

In the Light of the Epiphany

Maria Cristina Ogier



MARIA CHRISTINA OGIER
9th. March 1955 - 8th. January 1974

In the Light of the Epiphany

• Maria Cristina Ogier

FIRST ENGLISH EDITION 1977

*To Henry and Gina Ogier
that the fragrance and
the light which
Maria Christina radiates
for the good of many
may be a sweet consolation
to their hearts.*

11 January 1974

What's happening today in St. Lawrence's Square? It's a beautiful day, full of sunshine, with so many people from all walks of life crowding the steps of the Basilica. Inside, under the Dome, there is a coffin on which is laid a wreath of white flowers bearing the inscription: « Daddy and Mammy ».

The great Basilica is filling rapidly, the silence is almost tangible. It's just 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Ten priests walk in procession to the Altar and Holy Mass begins... « Hear, O Lord, the prayers of your Church, for our sister Maria Christina; by Faith she was united to your people, in your mercy unite her to the company of the Saints in heavenly light and peace ». Three priests distribute Holy Communion to the immense crowd, so recollected and silent.

Before blessing the remains, the Chief Celebrant addresses those present, in a voice full of emotion.

« There is a marked silence just now, but it is a silence full of a Presence, the presence of Christ within us. We are celebrating an extraordinary Liturgy — something or rather someone is missing, Maria Christina was not at her Mother's side when she approached the altar for Holy Communion.

However, through Christ's presence, she is also present and by her presence she leaves to you and me a remembrance, a message which I recaptured from a conversation with her, two days before her death. It is in the form of a question: « What does the Lord want of me? » — a question to which she has already given answer.

It was easy for me to say, « What do you think He wants? You have given Him everything and you have done so much. A boat, bearing your name, plies up and down the Amazon river and your name is engraved on the new benches in the Church. Yes, these are truly the fruits of your boundless charity ».

Her constant self-giving was now complete.

In the light of the Epiphany, following in the train of the Magi, she comes bringing to the Child Jesus, as they did, the gold of her

purity, the incense of her prayer, the myrrh of her long suffering. Let us say « thanks » to her for this gift which she has made to the Lord and to each of us; to her parents who prepared her and cared for her; let us receive her 'questioning', her 'searching' as a testimony, and take it to our hearts as we ask ourselves: « What does the Lord want of me? ». It is, as it were, an invitation, to which she has already responded and which now awaits the response of each one of us.

To those of you who have known her, to those who have come close to her, we offer this brief profile, recalling her presence among us. For those of you who have not known her, let it be an invitation to reflection.

For all it contains an exhortation.

« Unless the grain of wheat die ... it will not bear fruit ».

During these days since Maria Christina's death this Gospel passage has often come to my mind.

Spring has blossomed forth in many hearts, it would seem.

« What does the Lord want of me? ... ».

* * *

I have at hand her little diary, small in size and with few pages written on.

There are some photos: one of her parents, another also of her parents with herself and 'her' beloved Don Setti, one of Father Pius Conti, 'her' Missioner, and two others taken of herself, dressed in the white uniform of a cadet with the UNITALSI (The National Italian Union of Transport of the sick to Lourdes and Italian Shrines), standing beside a patient in Lourdes.

They are more or less the summary of her life: her eighteen years offered up, immolated.

Maria Christina was born in Florence, on the 9th of March 1955.

She was a lovely little child, vivacious and intelligent, surrounded by the love and affection of her parents, Henry, a doctor, obstetrician and gynaecologist, and Gina Matteoni, who were married in Rome on the 30th. of April 1951.

Maria Christina, long awaited and much desired, was their only

child, though her parents would gladly have welcomed more children, but this was not to be.

Little Christina passed her infancy with her paternal grandparents, Alphonsus, passed her infancy with her paternal grand-Epiphany in 1956, and her grand-aunt, Bianca, Alphonsus' sister.

This home was enlivened by little Christina's smile, her openness and her goodness.

In the summer of 1959 after a slight illness, common to all children, Maria Christina began to drag her right foot when walking.

Days of anguish passed as the child was examined by many doctors.

The shadow of a terrible drama was appearing on the horizon.

The diagnosis was inexorable and traumatic, a tumour on the brain.

On the 30th. June 1960 in Stockholm, Professor Olivercrona attempted surgery to halt further growth.

What were the chances for the child's life?

Anything might happen.

The sunshine had gone from the home of the Ogier family.

Notwithstanding her tender age, it was thought best to prepare Maria Christina for her first Holy Communion.

The Parish Priest, Don Setti, who was to be her spiritual Director for the remainder of her life, himself began instructing her, simple instructions suitable for her age and intelligence. Maria Christina drank in every word and thought, with evident enthusiasm and, on the 30th. April, 1961 in the Chapel of the English-speaking Sisters in Santa Reparata, she had her first meeting with Jesus.

It was her particular desire on this occasion that each gift she received be given to someone more in need. For herself she wanted nothing.

A letter of Mother Soligo, Foundress of the Sisterhood of the Apostles of Consolation, recalls this gesture:

Dear little Christina,

As you know, last Thursday, the 4th. May, Rev. Don Setti, organised in his Parish, a day in aid of our orphans.

We are aware that you have given a special offering for our little

ones, donating all that was given you on your First Holy Communion day.

What a beautiful gesture on your part, bringing to mind what Jesus himself said one day when he was speaking about poor little children: « Whatever you do to one of these, My little ones, you do unto Me ».

Therefore your gift has been made to Jesus himself, and consequently He will bless you for your kind and generous thought.

He has already bestowed on you a very special favour by coming to you so early in your life and, He will certainly be close to you and will bless you with the many graces that you need.

Keep close to Jesus, receive Him often into your heart, praying much for your Mammy and Daddy and asking Him to assist them every moment of their lives, in their joys and sorrows and to grant you many graces and blessings, above all that you will be strong and good, to the joy of your parents. So turn to Him often and have great Faith! Your generous gesture and thought for those who have no mother will find a place in Jesus' heart and your requests will surely be granted.

Now your little ones thank you for your goodness and are asking Jesus to bless you and your parents.

Mother Superior also sends best wishes and sincerely thanks you and yours.

Yours most gratefully, Maria Quintilla Soligo.

(Headmistress)

After her First Holy Communion in the Sisters' Chapel, Don Setti included Maria Christina in his group of First Communicants in the Parish.

So, during the month of May she came regularly with all the other children for instructions, and as was the custom she was invited, like the other children, to write her resolutions, or a letter to her parents. The following four lines were found written in pencil in one of her copy books:

« My dear Parents,

Above all I promise to be better, to be obedient and to be very good. Maria ».



First Communion - 30th April 1961

On the other side of the page Don Setti's comment reads now like a prophetic intuition:

« I have left these words, her written thoughts, so touching in their simplicity. May life continue to preserve, through your irreplaceable efforts, what grace has worked so admirably in her! ».

* * *

About this time, Maria Christina had a strange dream which she recounted to her mother and to Don Setti.

She thought she was in her Parish Church of St. John. The figure on the large Crucifix there seemed to move and spoke to her thus:

« Would you remove from me the nails and the crown of thorns and the Cross? ».

The little girl quickly removed all, then, as she said, she took Jesus by the hand and brought Him home with her. « I gave Him pyjamas, too because He was naked and He said to me: « Go now, you are cured ».

The story, ingenuous and fresh for a child unaccustomed to fanciful tales, touched the priest and he told her mother to put it in writing « It could be important for a future date ».

Her mother did not need to write it in order to remember it. ...

In September 1961, Christina went to Lourdes for the first time, with Don Setti, her parents and a group of pilgrims from the 'Pro Civitate Cristiana'.

She was serene and seemed really cured.

Professor Olivecrona had said in his diagnosis that Christina would have a period, though brief of seeming improvement.

In the meantime the family moved from Via Bonifazio Lupi to Via Fossombroni, but though their house was changed, Christina remained faithful to her Church, to her priest and to her school.

By a kind concession, and with a certain anticipation, she had begun frequenting the elementary classes at the Sisters in Santa Reparata.

It was striking the way she used to hurry each morning into the Sisters' Chapel to make a visit to Jesus before school. She participated with enthusiasm in the life of the school and with her friends she

was generous and open, with that well-known personality of hers, strong-willed, determined and at times even obstinate but mixed with much sweetness and always smiling.

Here is the testimony of her teacher, Mara Cappelli:

« I first met Christina when at the age of six she began her school life, and already her heart vibrated with love of God and her neighbour.

Incapable of envy, jealousy, rancour, even at school she was always ready to rejoice and suffer with the others, to lend a helping-hand, to understand and make excuses for the others, she, who more than all the others needed to be helped, understood and excused.

She studied with diligence and honesty, never expecting any concessions, aware of her duty to apply herself with all her capacity; she studied in order to enrich herself, but above all in view of the good she hoped one day to do for the sick who were most abandoned and most in need, once she had attained her Degree in medicine.

In her effort to make herself more acceptable to God, she tried to correct her shortcomings and little human failings: the negative aspects of her character for which life with its trials was partly responsible.

Deep down, Maria Christina was a child like any other. Like her companions she loved life, friendships, sport and all the good things that life had to offer. But nevertheless, she always kept aflame in herself the light of Grace and worked tenaciously for the Lord in a way that was quite exceptional for one so young ».

In 1962 she came to know of the trips to Lourdes with the UNITALSI which were to become for her a real source of enthusiasm and self-giving.

She would one day be proud to don the white uniform of a Cadet, the youngest in the Florentine section and I would say, without hesitation, the most generous.

The short period which had generated hopes and illusions passed quickly, unfortunately.

One morning, Maria Christina called her Mother aside, « I dreamt again of Jesus and He asked me to carry the Cross and the nails with Him for the salvation of the world ».

Her mother touched, but also frightened, asked tremblingly, « And what did you answer Him? ».

With a sweet smile the child replied: « I told Him I would! If you had seen His Face, you would also have said yes ».

A short time after this, the child began to limp slightly again, dragging her right leg as she walked.

The drama which began in 1960 was now continuing.

