

# Vienna as the Last Lights Fade

*The Lost City*, by John Gunther (Harper & Row, 594 pp. \$5.95), conjures up the "twilight smoothness" of pre-Hitler Vienna. Henry C. Wolfe, who knew the Danube city well, is author of "The German Octopus."

By HENRY C. WOLFE

**E**VEN while events of the early Thirties were sweeping her on toward *Anschluss* and doom, "the old lilac city" on the Danube exerted her traditional charm. In his massive and nostalgic novel *The Lost City* John Gunther evokes the mood and the political climate of those years in Vienna as they affect the lives of a group of foreign correspondents, their wives and mistresses. Central to the action of the story—and a dramatic, suspenseful, often tragic story it is—are the Chicago journalist, Mason Jarrett, and his devoted wife, Paula.

Carried along on the tide of political disorder, yet lulled by the "twilight smoothness" of Vienna's moral dissolution, the Jarretts are ultimately enmeshed in economic vicissitudes and amorous intrigues. Some of Jarrett's fellow newsmen are corrupt, others are not averse to preying on their colleagues—and their colleagues' wives. A few are ready to work for the Nazis or the Communists. To all of them Vienna is important as well as pleasurable: from there they

cover the key territory of Central and Southeastern Europe.

Thanks to a tip from a lesbian nightclub singer, Jarrett helps break the story of an attempted Austro-German customs union. Later he investigates rumors that A.O.G., most powerful bank in central Europe, is bribing newsmen. Despite local top-echelon opposition, Jarrett exposes the bribery scandal, thereby speeding up A.O.G.'s sensational failure. In consequence, banks crash all over Europe, Britain goes off the gold standard, inflation and depression eventually force American newspapers to fire correspondents, slash salaries, and close foreign bureaus. The Jarretts, like most of their circle, suffer financial straits.

The political disorder meantime increases. The Nazis murder Chancellor Dollfuss. Instead of uniting against their common Nazi foe, the Heimwehr conservatives and Socialists engage in bloody civil strife, thus helping set the

stage for Hitler's takeover. Jarrett takes part in the fighting.

Under the strain of the worsening European situation, their friends' personal tragedies, their own money problems, and Jarrett's philandering (Paula's started later), the couple's life together disintegrates. The Jarretts leave Austria, settle in London, and separate. In every sense their beloved Vienna has become a lost city.

Mr. Gunther, who lived in Vienna in the early Thirties, says in an author's note that his new book "is a novel, a work of the imagination, not a reminiscence or disguised autobiography." Old Vienna hands, nevertheless, may find in the diverse and fascinating cast of characters some resemblances to actual persons and to certain distinctive and exotic Viennese types. In general, the historical background is factual. The mood conjures up the soul of dying pre-Hitler Vienna.

But the author saves surprises for the reader. After a nightmarish interlude, Vienna—like the Jarretts—works out her salvation. For courageous Austria, as the reader of postwar European history knows, staged an almost miraculous political, economic, and moral recovery. Her beautiful capital, Mr. Gunther points out, "is once more incontestably one of the best-run cities in the world."

## A Friendly Kind of Fury

*The Blessington Method and Other Strange Tales*, by Stanley Ellin (Random House, 185 pp. \$3.95), combines the humorous and the grotesque in a manner reminiscent of Saki. Cecil Hemley is a novelist and editor who is currently director of Ohio University Press.

