as to say that they reduced it to a series of abstractions.\textsuperscript{1}

The women-novelists belong to two groups, - those who defended Victorian idealism and those who welcomed the new spirit of self-consciousness. Margaret Oliphant, Humphry Ward and Marie Corelli stood for Victorian idealism. Mrs. Oliphant dealt with the problems of the Church and clerical life in novels like Salem Chapel, The Rector and The Perpetual Curate. In Phoebe Junior, she wrote about the 'new woman'. Some of Mrs. Oliphant's spiritual romances like A Beleaguered City, A Little Pilgrim in the Unseen and The Land of Darkness tell us about the life seen and unseen, here and hereafter, like Corelli's A Romance of Two Worlds. Hall Caine's The Eternal City, though it manifestly deals with the moral and religious life of Rome, gives "a glimpse of the future and a religion founded upon the Lord's Prayer."\textsuperscript{2} The only difference between Corelli and these other novelists was that Corrielli presented religious themes both from the Christian and non-Christian angle whereas the others presented them only from the Christian point of view. Mrs. Humphry Ward's famous work, Robert Elsmere, dealt with the conflicts between religion, philosophy and science. It was made moving by lively characterization.

\textsuperscript{1} The History of the English Novel-Yesterday by E.A. Baker. pp. 213.
\textsuperscript{2} Modern English Writers by K. Williams. pp. 360.
and dramatic force. In *Helbeck of Bannisdale* she depicted the love affairs of a man of Catholic faith and an agnostic girl. In Olive Schreiner’s *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* and in *The Resurrection of Peter Christ* appears in person as in Corelli’s *The Master Christian*. Two years before Corelli’s *The Mighty Atom*, Iota published *A Yellow Asper* in which, unlike Corelli, she demanded the exclusion of religious teaching from the instruction imparted to children.

Some writers of the naturalistic school of fiction dealt elaborately with themes relating to sex. They favoured free union and equality of the sexes. Sarah Grand’s *Ida* was like Grant Allen’s *The Woman Who Did* a sex novel. Her depiction of the problems of sex was exaggerated and morbid. The same was the case with the works of Ouida. Corelli hated novels relating to sex. She was a champion of respectability like the Victorians. She condemned such novels and depicted, in her own works, the sordid life of a degenerate society in order to make it appear repulsive. This can be seen in her *Wormwood*, *The Sorrows of Satan* and *The Murder of Selica*.

Romance also received a new impetus during this period. It appeared in varied forms. Although Stevenson died in 1894, his *Treasure Island* delighted the reading public for several generations after his death. His passion for dramatic adventure...
Graham and his knowledge of the psychology of the child mind influenced several new writers. Kenneth Grahame created a new realm of delight in The Golden Age and Dream Days. In Dead Man's Rock, Quiller Couch wrote about the quest of the great ruby of Ceylon in the macabre manner of the tales of Stevenson. William Morris published his most enchanting Utopia, News from Nowhere in 1891. Conrad and Kipling endeavoured to blend romance and realism in a new manner. Conrad's stories, like An Outcast of the Islands and The Nigger of the Narcissus, described the lives of heroic adventurers in the midst of the wildest surroundings of nature. Kipling's Kim held even the least initiated reader in the grip of its kaleidoscopic romance. He wrote some poetic fantasies like They and The Brushwood Boy. In The Jungle Book he invented a new imaginative world in which wild beasts speak. In Puck of Pook's Hill and Rewards and Fairies, he wrote charming stories for young people with an admixture of history and romance. W.K. Hudson wrote some Utopian and picaresque romances like A Crystal Age, The Purple Land and Green Mansions. H.G. Wells helped to establish the new world of scientific romances in his works like The War of the Worlds and The Invisible Man. He based his romances on scientific theories and inventions. In The Time Machine he told a story about a machine which could

transport man at his will into the past or future. Well's romances influenced others. In *The Children of the Zodiac*, Kipling symbolised the commerce between man and the celestial powers. Corelli's romances, like *The Young Diana* and *The Secret Power*, also reveal the influence of this vogue of scientific romances.

There was another kind of popular romance which, with its sensationalism and melodrama, fascinated the reading public. Most women novelists of the day were not writers of thrillers, although their works had a melodramatic quality. The sensational thrill novels were mainly written by men. The thrillers of Rider Haggard were less pretentious and had a racy vigour in them. He endowed the incredible and improbable with an air of reality. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created a famous detective character, Sherlock Holmes, in *A Study of Scarlet* and set the vogue of the detective novel. The popular thriller perhaps reached its climax in Hall Caine. He had imaginative power. But his work was pretentious, sensational, and incredible. Among women novelists, Corelli was the most prominent writer of thrillers. Her *Vendetta* and *Wormwood* showed that there was also a masculine quality in her genius. But she was less robust and less artistic than Hall Caine.