Each day her mother became more and more her friend, her confidante, her shadow, her support; moments of trust and hope alternating with moments of desolation and abandonment: Why? Why?

Her father would shake his head many times but would not be deceived; he had a vivid and clear vision of the awful picture, and could only throw himself ever more generously into his work.

How many supplications! How many invocations! How many petitions! One could say that her mother literally stormed Heaven: « O Lord, my child, Holy Mary, save her ».

Maria Christina was taken from Shrine to Shrine. Never, however, to my knowledge did she pray for herself: « There are many suffering more than I am, and they are also poor and I am short of nothing ».

On the morning of her death, in Rome, at the Shrine of the Three Fountains her mother, having watched her praying with her hands joined, and heard her say: « Holy Mary save us! » asked her, « Maria Christina, did you ask Our Lady to cure you? ».

« No, Mamma, I prayed for the salvation of the world ».

She went to visit Padre Pio various times and was present with Don Setti on the last day of that great Capuchin's earthly life.

She eagerly responded to the starting up of the Prayer Groups and to their growth, first in St. John's Church and later in St. Lawrence's Basilica.

Many will remember the young girl who, during the Offertory, collected the offerings, and her collaboration during the first two Congresses in the Congress Hall and in Holy Cross Church.

Three times she took part in the Faith Walks organized by the enthusiastic Centre at St. John's. One can well imagine the amount of sacrifice that entailed.

The three years of post primary school marked a definite growth in Maria Christina's spiritual life.

Don Setti's life and sermons had a deep influence on her soul. And at this period too, her love for daily Communion commenced. « Jesus living! Jesus true! ».

On her way home from school she used to join the group of young people who requested Don Setti for Holy Communion at that hour.

A few days prior to her death, towards evening she said to Don Setti, « Please, would you give me Holy Communion? ».

The priest had many people waiting for him, but he replied, « I'll come ».

Maria Christina asked again, « Are you coming? » To which he answered, « Presently ». She insisted again and Don Setti answered, « Please, Maria Christina, for this evening make a Spiritual Communion ».

Her reply was like a dart: « Fancy you saying that to me! You did not teach me that ».

There was nothing for it except open the various doors, put on cotta and stole and ...

In November 1966 the terrible flood which hit Florence also affected the Ogier family in Via Fossombroni; Maria Christina and her mother feared for the safety of her father who was working at the Hospital.

It was about this time too, that she became a member of the Youth Community at St. John's Church.

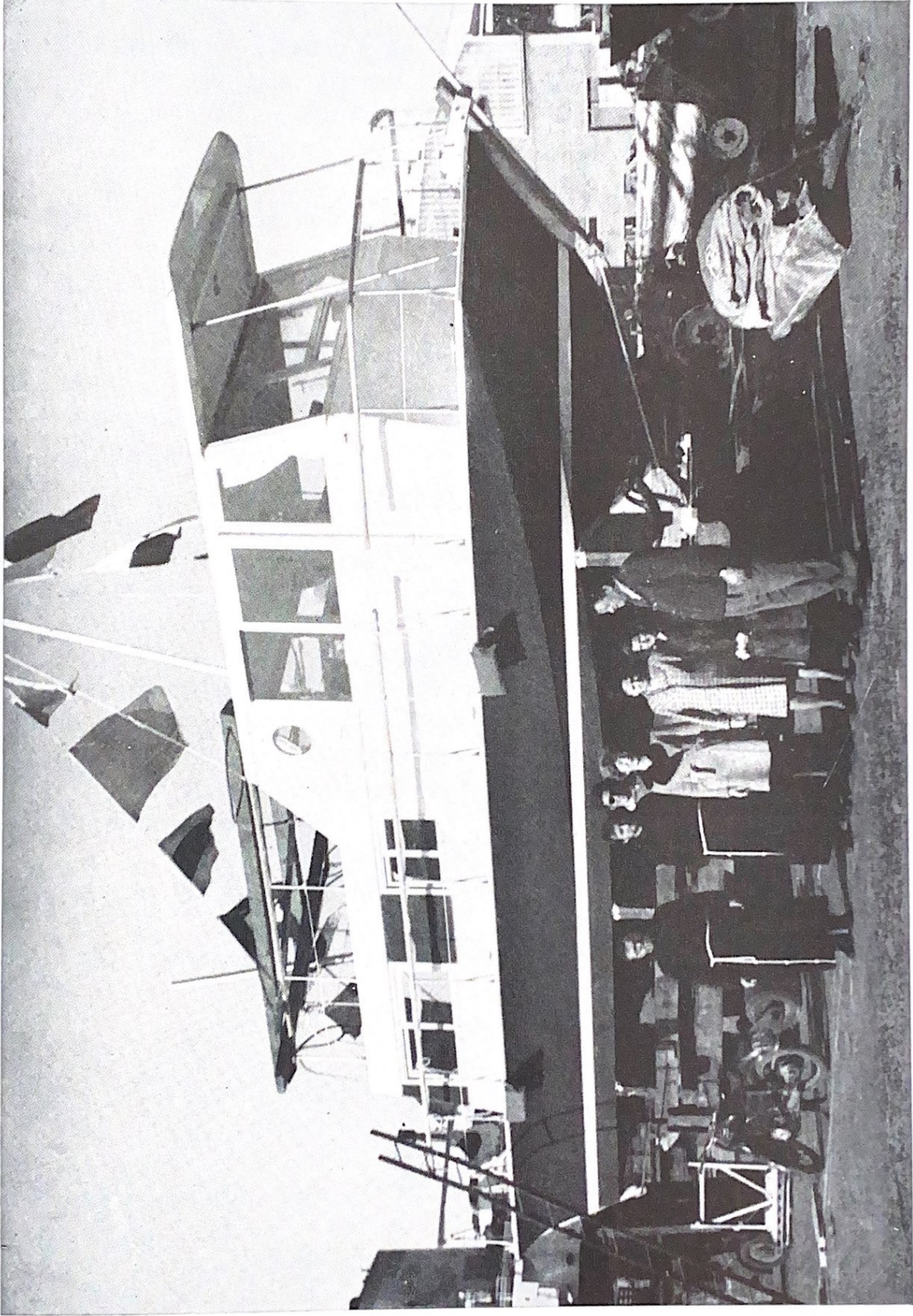
For some time a group of teenagers had gathered around Don Setti and under his guidance were working in various fields of charity: the Missions, Hospitals, Prisons, the « House of Hope » and in helping needy families.

Meetings took place a couple of times each week to promote the spiritual formation of the members by a study in depth of Scriptural theology.

Every month the entire « Community » met for a day's retreat.

Maria Christina found in this community the scope she needed for self-giving.

She began by taking part in all the activities of the Hospital Group.



Her dream come true

She used to go to Villa I Glicini with her mother to feed the old people after having done her homework.

Her free-time was for her an opportunity for self-giving. For her there was no relaxation, no rest.

An attractive youth generously working with the Mission Group, made a strong impression on her about this time and she seemed to have a real liking for him; she seemed to be genuinely in love with him.

She was fourteen years of age and her heart could well have fallen for him.

Indeed one might well be inclined to think it was so, were it not for a page in her little diary which, while revealing this lovely and delicate sentiment, reveals also the presence of another more beautiful and more profound.

There is a thought which is dated June 1969 and a footnote full of significance.

« Oh, ... I love you, but I know it is wasted love, an affection that has no meaning, but I love you and love isn't conquered, the yearnings of the heart though useless, cannot be silenced.

You make me suffer and you are in no way responsible, it is solely my own fault. I know and I acknowledge it, but I cannot help it. God help me to forget you ».

And then she continues in more mature hand-writing:

« I loved you because you taught me to love Him, but now I love Him and Him alone ».

... He had been for her a guide towards the Lord, through the attraction and admiration he aroused in her.

For this reason she left her 'Hospital Group' and joined the 'Mission Group' which opened up her heart to still vaster horizons.

* * *

The horizon opened up in an exceptional way with a realization that took up a great part of her brief earthly life.

A young doctor, Fr. Pius Conti, having become a priest in the Capuchin Order, came to Florence for a refresher course in obstetrics and was a student of her father's.

An excellent Religious, full of faith and enthusiasm, shy and

generous, he found in the exuberant and ever zealous Maria Christina, a good sister who took his Mission in the Amazon to heart.

A difficult Mission in a very vast territory which extends for more than five hundred kilometres along the Rio of the Amazon.

There are neither roads, railways nor airfields in the vast forest region of the Amazon.

The only means of communication is the great river along which the Indios row their canoes.

The sick and wounded are transported by these primitive means several kilometres to the little hospital of the Missioners.

« Many of them », says Fr. Conti, « die on the way. What is needed is a boat with all the facilities for casualties and first-aid. We need to raise funds to buy a boat ».

The idea seemed impossible, crazy, but Maria Cristina's charity found here a field for expansion.

She had always been generous in the Youth Community.

For an ex-patient of the C.T.O. (Orthopaedic Traumatological Centre) in need of a house, for whom the group had done a lot, the biggest contribution always came from Maria Christina.

She never requested or wished for anything for herself and when she did get gifts for herself she immediately dispatched them to the various groups which were in need of them.

There wasn't a poor person in the streets who didn't get immediate help from her.

It was easy to imagine how enthusiastic and caught up she became with the idea of getting the boat.

She left no stone unturned, letters, phonecalls, she tried everything.

It is amazing and almost incredible to think how she could have written so many letters!

She didn't write letters only about the boat; there were the sick whom she met on the train to Lourdes and Loreto and one mustn't forget how fatiguing letter-writing was for her after her day's study.

Here is one letter from among the many she sent out.

What I am about to ask you for is not very easy to explain, much less to do it in a few words, so you must forgive me if I dwell on it somewhat.

About two years ago I met a Missionary priest, a doctor in the Amazon, a very uninviting land which has an extraordinary hot humid climate.

His mission is situated right on the banks of the Amazon.

I got to know him because he returned to Italy for a while to do a refresher course in obstetrics in my Dad's hospital, — because down there many women die in childbearing. He often stayed with us.