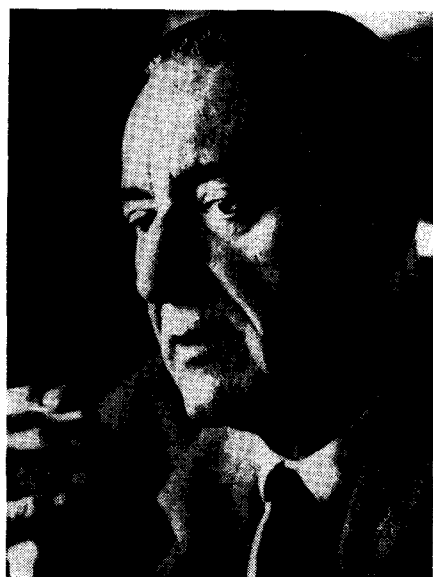
By CECIL HEMLEY

**L**IKE all satirists, Stanley Ellin is well aware of how much cant and hypocrisy there are in the world. The selfish and violent sides of man's nature may be concealed but not eradicated. Ellin, too mature to groan about this unhappy situation, laughs about it. When he is at his best, as in "The Blessington Method" and "The Nine-to-Five Man," he is very amusing indeed.

In some respects, Ellin reminds me of the English humorist Saki. Ellin, like Saki, combines the grotesque and the funny. Like Saki he writes with great concision. But he is not nearly so witty as Saki nor so polished a stylist. He is satisfied to say what he has on his mind with few verbal felicities.

His greatest gift is his grasp of structure. He can invent almost perfect plots, completely devoid of commentary. Consequently, his stories, though short, imply large areas of meaning. For example, in "The Blessington Method" a successful businessman is induced by a representative of the Society for Gerontology to finance the murder of his father-in-law. Before the representative entered Mr. Treadwell's office, Treadwell had no idea that he wished to be rid of his father-in-law. So the representative, Bunce, becomes a kind of Satan. Bunce is no mere symbol, however, but very much himself, a fine example of the modern man of good will who gets paid for his goodness. That the worthy organization that employs him finally reduces to a band of cutthroats is one of the high points of the joke but by no means exhausts it.

In "The Nine-to-Five Man" Ellin gives us a day in the life of a professional arsonist. Mr. Keesler, who has sent his sons through college and never once betrayed his wife, lives a completely humdrum existence despite his unusual way of supporting his family. The story is told with such objectivity



—David Douglas Duncan.

John Gunther—"surprises."

and such fine detail that it achieves a life of its own. It can be interpreted in any number of ways, or not interpreted at all.

Though some of the stories are not as successful as these two, almost all are worth reading. "You Can't Be a Little Girl All Your Life" has a fine, bold opening but a contrived ending. "Beidenbauer's Flea" and "The Seven Deadly Virtues" are so slight they might well have been left out of the volume. But "The Question" and "The Day of the Bullet" are both excellent. The last named, incidentally, is the only really personal story in the book, and it has an emotional quality that the other stories carefully avoid.

**Chaste in Cinecittà:** Although Leonardo Bercovici has subtitled *The Satyr and the Saint* (Scribners, \$3.95), his mischievous immorality play, "a novel of the Roman film colony," it is actually one of those stories that could have happened anywhere. It is just coincident that Cinecittà and its environs provide the appropriate fevered temperatures for the forced growth of a funny yet essentially ironic romance, and also a suitably cynical angle of vision from which to watch its improbable progress.

Eduardo, the "saint," is a young writer with an ear for dialogue, a knack for characterization, and an instinctive grasp of what makes a good movie scene—all manna to Urbani, a silver-haired actor-director whose international luster needs repolishing. Urbani makes a protégé of the young man, and offers him all the fleshly pleasures of Rome's *dolce vita*, only to discover, to his stupefaction, that Eduardo is incredibly chaste—indeed, has set for himself the impossible ideal of marrying a girl who is beautiful, intelligent, and virginal. Urbani, a man with three wives (which is something of a strain on holidays), follows Eduardo's quest with amused interest. And so does the reader, for Urbani's urbanity is implicit in Bercovici's style and outlook, while both the characters and their settings are depicted with wit and affection. *The Satyr and the Saint* throws little light on movie production in Italy, but a great deal on the mentality of the personalities involved in it.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.

