

aged to keep a tiny precarious flame of puritanism alive despite their nefarious activities.

Once in the course of a top-level conference with Lucky in Palermo the head of the Sicilian Mafia asked Luciano how he managed to get mixed up in such a sordid business as prostitution, to which the reply was that Lucky had always considered foreign women as only half human. He couldn't imagine them in the guise of Sicilian wives and mothers. Valachi was bewildered, too, when Luciano was arrested on multiple counts of compulsory prostitution. "I was stunned," he says. "Charley Lucky wasn't no pimp. He was a boss."

About forty other prominent Cosa Nostra "greaseballs" died violently the same day as Maranzano, and thereafter, with Luciano and the late Vito Genovese in the saddle, a measure of stability returned. In his description of a typical killing Valachi brings to life the short sharp war against these men with outmoded ideas:

"He came out of the office with his wife," Buster replied. "He kissed her in front of the office, and I was worried I wouldn't get a shot. But he turned and went for the corner. She was just standing there watching when I got him. I don't think I missed once. You could see the dust coming off his coat when the bullets hit."

"It's too bad the wife had to see him go," Valachi said.

Joe Valachi comes out of this as a small man, clearly vain. He joined Cosa Nostra for the leverage it would give him in the rackets, but also for the prestige—the *mystique* of the Organization. It was great to be in the mob. Within its ranks Valachi always remained a soldier because he had short-term ambitions and was greedy for gain rather than power. He took like a duck to water to fairly safe illegalities like loan-sharking and the numbers game, and seemed happier still as he muscled into legitimate spheres through partnerships in a restaurant and a garment business.

In the 1940s Valachi grubbed together enough money to join the flow of mobsters to the suburbs, and like his colleagues he behaved with the utmost propriety in the new environment. Genovese had laid down the pattern of conduct in a few words of advice: "It's different from living in the city," he said. "Make the people in the neighborhood like you. Don't fool around with the 'weak' [ordinary law-abiding citizens]. Give to the Boy Scouts and all the charities. Try to make it to church. Don't fool around with the local girls."

With his social upgrading Joe Valachi took on other responsibilities, notably the suitable education of his son, who was sent to a private school at a cost of

more than \$1,600 a year. "I am a happy man that I brought up my kid naïve," he says, "so he wouldn't be in the life I was." The hint of self-disapproval here is interesting and may reflect Valachi's low standing in the Organization. Top-level members have no such qualms about themselves.

Valachi, who grew up in a filthy tenement, loved to potter about his suburban home doing odd jobs, and he put in a concrete driveway "so as not to mess up the house from the dirt road." One can imagine the dismay of this *bourgeois manqué* when reminded that membership in Cosa Nostra, besides bestowing privileges, imposed obligations, and he was ordered by his superior to carry out a "contract" (the liquidation of another mobster).

What Valachi has to say about such commissions comes as a surprise. One of the principal items on the agenda of the celebrated Apalachin meeting of the heads of the Cosa Nostra Families was the removal from membership of a large number of soldiers who had demonstrated their unfitness by bungling contracts. "A count of inept executions had been kept since the membership books were opened. There were . . . twenty-seven contracts that ended in complete misses, slight wounds, and bodies being left around in the street."

Valachi's undoing was his habit of going back into narcotics for a fast buck. The profits were huge, but it was dangerous business, outlawed by half the Cosa Nostra Families (even Genovese claimed to be against it), and if a member insisted in dabbling on his own account, he did so in the knowledge that the Organization would not protect him. Once Valachi took a chance and bought fifteen kilograms of heroin at \$2,500 a kilogram (thirty-five ounces) from a French supplier in Marseilles with the intention of reselling the consignment on the American wholesale market at \$11,000 a kilogram. Cold feet at the last moment made him decide to cut his lieutenant, Tony Bender, in on the deal

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3. Mafia: Native Sons

The Man Who Plays Alone, by Danilo Dolci, translated from the Italian by Antonia Cowan (Pantheon, 367 pp. \$7.95), documents a society whose long experience of organized oppression has led it to distrust all forms of collective action. Gabriel Gersh is a long-time student of Mediterranean history and politics.