Mrs. Oliphant and Mrs. Humphry Ward were highly intellectual and they were quite indifferent to sentiment and sex. Women novelists of the 'naturalistic school' also were
intellectual and frank in their presentation of the problems of sex. Sentimentality is not, usually, a man's attribute. Corelli like some of her sex, Beatrice Harraden and Mrs. Clifford, attracted her readers by sentimental ethics and simple piety. Her stories were lavishly sentimental. Like Mrs. Oliphant Humphry Ward and Mrs. Linton, Corelli defended Victorian traditions. Like them, she was not inclined favourably towards the feminine movement and towards novels of sex. Mrs. Humphry Ward had the gift of strong characterization and dramatic force, which Corelli lacked. Both these writers suffered from an incapacity for humour. Mrs. Oliphant possessed, unlike Corelli, a clear insight into human nature. But her depiction of love stories was superficial and unemotional. Corelli easily scored over Mrs. Oliphant in this respect. Corelli lacked the deep, analytical insight and the artistic conscience of the writers of the 'naturalistic school'. But she commanded a reading public larger than that of many of these novelists. Corelli is sometimes compared to George Sand - a voluminous French novelist, who died in 1876. Both were prolific and popular novelists. Both possessed a fluent style though they lacked depth. But Corelli had the zeal of a missionary and many of her novels are earnest doctrinal propaganda.

Corelli disliked realistic and unconventional writers like Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, Shaw and Émile Zola. She did not perceive that the new age was progressing far beyond her mental
power in literary and scientific fields. She did not grasp the significance of the probing mind of the modern writer and his new way of artistic production. Although she was not wholly unaware of the new outlook, her mind did not keep pace with it, and she remained ever a Victorian in her life and art. She kept pace with it only in the sense that she opposed it with an idealistic philosophy of her own. In her later period, she recoiled from the explosive tendencies and the catastrophic circumstances of the First World War, and, instead of facing the new world with her former vigour, she shewed in despair the old topics,—sentimental love and improbable romance. The disillusionment; the self-torture and the suppressed, pathetic cries of post-war writers are hardly perceptible in her later novels.

Corelli belonged to a period of transition during which Victorianism was dying and the Age of Interrogation was taking birth. In between existed a twilight period. Writers and thinkers were tossed between two opposites,—the traditional and the new. A few great intellectuals, like Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells freed themselves from Victorian coils and marched triumphantly into the new territory. They sought solutions for all the problems in society, in ethics, in religion and in literature. Some writers, who were less gifted and were too much taken up with the past and its attitudes, did not survive long in the new age. Corelli also did not adopt the new technique of the novel or absorb the new spirit in literature.
But Marie Corelli's work is significant for the present day reader for more than one reason. Religion, which she made her theme in some of her novels, is increasingly engaging the attention of contemporary novelists like Graham Greene. Indian mysticism, which Marie Corelli drew upon for the presentation of her new version of primitive Christianity, gives a powerful philosophic background to novels like those of Aldous Huxley. Religion and worldly life are artistically blended and revealed in the novels of Graham Greeno. His art is never sacrificed on the altar of Catholic faith. He views sympathetically the sordid and ugly life of human beings and endeavours to discover the spark of God in them. In *The Power and the Glory* he depicts the hideous life of a 'whisky priest'. Greene, unlike Corelli, is a great artist. He is never a preacher. In his intense and realistic representation of the human hell he evokes pity and terror and "dares to reinterpret Scripture in terms of its original charity."\(^1\) Aldous Huxley, like Corelli, has turned his attention to Eastern mysticism. In *Time Must Have a Stop* he deals with the theme of the flesh and the devil in opposition to eternity. In *Ape and Essence* he reveals his abhorrence for the sensualism of the human species.

Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*, shows a materialist turning eventually to Indian mysticism. It stands specially to the credit of Mario Corelli that she produced much earlier,

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1. Fifty Years of English Literature by Scott James. pp.179.
fiction which reveals a strong predilection for religious fervour and eastern mysticism, a predilection which is fast becoming a sign of the times in our own day.

The press was then, as now, a powerful weapon to weed out the unwanted and to guard the commendable. Compulsory education brought about a larger reading public. Several periodicals were started. Writers clustered about 'The Yellow Book' and 'The Savoy'. "No other decade in English history has produced so many distinctive and ambitious publications." The 'realistic novels', and the melodramatic romances reached all the corners of Great Britain; and men and women, high and low, read them eagerly.

Corelli and the press were never on friendly terms. The press condemned her works as preposterous, pretentious and improbable. Critics did not see any special literary excellence in Corelli's novels. Her 'worshipping public' only increased the bitterness of the Press. She stopped sending her books for review after the publication of The Sorrows of Satan. She made fun of pressmen and press-women by introducing them in many of her novels. A woman interviewer, 'Tiger-lily', approaches the poet Alwyn in Ardath and is fooled by Alwyn's friend for doing such unwomanly work. On the other hand, the press roared with laughter at her and made her an object of ridicule.

Corelli did not adopt a gentle attitude towards the press.

1 The Eighteen Nineties - by Holbrook Jackson. pp. 34.
Her conceited and impulsive nature made her blind to its great power. But as she had a vast reading public, she could face boldly even severe attacks from the Press. A novel was for her a book meant both for refreshment and reformation. Her conception of the novel did not depart radically from the prevailing writing idea of 'popular fiction'. "We should take our books", said Corelli on one occasion, "as we take our friends, prepared not to find fault, but to enjoy their company."

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