He has need of a strong and solid boat to bring medical assistance to the people along the river which is the only navigable way and, into the heart of the jungle among the scattered tents of the Indios.

Myself and others who have had the opportunity of knowing Fr. Pius, together with Don Setti our former Parish Priest, and to whom we are still very attached, are trying to collect the required sum of money, something in the region of Ten Million Lira.

If Jesus has said, « Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you », I, too, am asking, seeking, and knocking, certain that I will be heard because I ask, seek and knock in order to do good to my brother, who, though far away, I want to and must love according to the word of Our Lord.

We of the UNITALSI, who are trying to alleviate the sufferings of the sick by all kinds of means, must remember that also in far distant lands, there are sick people affected by such awful diseases as leprosy, malaria and many others unknown to us, and what is more, with little or no assistance, abandoned to themselves, deprived of every comfort.

If you wish to help me I enclose a voucher on which you must state the purpose. If you know anybody else who might help me let him know the situation. Thanks for what you will do ».

« Dear Director,

My name is Christina Ogier and I am a young reader of your paper, my Dad being an assiduous subscriber for many years. I am writing to ask you to publish my appeal in aid of many poor suffering people.

A young doctor, who in order to be able to do still more to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and needy, became a Capuchin, and is actually a Missionary working on the banks of the Amazon.

The only way of communication is by the huge river through which he can bring medical assistance to the lepers and the sick, and relieve their sorrow and suffering.

He needs a strong boat which would enable him to carry out his out-standing good work in a more practical and efficient manner.

Little by little we have gathered quite a lot, but we are still short Three Million! ... A small sum of money for our many Florentine friends whose generosity and goodness we know only too well.

The Missionary priest is Fr. Pius Conti, whom I met through my Dad who is also a doctor in Careggi.

I belong to the group known as « Friends of the Lepers » and we are all anxious to help this generous Friar. If, among the many readers of « The Nation » there be any who would like to collaborate in the realisation of our plan, by forwarding contributions to the charity section of your newspaper, we should be most grateful to you and to all who will help us.

Thanking you for your hospitality,

Christina Ogier ».

No one could resist responding to these appeals, so simple and so pressing. Many episodes could be told, but it would end in a huge anthology, which would be impossible to compile at the moment.

Maria Christina, with her eagerness, never missed an opportunity and she found a thousand ways both opportune and inopportune.

All this activity could not but cause worry to the vigilant and anxious eye of her parents.

School was already a burden; in Church she was always ready to read the word of God or the Prayers of the Faithful, at the microphone.

She was always ready for the Meetings, etc.

How often at the slightest intimation of a headache her mother would turn in tears to Don Setti.

But now Maria Christina was exaggerating

Her little diary reveals this trepidation:

« 30th. January, 1973

« They call me bigotted, obstinate and maybe I am; it isn't for me to say, but you have left me only this and what else can I do?

You have taken away from me every other possibility, and this leaves a deep wound in my heart, but notwithstanding all this I desire only to love You, and love You with a great love, to thank You for all You have done for me.

They may call me bigot, obstinate, but all I know is that this is the road which leads to you and which I must follow ».

And Maria Christina continued right to the end until she reached her desired goal.

The January 1973 number of « Seraphic Voice from Assisi », the Missionary magazine of the Capuchin Fathers, has two articles which it is a duty to reproduce here.

One speaks about the boat and describes it:

« The boat is more than ten metres long and is equipped with a Perkins Diesel engine of 145 H.P., the hull is glass-resin. It can take twelve persons comfortably. It has all the facilities for surgery and casualty with stretchers to carry the sick.

It will always carry a good supply of medicines, diatetical provisions and comforts, and it has the best and most modern sanitary equipment ».

The second article reports as follows:

« We asked her for a photograph, desirous that her lovely image should appear in our magazine and having overcome her natural reserve and bashfulness, she condescended to let us have one and enclosed a short letter to our editor in which is revealed the beauty of her young soul, totally dedicated to doing good.

Here are her simple words, fresh and limpid like an Alpine spring:

« Dear Mr. Petruccioli,

Excuse my delay in answering your request.

Enclosed is the photograph. I ask you, however, not to put me on show and not to praise me too highly; I only tried to help the poor people of that torrid region: the Amazon, and if for this you consider that I have done something towards eternal happiness, then it is indeed very small and of little account.

I can only say that in doing what I could, together with Mrs. Tonelli, to provide this boat, all it required of me was time, which I hope was profitable and well-spent.

I hope that our good Missioners and Fr. Conti are at last happy to see their desire fulfilled.

I greet you affectionately and send you my best wishes for a happy New Year of 1973 and pray that everything good will bear fruit. Christina ».

The following is a precious witness; it is from Mrs. Tonelli who was, with Maria Christina, the protagonist, in her great achievement.

« I can still hear laughing freely and happily, at the Port of Leghorn, on that serene day, when the boat bearing her name was ready for the hold which was to take it to the Amazon. Fr. Pius was laughing with her and they were just like two children, beside themselves with joy.

It was I who presented Fr. Pius Conti of Fiordimonte, a Capuchin Friar, with a degree in medicine, to Maria Christina's parents.

Fr. Pius needed practice in obstetrics and his time was limited. Only Henry Ogier could help him.

On the mission territory of the Upper Solimoas, St. Elizabeth's hospital, the result of and monument to the great love of Lina Petruccioli for the lepers, was awaiting him.

Fr. Pius was welcomed, loved and looked after like a brother in the home of the Ogiers. He received all the encouragement he needed to arouse his confidence and courage for the achievement of his very difficult and charitable ideal.

Christina had an infinite tenderness for him; she helped him with an insight far beyond her age and experience.

In the late Spring of 1971, after the Missioner had gone back to the Amazon, Christina telephoned me: «Do you know », she said, « What Fr. Pius wants? A boat large enough to sail on the river Solimoas so as to reach the Indios in their tents! ».

The collecton began. The biggest intake was at the Archbishop's Palace, the response of many friends; then at Don Setti's; finally it became a slow contribution that flowed into our houses.

Christina would bring me her little sums to add to mine. She found them mainly in a little box in her father's surgery, but she didn't realise that it was he himself who used to replenish it!

The required sum was difficult to arrive at. Graziano Bianchi

organized an organ recital at Montelupo to help us, with Don Sessa the organist, giving one of his most brilliant performances.

Victoriano Bitossi was a most able organiser of funds among the workers and clients in the ceramic factories; he imposed an offering on his Lombardian buyers and how generously they contributed!

Some months went by during which Christina suggested other initiatives, and she insisted on my going to Fr. Bartolini in St. John's Church of the 'Scolopi' Fathers to ask that a collection be made at all the Masses on a Sunday in June. Fr. Evangelist from Foligno, Fr. Pius' home town, preached at all the Masses that Sunday. There was a great collection, among the offerings was a cheque for One Hundred Thousand Lira.

Christina was overjoyed. The required sum had been reached. Fr. Evangelist rounded off the difference.

It was at this point that we got help from Dino Lorenzini, a dockworker from Leghorn, a man good and strong, dedicated to love of his neighbour, a genuine missionary.

He accompanied Christina to the shipbuilding yards at Fiumicino to choose a boat, to decide what modifications were required and he also arranged that the dockers themselves paid the transport from Fiumicino to Leghorn.

The boat was exempt from duty thanks to his intervention and he also obtained a marked reduction from the builder, Eugene Costa, in the cost of transport of the boat to the Amazon.

The boat was thus transformed into a floating clinic and friends of the lepers in Perugia paid the expenses of furnishing it with indispensable medical appliances.

Fr. Pius arrived from the Missions to see to the various changes. When the boat was ready to be loaded on the ship, I also went to set it.

Bathed in sunshine, with the bunting blowing in the breeze, the « Maria Christina » had us all around her: Christina Ogier, Fr. Pius, Lorenzini, the journalists, the dock-workers, it seemed the ship of hope.

Before Fr. Pius left for the Amazon, my husband invited him with Christina, her parents and Lorenzini, but the little girl was pale, tired and sad.

Then for some time I did not hear from her, until one afternoon

she phoned me to say that she wanted to send some dollars to Fr. Pius.

I was rather annoyed at this and said it was a bit too much sending help so soon again to Fr. Pius who in all that long time, had never written except for a line of greeting to her.

Certainly it must have hurt Christina. I had remorse at not having understood her and it cast a shadow over our precious friendship.

Don Setti, who was installed as Mitred Parish Priest of St. Lawrence's Basilica, encouraged our meetings. Christina spoke to me again of her wish to begin another good work, to which we could dedicate ourselves when the school-leaving examination was over. She wanted to help the old and the sick, providing a home for them where they would find help and comfort.

But a hint of sadness was stealing more and more each day over her childlike face, just as the tears which dimmed her mother's eyes, so full of sorrow.

On the evening of the 8th of January, Jesus removed the Cross which she had carried with so much love and simplicity for Him.

* * *

Her studies are coming to an end. Her last year would be spent at Poggio Imperiale so as to overcome some difficulties connected with her continuance at Santa Reparata, though she had been there since the Primary School. At the Poggio Imperiale she prepared for her Matriculation which she passed brilliantly in July 1973.