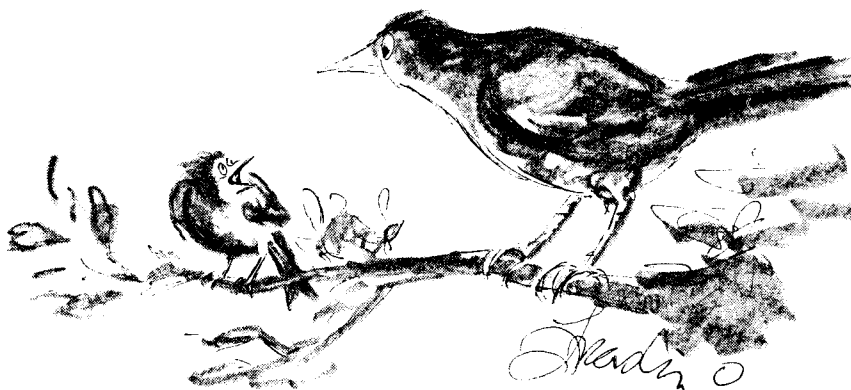
By GABRIEL GERSH

WHAT RATIONALIZATIONS do many of us make to ourselves when we see those requests for money for causes like Biafra and Save the Children? Do we belong to the what's-the-use school? Or to the I'm-too-busy school? Or do we say, "Well, I send them a check sometimes"? A lot of us go through these and similar motions; and one reason Danilo Dolci arouses both admiration and resentment is that he does not. He has given himself unreservedly to those whose lives have been blighted by hunger, fear, despair, and the selfishness of others.

Though Dolci's books have been compared to those of Carlo Levi and Ignazio Silone, he is the first Italian to step out of a literary tradition and dedicate his life to human beings who are submerged in squalor and wretchedness. Danilo Dolci's chosen terrain is Western Sicily, an area more unyielding to change than that in which Gandhi worked because it lacks the ferment provided by a struggle for freedom. Sicilian regionalism, ingrained for centuries, is the means by which oppressors—particularly the politicians, the Mafia, and the Church—have entrenched themselves in power.

Dolci was among the first to use tape-recorded speech as a new and vivid form of literature. Being a compassionate man, he has been able to draw out the innermost confidences, confessions, and prejudices of men and women trapped in misery, and a terrible form of beauty has sometimes ensued.

In *The Man Who Plays Alone*, ably
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"Fly south in October, fly north in March, build nests all spring, feed chicks all summer and teach them to fly in time to start all over again. How am I supposed to remember all this?"

The Lady Was a Drifter

Diaries, 1915-1918, by Lady Cynthia Asquith, edited by E. M. Horsley (Knopf, 560 pp. \$10), conveys the anguish of a society whose world had come to a premature end. Leon Edel's latest book is "The Treacherous Years," a continuation of his series on Henry James to be published in June.

By LEON EDEL

LADY CYNTHIA ASQUITH was the daughter of an earl and the daughter-in-law of a prime minister. She moved among the titled of England and also among its élite of culture and politics. Member of a homogeneous aristocratic world, she knew it as civilized and cynical—the young inclined to be a bit "fast," the elders still deeply aware of *noblesse oblige*, clinging to fragmented remnants of feudal power. The 1914-1918 war cut Lady Cynthia adrift. Her husband went off to the trenches. She had not married wealth; she could not maintain their home in London. She found herself, as the editor of these diaries relates, "flitting from temporary roof to temporary roof" with her two baby sons—"cuckooing," she ruefully called it. Possessing a delicate and subtle kind of beauty, painted by the leading artists, among them Sargent and Augustus John, she tried for work in the movies and later became secretary to the whimsical and melancholy James Barrie, author of *Peter Pan*. In 1915 a friend urged her to keep a diary. She cultivated the habit. The present volume is her record of the war years.

It would be easy to patronize Lady Cynthia's diaries. They are often trivial; they are hardly literary; and one could be condescending about the "high life" they describe. By democratic standards, aristocrats aren't supposed to be human. Lady Cynthia was; and in the midst of the trivia there are serious and poignant pages, for what comes through the often humdrum story is the deep suffering, the eternal ennui of the home front; a kind of killing of time as a means of insulation against the killing one couldn't shut out. Beyond the lunches, the teas, the bright talk, the gossip and rumor, the assumed gaiety, there were the inescapable casualty lists. The war was static and only a few hundred miles away. The trenches in Flanders were a yawning, self-renewing grave.