**Coming October 3  
SR's Fall Book Number**

## The Mind Behind the Master's Hands

***The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, by Charles de Tolnay (Pantheon. 144 pp. 44 pp. of plates. \$7.95), evaluates the master's political convictions, philosophy, religiosity, and esthetics. Robert J. Clements, one of the two Americans invited to lecture at the Fourth Centenary Congress described in this review, wrote "Michelangelo: A Self-Portrait."**

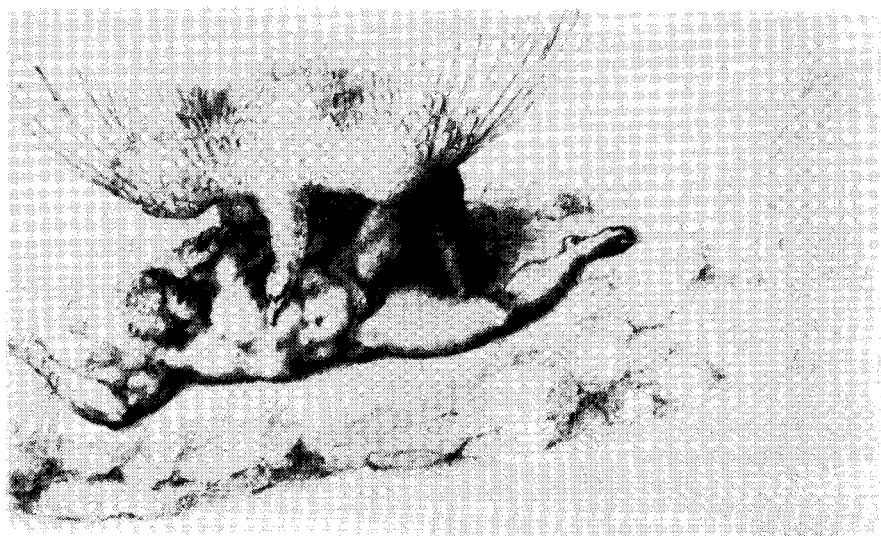
By ROBERT J. CLEMENTS

**T**HIS summer Rome and Florence commemorated with great ceremony the uneasy death of Michelangelo. ("I regret that I have not done enough for the salvation of my soul," confessed the dying artist to Cardinal Salviati. "I regret that I must die just as I am learning the alphabet of my profession.") The mayors of Florence and Rome invited some forty international students of Michelangelo to speak on their special researches. These rival cities took great pains to organize exhibits of Michelangelo autographs at the Laurentian Library, and of his art (in replica) in Rome's Exposition Palace. Even concerts featuring Michelangelo's madrigals were arranged in the Sagrestia Vecchia of San Lorenzo Basilica in Florence and in the Horatii and Curiatii Hall of the Capitoline Museum, Rome.

The very first lecture, heralded by costumed trumpeters and standard bearers

in the Cinquecento Hall of the Palazzo Vecchio, was given by Charles de Tolnay. For de Tolnay, in Europe at least, is the acknowledged dean of Michelangelo studies. Professor de Tolnay's lecture on Florence's role in the formation of Michelangelo produced, as expected, something new. He exhibited a Rubens drawing of a Hercules copied from none other than the lost statue executed by Michelangelo as a boy and last seen at Fontainebleau in 1713. De Tolnay's status was again acknowledged at the close of Margrit Lisner's exciting paper. Even readers of tabloids had been alerted that this German scholar claimed to have hit upon an unrecognized wooden *Crucifixion* by Michelangelo in the Church of Santo Spirito. In a sense, her claim needed acceptance by the Fourth Centenary Congress. It befell to de Tolnay, accepting the authenticity of the figure, to speak for the majority and assume the responsibility of approval.

As further testimony to de Tolnay's pre-eminence in this field, and as a commemorative act in itself, Pantheon now provides an English version of his *L'art et la pensée de Michel-Ange*, four lectures delivered by the Hungarian-American scholar at the Collège de France in 1948. Whereas most of de Tolnay's writing is intended for specialists, this volume can be read with profit by all. Four sectors of the master's thought are carefully evaluated: his political thought, "philosophy," religiosity, and esthetics. De Tolnay not only probes the



—From the book.

"Tityus," by Michelangelo. Black chalk. Windsor Castle, Royal Library.