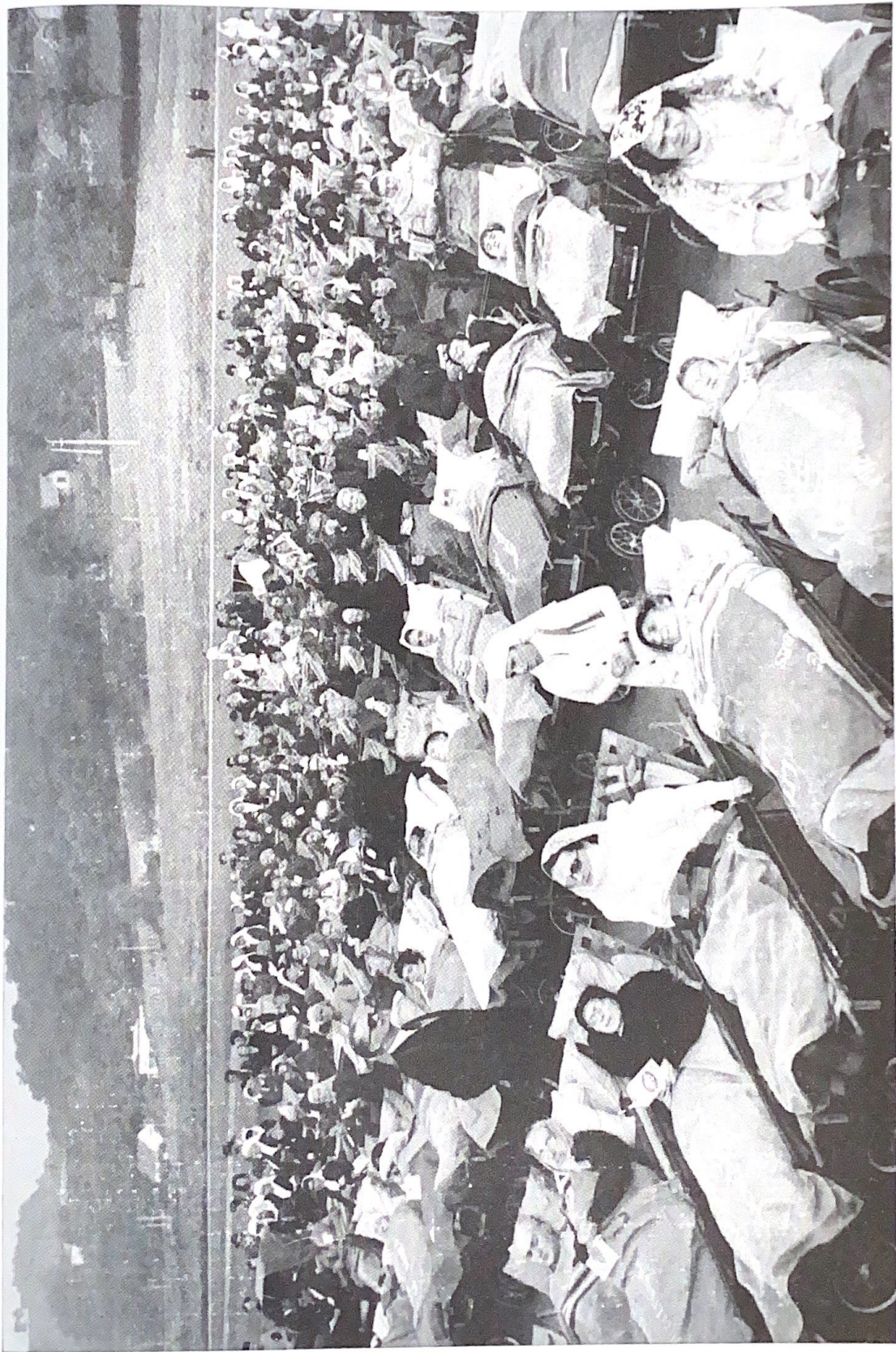
There was no time to be lost in Don Setti's school. Maria understood this very well and she shot ahead. Her piety is essential. She receives Holy Communion daily, and prays at length: « You leave me little free time », she writes in her diary, thus revealing the deep intimacy of her union with God.

Each night after the Rosary her Mother would find her on her knees, « What are you doing? Go to bed! »

« I must still pray for the whole world, for the Missions, for Don Setti, for Fr. Pius, for the sick, etc... »

She had a great love for and a lively devotion to the Passion of Christ. She felt keenly the problem of peace in the world, in families and she longed for the conversion of sinners.

How she prayed for two well-known Florentine doctors estranged



At Lourdes, her field of activity

from God, and how she rejoiced when one of them, helped by Don Setti, to whom she had introduced him, made his peace with Jesus and died a christian death.

From her Spiritual Director she had imbibed a deep love of Our Lady, and was faithful to the recitation of the Rosary each day with her Mother. She was attracted to St. Francis, and after reading his life, expressed the wish to become a Franciscan Tertiary.

It was Don Setti, now Monsignor of St. Lawrence's Basilica, — an appointment which made her happy because of her desire to be near him in a vaster field of work — who admitted her into the Third Order during a Mass celebrated in the Capitular Chapel on 10th of October 1973.

It was the very Chapel that a few months previously, with who knows just how much fatigue, she had so enthusiastically re-arranged, washing the floor and the benches!

During the work of restoration and transfer from St. John's to St. Lawrence's, she was with her Monsignor in all he had to do, helping in a concrete way, working herself, while others better able, remained comfortably in their own homes.

* * *

For Christina, it was a great joy to spend Sunday, the weekly day of rest, with her parents and when her father was called out on emergencies, she and her mother went with him and, remaining in the car, they prayed as they waited for him.

Her parents meant everything to her:

They gave the impression of being an inseparable, united threesome. For the monthly retreat of the Youth Community there was always one fixed reservation for the three Ogiers.

What tenderness and loving-kindness...

Everything about them was always transfigured in the light of Faith.

I can't help sharing a note which she wrote to her father on Ist. November 1970:

« Dear Daddy,

On this day, which is so important for you and for all of us, I, your little daughter also want to tell you how happy I am for this

recognition which you have received after so many long years of hard and patient work.

I hope for your sake that this may be the definitive arrangement which you have waited so long for and that it may be for you the fulfillment of everything for which you have been working so hard all this time.

I'm so proud of you, Daddy, and I couldn't ask God for a better parent than you.

I love you very much, and I'll always try as hard as I can not to displease you more than I have in the past, however unwillingly.

I'll always try to be worthy of a Father such as you are, and I hope that our little family will always remain united and happy, in the light and love of Christ.

Your Christina. »

Beloved parents who had suffered for so many years...

But they were always ready to support the tireless eagerness of their daughter who was to write on March 30th 1972:

« Lord, I thank you for the Flame which burns within me, this insatiable desire to do good and to help my brother ».

If she found herself at the seaside during the summer holidays, — why not go to visit the sick at San Camillo?

If she went to her Grandfather's at Massarella, — why not call on that sick friend whom she met in the train on the pilgrimage to Lourdes?

She was happy when Carlo, a thirty-five year-old invalid whom she had met at Lourdes, a polio victim for eighteen years, was able to accept her invitation to go to London for treatment of his paraplegic condition, and how happy when she was able to see him no longer in bed as she had known him previously but in a more convenient wheelchair which made his life more comfortable.

We get a glimpse of this in her diary entry of 1st May 1972:

« Carlo has returned from England a new man.

« Lord, you are truly great, omnipotent and magnificent.

« Only a few years ago he was such a different man, and you have wanted to show me Your omnipotence through the medium of human beings.

I am Yours, and I want to be Yours now and forever; I want

to be Your instrument to do good among my brothers, far and near. I love You ».

In the presence of an old sick man who loved to talk at length, but who was unfortunately rather senile, and whose wife would try to quiet him, she said with great sweetness and with such feeling as to leave her hearers surprised, « Be patient, let him talk ».

And the gentle hand which she placed on the shoulder of the old lady after Mass to signify her sweet and affectionate closeness had the same meaning.

An old professor, who could not stand through the Mass, tearfully recalls the young lady who kept a place in Church for him when he came in late.

All these kindnesses were surely due to the deep and steadily maturing influence of her own suffering.

Up until the very end she often tried to hide her suffering, she did not allow any self-pity but kept smiling. « Try not to impose your suffering on those around you. Never say, ' I can't go on ', but ' I won't complain any more ', Don Setti used to say to her.

And she succeeded... a silent glance of understanding at him was abundant proof of the quality of her heroic charity.

Even though she was well aware of her illness, she always smiled.

To a friend who was complaining over nothing she said, « Why are you complaining? What should I not say? »

To another friend who was afraid to fly, she said, « One could die anywhere! »

« I'm not afraid; I'm always ready for anything ».

She loved beautiful things, especially music. Perhaps she learned this too from her Priest — many times, along with him and his friends, she attended musical events with real interest and enjoyment.

A few evenings before her death she had listened to the sacred songs of Magda Olivero, on the veranda of St. Lawrence's.

When that great artist came to Florence, having heard the story of Maria Christina, and, for her love of sacred music and song, she wished to participate, with the Youth Community at a Mass for Christina and as a personal night, 19th January, 1974, for the altar of St. Lawrence's.

She used to make plans for her future.

« I'll be a doctor; I'll be a pediatrician; I'll dedicate myself to

children; I'll go on the Mission field ». She said this, even though, many times she said she would not live past the age of eighteen years.

After observing so many sick people, especially the elderly, she wanted to establish little houses, family-like, for the lonely and abandoned aged.

« Everybody thinks about children, but old people are the most neglected ».

In a letter of 25th February 1973, from a friend and companion on her trips to Lourdes we read:

« Dear Christina,

I understand your well-justified discontent with those so-called rest homes, and I quite agree with you that it's not the quality of the building which counts here but rather the personnel. From what little I've seen I've wondered if these people (the attendants) haven't perhaps thought that one day they might find themselves in the same situation.

« I know that they can become accustomed to a certain ambient and yet, unlike those of us who drop in from outside, they cannot really feel the pains and the moral and material sufferings of these people; however, I do not grant that their being accustomed to all this gives them the right to treat those poor people with such coldness when, rather, they need human warmth above all.

This very idea which you had of a little rest home in your city of Florence is something I've been thinking about for a long time, and I hope very much to be able to talk to you about it again as soon as we meet ».