Lady Cynthia is observant and direct. Her matter-of-factness makes her diaries come all the more alive: Winston Churchill at London dinners, brooding and scowling, saying through clenched teeth, "Mr. Britling hasn't nearly seen it through yet." Or a poetry reading at which "the author of *Prufrock* read

quite a funny poem comparing the Church to a hippopotamus." A young man named Huxley seems to have been present. John Singer Sargent, of whom we know so little, appears here, "extraordinarily inarticulate, grumbling and growling and clutching the air in efforts to produce quite ordinary words." But most important is the feeling of a generation's anguish.

The United States, for all its war experiences during this century, has never known this kind of suffering. No one of us could cry, as Lady Cynthia does, "Oh why was I born for this time? Before one is thirty, to know more dead than living people!" She hardly knew "who is alive and who is dead." She speaks for the sacrifice and loss and mourning of an entire era. And behind her last entry there is a world of numbing experience: "I am beginning to rub my eyes at the prospect of peace. I think it will require more courage than anything that has gone before. It isn't until one leaves off spinning round that one realizes how giddy one is. One will have to look at long vistas again, instead of short ones, and one will at last fully recognize that the dead are not only dead for the duration of the war." Lady Cynthia had a way of coming up with sudden truth, of looking reality full in the face.

Her friendship with D. H. Lawrence has long been known. Some of his finest letters were written to her, and she brings great vividness to her picture of him. Seen through her eyes he is very much the Lawrence of Huxley's *Point Counter Point*—provocative, savage, feline-aggressive, as when he mocks Edward Marsh "lamenting Rupert Brooke over his evening whisky." Lady Cynthia is disturbed by his books. *Women in Love* is "nightmarish," and of Lawrence himself she says, "a man whose temperature is 103—he is delirious." But she likes his way of talking: "Lawrence's voice, with its layers of harshness and softness." He is earnest, "every inch of his body talks with his tongue." He has "great power of resentment," and humor and anger. "Indisputably a genius," her friend Desmond MacCarthy remarks of Lawrence, adding, "but no artist."

They pass before us in these pages: Lady Ottoline Morrell, Charles Whibley, Margot Asquith, Duff and Lady Diana Cooper—names out of the fading part of the century, but more than names. The present tends to scoff at such figures of the past, forgetting that they had all the heartache and suffering we have known. Now some are become footnotes, and the editor has buried them in the index. It is often difficult to figure out Lady Cynthia's nicknames—the ever-present "Bluetooth," for instance, who turns out to be an influential M.P., Harold Baker. More conventional editing might have helped, as well as judicious pruning of

the mere routine of Lady Cynthia's life. But one carries away above all from these diaries, even from their quiet minutiae, the terror of a society for whom the world has come to a premature end, living out its days with such solace as can be gleaned, and confronted always by those terrible casualty lists. It was a tragic generation, doomed to pass its youth in one war, its old age in another.

Quizzical Victorian

Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer, by Vivien Noakes (Houghton Mifflin, 359 pp. \$8.95), depicts an unstuffy Victorian who sought recognition as a landscape painter and achieved it with inspired nonsense verse and drawings. Paul K. Cuneo is book editor of *America* magazine.

By PAUL K. CUNEO

ON ONE OF THE FINAL pages of Vivien Noakes's biography there is a reproduction of the last photograph taken of Edward Lear, showing him as he was in 1887 not long before his death. Seated in a comfortable high-backed chair and wearing a loose-fitting but well-made vest and jacket, he gazes directly out at us with a slightly quizzical, worried look. His beard and mustache are full, his glasses are round and metal-rimmed. He seems to be listening attentively to what someone is saying to him, and his hand and forearm nearest the camera are extended slightly, as if to help him grasp a point he is trying to understand.

This man is definitely a Victorian gentleman, but he is not one of the stiff, almost embalmed figures we associate with photo subjects of the 1880s. In an age and country that produced an unusual number of both stuffed shirts and dazzling eccentrics, Lear was a different sort of individualist. He was a man of great humanity, formed perhaps by the
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—From "Edward Lear."