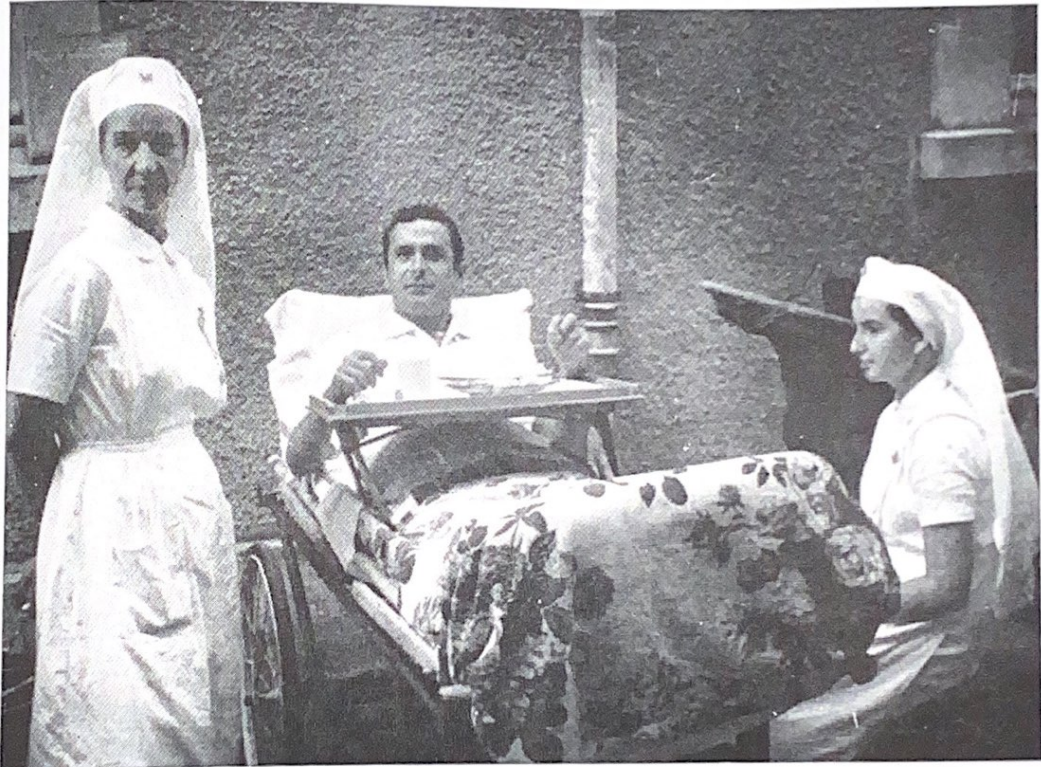
At this point it will be worthwhile to recount a letter of Christina's to a sick friend, dated 19th February, 1973. The handwriting is underlined in the original text.

This is precisely the sense of duty which motivated the charity of Maria Christina. Could it perhaps be a stimulus to awaken an awareness of our own obligations?

« Dear F.

« Last evening when we went to visit you, your aloneness distressed me so much and yesterday was Sunday, the day on which I like to have fun and enjoy the happiness that life has to offer.

But your days are so monotonous. For you there are no trips to



Beside a sick bed

Lourdes or Loreto, because you have no rest from your suffering, not even on Sunday.

You see what contrast there is between my life — even though mine resembles yours in a way and though there are some points of contact — and yours, which is always the same and weighed down by spiritual and temporal sufferings.

After I got to know you, that is to say you, poor F., and all the others, I began to think about arranging a little rest home for you, a real rest home, — not like the one you're in now. You may recall that I used to say this when I was six years old; now has come the moment to put my plan into action, with your permission.

Dear F. only I myself, can really understand you people — don't forget that I was also in danger of being in a similar hospital, and this will probably happen when my dear parents die — and also don't forget that only because of the love and faith of my mother was I taken in a wheelchair into the Holy House and I drank the water at Lourdes from one of those little cups which all the sick use, and I still drink from it because even if I am cured in body I am still sick in my soul, and so I am sick like all of you, if not more so.

Don't worry. This house for you will come into being, and after my final exams I'll really start to work on my plans. Trust me to do it. *Keep this letter that it may be an incentive for me to carry out my plans.* Just as I got the boat for Father Pius Conti, I'll get the rest-home you long for so much.

Now I'll leave you with a request to pray for me and I send you a great big kiss.

Christina ».

Her character was volitive and impetuous but at the same time determined. Sometimes this fact had its negative aspects, by reason of which she seemed less than pleasant on occasion.

During the discussion in the Community, she was the first to speak her piece, and at times her interventions, always well-intended, of course, did not seem opportune or pertinent.

She had a clear and well-defined goal, and sometimes, she came sharply up against the halfheartedness of those who surrounded her, goading them with her own generosity: « Well, what are you doing? Why don't you do something? There's so much to do! »

This sort of behaviour did not always meet with success even though accompanied by her constant smile.

She felt real pain at this sense of uneasiness which she stirred in others, and her depth of feeling perhaps made the situation more difficult as she said on the 6th September 1973:

« People keep at a distance from me, and even my parents, in a certain way prohibit my doing this and that — everything is refused me who have accepted Your will. Those who are close to me put up with me, but what a great humiliation it is to be tolerated, to be loved, sometimes against one's will ».

* * *

A friend of Christina's who later became also her teacher, Giustina Grisola Mannelli, sent me a cordial and sincere remembrance of her:

« Santa Reparata: a chapel crowded with many blue caps, the rosary said all together, the corridors where we met between classes.

These are the first memories I have of Maria Christina and of our acquaintance, an acquaintance which was at first disconnected and superficial but which later became a true friendship, and exchange of heartfelt sentiments.

Then there were the lessons I gave to Maria Christina, the hours we spent together over Latin and Greek texts, her frequent tears over an interrogation which had gone badly or over some lesson she couldn't do. All of these things served to strengthen our friendship.

Yes, Maria Christina was one of many girls to whom I taught Latin and Greek, but with her the relationship was different because she was different from the other girls.

I was always impressed by her great spirit, her tenacity, and her desire to be useful to others and to turn even her misfortunes to good account, to the best of her ability. This possibility was offered to her, more than anywhere else among the young people of the Community of St. John's, where she brought her enthusiasm and zeal for charity.

I seem to see her again as I recall how at our retreats she used to taperecord Don Setti's talks, so she could listen to them again alone in her room, but above all, so she could put them into practice in her life, something which was not always easy.

Maria Christina had many problems and this was a misfortune which made her different from her companions and which deprived her of many joys common to girls of her age, and yet in her short life she succeeded in making the most of her talents, and of never wasting time...

Don't waste time... Many times these words of Don Setti must have impressed her and become the continuous urge of her life, so much so that she succeeded in taking her Matriculation a year ahead of time, even her death was premature.

Maria Christina probably showed me the greatest proof of her self-abnegation at Lourdes where she took me and where she never stopped going even for a moment. On the train when all of us were tired and sleeping, she was one of the few who found the energy to work, going up and down the corridors to bring comfort to those who were worse off than herself. This, too, may have been the reason why Maria Christina was transformed at Lourdes, and why she found a source of exceptional energy because at Lourdes she could really be useful to someone and feel indispensable ».

On 2nd March 1973, a severe headache kept her in bed.

The terrible anguish of her parents was beyond all imagination.

It seemed that things were coming to a head: « I'm going to Jesus », she said, despite the fact that it was at home that she always received Communion, brought by Don Setti at the most convenient times during that period.

At the end of March, an improvement allowed her to continue her studies for School Leaving Examination.

She had the joy of seeing her boat come into being with the generous collaboration of the Leghorn Dockers, who, even if they did not agree with her ideas, were touched by the open enthusiasm of Maria Christina.

She offered the purple cassock to Don Setti when he was made Monsignor and Parish Priest of St. Lawrence's, saying, « For me, though, he will always be Don Setti, even if they make him Pope! »

And every Sunday she faithfully attended the Mass which he celebrated at St. Lawrence's.

It was such an upset to her when she was unable to attend that Mass!...

For her, it was a renewal of grace and joy, even during the last months when she approached the Eucharist, leaning on her Mother's arm because she could no longer stand steadily alone.

The Summer of 1973 was a sad time because of a deterioration in her condition which kept her from going to the seashore and which caused her to feel the seriousness of her condition even more.

She enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine at the University, as she had always wished since it was her dream to dedicate herself to those who suffer most and to the poorest among the sick, especially on the mission field.

She went several times to the University and attended lectures.

She felt an unusual tiredness, and contrary to her normal disposition, an apathy which often made her seem absent-minded and inattentive. What could be done?

Her parents vied with each other in caressing her little lifeless hand.

It was touching to see this well-known doctor, at times so typically Florentine in a free and easy manner, taking that hand to his lips and kissing it with unconcealed tenderness: « My little pet ». Again they attempted a trip to Switzerland — to Gottemburg — from the 14th to the 20th October.

On the night of the 13th in St. Lawrence's Square, Don Setti blessed the three travellers, saying, « Gottemburg — that's a hopeful name. It means City of God! Let's hope that there you may find the Lord and feel close to him! »

The tumor in the centre of Christina's brain was still much the same as it had been fifteen years earlier, but her leg dragged increasingly, and she continually supported her right hand with her left, and all the while her manner of walking became increasingly unbalanced...

To try a special cure, she went to Rome with her Mother from Monday to Saturday, mainly to please her Mother, but she always returned for every holiday to be with her Father. The whole family was together on Sundays in the first seat in the Basilica of St. Lawrence.

It seemed as if a thick fog enveloped her heart and a feeling of anxiety and a fear of the future were always with her: did she face total paralysis? A wheelchair for the rest of her life? Even worse,

would she lose her enthusiasm for Jesus?

« You must not worry. The Lord wants your gift of pure Faith, courage and determination ».

Don Setti was her support in this terrible trial.

« What does the Lord want from me? » This was her continual question in her last days.

Her distraught Mother couldn't have given her a better answer than this: « God asked of Abraham his only treasure: Isaac. What if the Lord asks you to offer him the rest of what you have, even the possibility of doing good. That then? »

« Yes, Mother, I'll do everything in my power, always ».

This was her final question in her last conversation with Don Setti two days before her death.

She spent all day with him; she had lunch in his Presbytery with his family and stayed until late that evening.

« What does the Lord want from me? ».

Don Setti encouraged her: « What do you want Him to ask? You have always given Him everything! Try to get better quickly and come back to Florence.

There are so many things to be done. I have to finish the benches in the Church, the apartments — and I need a silly thing like you! ».

She laughed happily and, with this peace of mind, left for Rome.

On the last day of her life her anxiety vanished, and she retained this peace of mind until her death.

She had just returned at 7 p.m. from the 6.30 p.m. Mass in Rome where she had received Communion as was her custom. She had sat down at the table next to her Mother, and stretching out her arm to her, went limp.

A bulbar paralysis marked the moment of her final encounter with God.

« I live dreaming about Heaven, and I cannot wait to meet You and see You, O Immense Love! ».

* * *

The word quickly arrived in Florence — both Christina's Father and Don Setti were telephoned.

The news came as a shock to everyone.

Christina's body was brought back from Rome on January 10th. and placed in the Chapel of the Stigmata of St. Francis in St. Lawrence's Square.

During the Mass which Don Setti celebrated, the first flower was placed on her coffin.

While talking about her young swimming instructor, a former world champion, Christina had said to Don Setti before Christmas: « D. needs you; he's a good person and generous, too, but he does not receive the Sacraments, and even at Lourdes where I tried to encourage him I didn't succeed. I'll bring him to you — I promise I'll send him to you ».

While they were awaiting the arrival of Christina's body, a young man appeared, and even before he had a chance to speak, Don Setti said to him, « Christina has sent you — she has kept her promise! ».

After a tearful discussion, the young man accepted the forgiveness of Christ for the first time in twenty years and re-established his contact with the Lord at the Mass on the 10th. and on the following days.

The funeral, held in the early afternoon of January 11th. was a true Epiphany — a spontaneous testimony of a whole city and of others besides.

Among the concelebrants were four Franciscans from Assisi who had come to represent « her Missionary » whom from now on she would closely follow, in his activities, from her place in Heaven.

On Saturday morning, in the presence of her family and a few friends, Christina was laid to rest on the hill of San Miniato, in the cemetery of Porte Sante.

* * *

Soon rumours began to circulate. Someone dreamed that he saw her dressed in white garments and radiant with light. Someone else felt a strong urge to invoke her. And there were others who, in her name, gave offerings so that her works of charity might continue.

People began to think seriously about fulfilling her plans to provide homes for the aged poor and the lonely.

Maria Christina's presence made itself felt because everyone spoke of her with curiosity, interest, affection and an enthusiastic desire to participate in the realization of her dreams.

* * *

With deep emotion I conclude this little book which so many have requested. Her death has revealed a life.

* * *

Because of her example, many have felt the need to draw near to the Lord, to work for peace, and to commit themselves.

Many invoke her as a little saint, and this expression of faith is the source of amazement and emotion to many — especially to her young friends in the Community.

Let us allow God to carry out His work as He likes; we have only her splendid example which invites us to imitate her and follow in her steps.

G. S.



With the Community youth Group

*Here we publish a few thoughts
found in her little diary.*

*The dates and underlinings are left
as they
were in the original.*

2nd. March 1972.

Thank you, Lord, for
having shown me your
life and for having led me
through it, to you.
I love you and I want to
dedicate my life to you and
to others.
I can only repay you in a very
small measure, never completely.

5th. March 1972.

My love for others
must have no limits
I must love the people
of all countries, nations
far and near.
To love in Your love.
To love in order to thank you
For your great love for us.

19th. March 1972.

I cannot doubt you,
You always silence me.

30th. March 1972.

O Lord, I thank you for the flame which
burns within me, this insatiable desire
to do good, to help my brother and at the

same time to help you who have loved
us so much.
Help me to endure, to suffer, to
ever accept Your Will.

12th. April 1972.

This life of ours is as nothing
compared to eternity, teach me
to use my life according to your
ways.
May your will be done in me: only
in this way will I be happy forever.

23rd. April 1972.

I told Don Setti about my aspiration.

23rd. April 1972.

Every day you bring me closer to yourself,
you are calling me insistently
and always; you leave me very little
free time.
Soon I shall answer you, but now I can
only listen to your call
to be certain of your will.

27th. April 1972.

(Professor Mangione is dying at Careggi)
St. Francis called you « Sister Death »

and you are truly a sister as
well as a peaceful sleep; you unite
us to Him who created us.
I have no fear of you, O Death,
for me it is you who will unite me
with my Lord forever.

1st. May 1972.

(Carlo has returned from England — a different man)
Lord, You are truly great,
omnipotent and magnificent.
Only a few years ago he was
a different man, and you have wanted
to show me Your omnipotence
through the medium of human beings.
I am Yours, and I want to be Yours now
and forever, I want to be your instrument
to work for good among people, far and near.
I love you.

29th. May 1972.

(Just returned from Loreto)
Lord, why have you poured out so much
kindness and love upon me?
You have had mercy upon me and have
willed to look upon me from your throne.
Lord, how can I thank you unless
I devote to you my whole life
and all that I have?
Lord, enlighten me, do not
abandon me, grant that I may
ever walk in your ways.

8th. August 1972.

I love you, O Death, because You
are the peaceful sleep which
will unite me to my God
and give me eternal happiness.
I love you, O Death, because you
don't frighten me and for the
sake of my love for Jesus, I
would even come to meet you
right now, not as an enemy
but as a loving friend.

18th. October 1972.

I live,
dreaming of Heaven
and I cannot see the hour
to be united with you, to see you,
O Great Love of mine.

28th. November 1972.

All for you and in you.
All according to your will
and in the service of you
and others.

29th. November 1972.

You must have the strength,
the perseverance to go
forward alone for the sake
of that God who loves you.
You must accept life
as a continuous struggle
against evil and if
you give in, you are conquered,
whereas if you continue to fight on
in His name you shall have won
the greatest battle:
the battle of life.

9th. December 1972.

Fr. Pius has returned
Lord, how can I thank you
for all that you give me.
Your plan and mine seem to really
run along the same path, the very
path which leads to you.
But Lord, I feel unworthy
to be able to possess you entirely
for myself. Do I, insignificant worm
of the earth, have such importance
for you? Why?
I can only offer you my
worthless life of a poor
sinner and you have offered
yourself for me.
Lord, what can I do to give
you even the least thanks?
I love you, only this can I say, I
love you with an immense love, this
alone I can offer to you, my God,
my all.

12th. December 1972.

(I have gone with Fr. Pius to see the boat)

Lord, I thank you for
having allowed me to achieve
such a marvellous work. It seems
just like a dream.

I love you, and I want this love
to increase ever more and more.
To love, to be able to love is the
most beautiful thing that exists on earth
and I thank you for having taught me so
ever since I was a little girl.

No, my love cannot
exist for one person alone
I must give to everyone without
distinction, to friends and foes,
to those near and far, a great love
such as you yourself have given
and following your example I want
to live here on earth, in such a way,
that later I may be happy with you, my
highest Good, and with all those whom
I have known and not known.

I want to give and to give
still more, to present
to you the tiniest fruits of
this ceaseless and continuous
longing to be able to give.
Teach me to love and to be able
to give more and more.

30th. January 1973.

They say I am a bigot,
obstinate and perhaps I am,

I don't know exactly how
to say this, but you
have left me only this, and
what else could I
do?

You have taken from me every other
possibility and this leaves in me
a profound mark, but apart from all
that, I desire nothing but to love you,
and to love you with a great love
to thank you for all
you have done for me.
They will call me bigot,
obstinate but I know that this
is the road that leads
to you and which I must follow.

2nd. February 1973.

Lord, I don't feel worthy
of suffering, because suffering
is for Saints, and I don't
think I am a saint, not even good,
but I shall continue along this
path, along the path of great and
little trials which you show me.
Do with me what you will,
you know that I love you and from you
I accept all, all that you will.

18th. February 1973.

I don't want to be raised
to the hours of the altar
nor to be greatly praised on earth

because of a boat, or any other
small thing,
I only want to be able
to stay close to you and
always to be your loved one.
To love you, to love you to the end
this is what I desire, what I
want more than anything else in the world.
I love the world which you have made,
even if it seems that the world
hates me.

(I have been to Fiordimonte to
the home of Fr. Pius the very day
of his departure)

17th. March 1973.

Lord, I thank you
for having given me this great
joy of getting to know a bit more
about his world which is
so very simple and which
I love.

Lord, comfort him and give him
the strength to go forward
and to do whatever he must do,
what you have asked him to do
Be near him, never
abandon him,
keep him ever in your sight,
don't leave him, just as
you never leave me, not for my sake,
but in your great mercy.
Have mercy on us both,
Keep us both close to your heart
and look upon us with your
infinite mercy.

9th. June 1973.

People keep at a distance from me,
even my parents, to a certain extent,
forbid my doing this or that,
everything is denied me who
have accepted your will.

I am just borne with by those
who are near me, what a great
humiliation, to be borne with,
to be loved, at times,
against one's will.

It's easy to give a kiss, to give
a warm embrace,
but to give up a pleasure
a diversion,
this is difficult, this
is the drama in which
I suffer.

1st. August 1973.

Dear Jesus,
You know much I love you and have
need of you, help me in every
moment of my life; I fear the future,
life itself, not
death which will unite me
with You, my all.
If I didn't have You, how
woul I ever manage to go
on living!



Maria Cristina Ogier 'House

8 January 1973

THE ANNIVERSARIES

8 January 1975

Dear Friends,

It is with deep emotion that I'm writing to you on the anniversary of the death of Maria Christina Ogier.

I'm writing to invite you to the Mass that will be celebrated in the Basilica of St. Lawrence on January 8th. at 6 p.m. But I'm writing especially to communicate to you, even if only in a summary way, some ray of that light which the 1974 Epiphany has shed on several people in an inexplicable manner. The modest acknowledgement printed thirty days after her death with the symbolic title: « In the light of the Epiphany » is in its fifth reprint. The message of the young girl has caught the attention of thousands and thousands of people in our time.

The « Osservatore Romano » has published two articles on her; the weekly « Gente » has written about her, as have other periodicals and weeklies in Italy and abroad — Switzerland, England, Brasil.

There has been a lot of mail every day, expressing deep emotion. The seed that was planted has already begun to yield. In S. Maria Nuova, for example, a whole pavilion will be set up, dedicated to the generous soul. The same will happen in Empoli with an Old People's Home.

An institution to house twelve handicapped girls is shortly to open in Florence and it will bear her name. In this same communication a mutual friend will speak about it.

As a result of this vibrant emotion, a « Maria Cristina Ogier Foundation » is being set up as a kind of Moral Board to administer the charity done in her name.

How are we to describe the zeal of youthful groups who, imitating her example, continue the same work! What shall we say about the feverish assembling of paintings with a view to a possible future exhibition?

How can we thank the generosity of the several ladies who knitted bedspreads for the House in Florence? And what shall we

say of the bigheartedness of the famous Madga Olivero who made a splendid record, still available in San Lorenzo, in memory of Maria Cristina?

All these items of news bursting in upon us from every side have made us think of selling a « newssheet » to keep all our innumerable friends in touch with what's going on and what's being written in the letters coming in.

We are not giving credit to all the claims to favours received through the intercession of Maria Cristina — and these are numerous. The spreading of her message of generosity and self-sacrifice and love must be due to Divine intervention.

Time had shown that the world of to-day is more and more in need of the « words made Flesh » that relieve anxiety and the present restlessness with the love that Christ brought on earth as « a fire to be enkindled ».

May this first anniversary be for each and every one of us a reminder to be generous and active in the same direction.

May Maria Cristina intercede for us in her gentle way.

Mons. GIANCARLO SETTI

STEP BY STEP WITH MARIA CRISTINA

There are certain rhetorical phrases which we all try to avoid; and yet, I wouldn't be telling the exact beginning of my moving story if I didn't try to do so in the following way:

I still seem to feel the touch of that slender little hand in mine, just as on the day when, holding my hand in hers, she guided me to a big bench in the hall of San Lorenzo. I had sensed that those courageous little fingers were unable to detach themselves from the support of mine.

« Let's sit down, Maria Christina, I'm tired », I said to her. And suddenly, after having known her for years but only superficially (due to my 50 years against her 18) a great bond between us came into being, an understanding, true and positive. Maria Cristina had sought me out. She had something to talk to me about.

« Mrs. Barocchi », she said, « we have something to do together. I can't stop thinking about my friends who are ill, those whom I met in Marlia, you know? It's not fair that a young person who is ill, and has neither parents nor home, should have to spend the whole of his life in a chronic hospital with the aged, with the demented sometimes, and in such squalid surroundings! It's not right that there isn't special provision made for them ... ».

In more or less these words, she continued to give vent to her distressing feelings about the insufficiency of the social assistance schemes. (A good, saintly soul always knows beforehand what society or State shall have to learn from her!).

That conversation was a revelation of her intense sensitivity, boundless love that made her feel in her very self the sufferings of others. In the touch of that little hand, infirm though it was, I felt the strength of « creatures of good will ».

Now then, if I didn't explain properly this first point, my readers would fail to understand the emotion I later experienced when faced with an event which seemed to me to be directed from on high by fine indeed invisible threads of that same strength!

When did that meeting take place? It must have been in No-

vember. Maria Christina was wearing her little grey coat with the light-coloured fur collar which so well suited her expression. She never for a minute looked affected, not even when in December she consented to sit still in the front seat at Sunday Mass. Her gaze was ever clear and direct whereas ours was unsteady and changeable. How many times from then until the 8th. January did we have a talk together? I can't really recall how often. But I'm sure of at least two meetings since they stand out in my mind as being particularly meaningful.

Once I had a long conversation with her, sharing her longing to do things and to give. She was not, however, so confident about succeeding in setting up the little « Home for young people in ill health », which was her dream and which indeed she had promised to do! ... (As I discovered later on when I read her little letter printed in the present booklet on page 25: « Ever since I met you, poor F, and also the others I set my mind to thinking of setting up a little house for the sick, a *real* rest house, not like this one. Don't you remember I used to say so when I was six and now the time has come to carry out my plan ... »).

I would say to her: « Maria Christina, even if we find a suitable place, how will we manage the upkeep of it? We're only a private institution and social assistance doesn't support such undertakings... We won't be able to face the expenses, not without a subsidy! »

Maria Christina wouldn't allow herself to be discouraged by others. She was fully conscious of her own steadfast trust and confidence. She kept on insisting that young handicapped people couldn't be left in squalor and she kept on saying: « Look for suitable quarters, find something! »

The last time I spoke to her was on Christmas Day at a Mass celebrated by Don Setti, which Mass, at any time, made her feel strong and full of joy. I made a sign to her, I gave her the good news: « Christina, there are hopes of a villa! It's magnificent, situated in Viale Galilei. It would be suitable for a small community of ten or twelve young people as you so desired. The « Opera Pia Picone » own it. It was given in 1959 as a Home to the « Stimmatine » who are now actually leaving it. I think we could manage to get the use of it. But that's not the problem! What are we going to do after that? »

Once again Maria Christina showed how staunch was her sense

of charity. « I'll find a way, you'll see »! And then if I can take my degree in medicine, I'll look after the patients. Let you think about the villa! Get busy about it! »

She gave me this charge with a lightheartedness that I considered none other than the inexperience of youth! But then she was taken from us and I dropped the whole undertaking. I knew from experience that good works undertaken by private people nowadays can be compared to a delicate woman whose pregnancies often end in miscarriages.

I'd said exactly the same thing to Maria Laura Tonelli some months previously when I met her in her house, in that marvellous place where she lives and where the spiritual beauty that blossoms forth from her is in open rivalry with Brunelleschi's architecture of S. Maria del Fiore, close by.

Don Setti had sent me there saying: « I'm giving you this name and address. Take it down and go there. I don't quite know why, but I feel you should meet Maria Laura Tonelli. Both of you are fire-brands! Perhaps a good spark will result! »

I went to Maria Laura's and I was compelled to be at once frank with her: « It is true », I admitted, « that I desire many things. But I'm lacking the most important: holiness. Now, if you're holy, then we'll get on fine together. I know from experience, unfortunately, that charity itself cannot succeed without genuine holiness. Maria Laura replied in a happy tone of voice: « Well, we'll find some saint or other to substitute us ».

Time passed and in spite of all our efforts no sparks came from the firebrands... The little seed had to die still more and go deeper into the soil. At that time I didn't know that Maria Laura and Maria Christina were acquainted. I got to know it later, on my first meeting with Gina Ogier after the « Epiphany » three days before her death, the girl had said: « Mummy, if I'm no longer there, you'll carry on the good work for me, won't you? »

« Maria Christina, what on earth are you talking about? Don't you know well that Mummy hasn't the same undaunted strength that you have... ». « Never mind, Mummy. Just begin and then you'll see that strength will come to you... You must go to Mrs Tonelli and to Mrs. Barocchi... And they, you know, we've already got the villa; All I want is a small house for ten young people ».

That's how I got to know; we all got to know and we all felt involved. That same courageous involvement of Gina and Enrico Ogier (It was that sort of radiant courage which shone forth from her parents, that unfailing courage inherited from them even though she was physically failing) gave us the strength day after day to be faithful to what we had undertaken to accomplish, faithful to Maria Christina for her parent's sake, faithful to them for her sake!

Then, there was Don Setti, endowed with the ability to get things going. He gathered us around him while recruiting other friends and further solidarity.

What should we do? What was the best thing to do in memory of Maria Christina? We set out in different directions and did practically everything except to request the use of the villa for the young in ill-health. We didn't know! Yet we were convinced that something had to be done, in a simple way, for Maria Christina. What we didn't know was that Maria Christina was about to accomplish something for us in an extraordinary way.

Then, one morning (if I must go into the whole story) the firebrand Maria Laura let off a spark: « One of the Stigmatine Sisters came to see me, the Sisters who had left the House in Viale Galileo... Was it by chance, but I thought to myself it might be an inspiration... It was a pity to let that place slip through our fingers. We must try and get hold of it! »

Taking the lead from this idea, coupled with hard work, the villa « Picone » was eventually in our possession. And then through a series of strange events ranging from the most unimaginably difficult ones to the easiest, we were actually forced — and I mean it when I use the word forced — to carry out what Maria Christina had wanted. And what's more, in the very manner she wanted it. In her own words: « A home, a real home for ten or twelve young people, not more... so that it may be like a true family... and with nuns so that LOVE and willing help may never be wanting there ».

And now all of us of the « Maria Christina Board » with the help of many friends are restoring the house. We're doing a good job on it. We are putting in a lift which is indispensable for stretcher cases, besides the necessary conveniences. Our aim is to make the place as beautiful as possible so as to cut out human squalor from the suffering that has been ordained by God. It is as she had wished.

In that way the Home she had wanted to look after as a doctor, she'll be able to guard like a Guardian Angel... the « Maria Christina Home ».

Dear me! How dim-witted was I! And to think that I hadn't understood how the little hand now no longer infirm, had guided us with invisible threads and ever-growing determination, to make us do what she had wanted and promised to do while still alive. I hadn't grasped that Heaven carries on, through its chosen ones, the good work which hasn't been fully completed by them on earth.

From that evening on, I've read and re-read with evergrowing emotion every word of that famous little letter which Maria Christina wrote to the Paralysed young teacher: « Dear F,... hold on to this letter which will be an incentive to me to accomplish the work ».

Often have I gone over in my mind the meetings, the words, the extraordinary happenings and the inspirations; and, now, finally I see everything in a different light, the Light of that young girl whose great desire was « to give and ever give more and more ». It was she who succeeded in getting the villa; it's she who draws the helping hearts and hands to it, it's she who undoubtedly watches over it and shall ever watch over it; that's certain. And if this should seem sentimental, then let's not be ashamed to be sentimental when we look up at that sky from where « sentiment » comes and to where it returns!

LUCIA BAROCCHI

8 January 1976

We must pause a moment, not just to recall the second anniversary of the death of Maria Christina (a reminder of how time flies!), but, above all, to communicate to all our friends the experience we're going through.

We feel Maria Christina to be alive and with us more and more every day. The post coming in bears constant witness to how that seed is flourishing and to how the light is being shed.

The young girl is working silently amongst us from one end of Italy to the other, and also in places abroad. The phenomenon is not easily explained away and it leaves us constantly in wonder and deeply moved.

The booklet « In the light of the Epiphany » is in its sixth edition and it looks as if another reprint is in the making. The House dedicated to her is going well, but more important is the « Foundation » that bears her name. All the works of charity go through it as well as donations, and consequently it is hoped it will facilitate the many good works that need to be done without delay.

Old people keep writing and telephoning us asking about an « Old Folks' Home. Maria Christina's good will has filled them with the dream and the longing to be able to ease the loneliness of the closing days of their hard lives. It is what the « Foundation » has set itself to bring about as soon as possible.

It's two years since Maria Christina died, but the flame lit by her is getting bigger and bigger and glowing ever more brightly.

Mons. GIANCARLO SETTI

STEP BY STEP WITH MARIA CHRISTINA

To repeat what we said in our January communication when we gave an appraisal of the first year after the death of Maria Christina, we admit that events have happened but WHO is it who brings them about?

At that stage we felt deeply about the invisible thread which led us in our uncertainty to an undertaking (the Home for young people in ill-health) which Maria Christina had so much at heart.

To day we really feel moved by the extraordinary help which led to conclusion of the undertaking — from the restoration of the house itself to the very blinds and glasses —. Almost as if Maria Christina had pressed the generosity of our hearts, as she was well able to do when she was amongst us. Not only that... On the opening day, when it was decided to make a symbolic offering of the keys at the Offertory of the inaugural Mass, another strange « event » took place: five years ago, at Christmas, Maria Christina wanted to put in bonds all the money she had received as gifts from her relations (she always asked for money gifts so that she could use them more readily for her beloved poor) in a bank account, which by Christmas 1975 would have grown to the substantial sum of 500.000 lire. « By then » — she said to her mother jokingly, as she was wont to do — « I'll be 21 and you won't snatch that half a million from me, nor will you spend it on a fur coat for me! It will be the fund for my Home for the sick... ».

By « accident », Maria Christina's good work fructified when the first young girls were admitted to the Home... And so it was, in last analysis, to those bare keys on the Offertory plate — we who had believed that we had thought of everything — we added that first fund. Maria Christina's generosity had once again forestalled us.

We invited you all to come to Viale Galilei, 12, for the Inauguration Mass. It was not a question of publicity, you know that quite well. Rather was it that, looking around you and into each other's eyes, reading above all in the strained faces of Maria Christina's parents the loving cost of that House, you would feel as we do that, finally, it is we who have received Charity; the divine gift of Hope and Love.

LUCIA BAROCCHI

A SHORT SUMMING-UP

I knew Maria Christina intimately without understanding the mystery she harboured in her soul... and even still to-day I am spellbound by the fascination that emanates from this slender young girl.

It is a mysterious power that draws everybody who approaches near Maria Christina even to-day, though she is no longer with us pale and suffering. On account of the fascination this child exercised over me, I find myself following in her footsteps, so I look over the pile of correspondence which has been coming in since January 8, 1974, urging her parents and other people to set up the Foundation and to get busy in order to fulfil her ideal.

Letters began to arrive straight away and the mail has been getting heavier and heavier since the publication of her biography which Mons. Setti very simply wrote without delay after her death. The mail comes from all over Italy and from countries overseas. These letters are worthwhile transcribing because they are full of marvellous words and are a proof of the power of good and of the light that shines in every soul — a sure sign that this power and goodness lives on after death.

What has always struck me most about these letters is that people never write just to give expression to their own sufferings; on the contrary, everybody is animated by the desire to share in the good work, to donate their money or their free-time, so that personal crosses are made seem light in the face of this child's life and acceptance of the Cross.

At this point we will summarize the most salient aspects of the Foundation budget. We feel we should do this out of gratitude towards all those who really helped us out of love to set up the « Maria Christina Home » and to keep the Foundation going in all its other works in aid of the sick, the aged, the Missions. We do so also to give a further proof of the mysterious « chorus » of love intoned by Maria Christina.

We've had very many generous offerings from numerous bene-

factors, such as, Barocchi, Tonelli, Olivero etc., and some of these offerings have been used, even by me personally, for various activities. Our Board has made generous donations for various enterprises: the « Vincenzo Chiarugi » Rest-home of the Misericordia at Empoli, the « Day Hospital » which is going up in the S. Maria Nuova Hospital. Substantial offerings were also sent to the Capuchin Missions in the Amazon for the fuelling of the boat called « Maria Christina ».

Among the undertakings which have been finished, we can count the opening of the Maria Christina Home in Viale Galilei to which furniture, electrical appliances, lamps, pictures, quilts and bed linen were donated, as well as all the furnishings for the Chapel. These donations fill in the huge mosaic of charity, woven and embroidered by Maria Christina and by her friends to whom we are heartily grateful.

Our remaining funds are very low, but trusting in Divine Providence and in your generosity, just as we are led on by hope and sustained by the strong hand of Maria Christina, we count on being able to continue along the road which she pointed out to us and which she continues to illuminate.

SILVANA DANTI

8 January 1977

A DIVINE MESSAGE

In old medieval legends one often reads that at the death of some saint the ringing of the bells was doubly joyous. One finds the same stories in Tuscany.

When St. Fina died at San Gimignano, violets sprang up on the ancient towers which bear her name, and they flowered again on her anniversary. This little letter is like a flower to be placed for the anniversary on Maria Christina's grave which is always decked with flowers.

Her anniversary reminds us of how much has sprung up since her death, like the ringing of the bells and the flowering of the violets as related in medieval legends.

It's not possible to give a lifeless list of the good that's come about since her death. There's the mail from all over the world and several proofs of spiritual fruits.

Full of sunlight and smiles, the Home has now been opened a year. The little booklet is in its 13th edition and has also been translated into French. Other good works are under way, which will be spoken about in due course.

God became a child so as to bring His message of love into the world, and men will ever ponder on this message and draw inspiration from it in order to follow and imitate it.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that also through Maria Christina, God wants to give us His message of love. We can never reflect enough on that love, just as we can never try hard enough to put it into practice in our lives.

Mons. GIANCARLO SETTI

THE HOME FOR THE AGED

With time, everything has been accomplished as she had wished.

With these words we can conclude the message left by Maria Christina Ogier to her mother at the end of 1973 when she felt death approaching — and felt it so near that she was ready for the sacrifice; while, at the same time, feeling a certain anguish of fear.

Then her mother's arms were stretched open to receive her, to attenuate the cold fear of death in that warm embrace. Those same arms also welcomed, as it were, the message which was a call to charity: « Continue the work I wanted to do. Set up the home for those young people in ill health, set up a Home for the aged who have need of that same warmth of their childhood ».

Christina's mother has passed on to us her daughter's wishes smiling in the midst of her tears. She never tired of asking for help which all generously gave.

While Christina was on earth, she had alms for the poor, the distressed, the handicapped and the missions. In Heaven she must surely have asked the Angels to help us, to guide us, to make the impossible possible. The Home for young girls in Viale Galileo Galilei sprang up out of the magic of love; amid numberless small but united efforts of charity.

To-day, as a result of unforeseen circumstances and through the same magic of love, the Home for the Aged is being realised. Everything is ready; we need only « them » to come knocking to find the warmth they enjoyed when they were children and which they recall as: home, smiling faces, carefully prepared meals, gardens and twittering of birds, a joyful « Good-morning », a « Good-night » to fill their hearts with peace.

MARIA LAURA TONELLI

STEP BY STEP WITH MARIA CHRISTINA

Yes, indeed! Step by step with Maria Christina here we are at our third yearly appraisal. Let's be simple about it not fearing vanity, for, since all our undertakings are being directed from above, it is obvious that we are none other than servants, unprofitable servants!

When I got to the « Maria Christina Home » which is not just hers in name but in actual fact since it is lovingly watched over by the Ogier parents as if it were their daughter's very own house... When I bend down to kiss the « youngest » in the « family » (a little mite with a great desire to live and to do things in spite of the polio which afflicted him when he was only seven years old and caused him to have to wear irons corsets... or when I bend over the worst afflicted of all, (a little Beato Angelico face, the blue eyes accentuated by the spot of eye shadow which she manages to put on every morning with the one free hand left her in her paralysis...) or the most silent of all, still hardly able to believe she has found a home of her own, a home where an invalid is not considered a burden but an invaluable member of the family); when I embrace the joyful and open-minded Sisters, when I listen to the echo of the song that's just been sung on the last record (just as Maria Christina used to say: young people who are ill might at least be able to live as youngsters!); when I think that shortly all the beds will be occupied for life by a « family » which has finally found security and serenity... then, I'm always amazed at how such a « little seed » which had died could flower in the world... a seed which, while alive, « had done everything it could as a servant, and now commands, now has her own servants!

And so step by step with this flower who has taught us so much, I go down the steps which lead to the little Chapel. I draw near to the Master of the House (He also is « infirm » amongst us in the Tabernacle). I tell Him there is none other more worthy to be served than He. The Master who knows how to blend in our hearts, joy and suffering, disheartenment at being His unprofitable servants and pride in being His servants, the fear of not being able to reach Him and the peace of having found Him.

LUCIA BAROCCHI

AN INVITATION

At this point we must admit that it was our intention to let the real protagonists of the Home to say the last word — the Sisters who run the Home and the young members who make up the « family ». But as we go to press, we're quite convinced that anything they say — apart from the generosity of heart that might dictate it — would fall short in fully revealing the extent of the generosity of the Sisters, Minims of the Sacred Heart, who are in charge of the Home, as also the sense of peace which dwells in the hearts of these young people who are so sensitive and grateful.

For that very reason, we would only make one suggestion: that the reader actually come and meet the patients instead of reading whatever might be written about them. They will touch your hearts much more than printed matter will. You'll be giving them a gift just as, without doubt, you yourself will be receiving likewise.

MARIA CHRISTINA OGIER Board

For further information apply to:

Mons. GIANCARLO SETTI
Basilica di San Lorenzo
Piazza San Lorenzo, 9 - 50123 FIRENZE
Telefono 21.66.34

TIPOGRAFIA GIUNTINA - FIRENZE