

# American Notebook

By LEWIS NICHOLS

House, the book's publisher, gave a little party for "Adam Smith"-Goodman. Some book people were there, and money people, and it was estimated that at one point, money people controlling 29-billion dollars were in the room. They acted just like everyone else.

### The Roth Book

Although its Random House publication is still seven months away, there is no question that Philip Roth's new novel, "Portnoy's Complaint," will be one of the most talked about books of the winter. Even now, it is more talked about than most books ever are, this due to the prevalence of masturbation shown in four excerpts published in magazines. Some questions: "What is this new Philip Roth?", "What is Philip Roth getting at?", finally, "What do you think of *this* Philip Roth?"

Talk, speculation aside, Mr. Roth finished the novel at Yaddo a month ago, a manuscript of 80,000 words, which he had begun a year and a half before, although carrying around the ideas in his head and notebooks for many years before that. The four excerpts accounted for a bit more than half the novel, which is about a Jewish family and sounds more than a little autobiographical, and these have been changed slightly for the final form. Random House paid him a cool quarter-million in advance royalties—this is not from Mr. Roth — and Bantam paid a cool \$350,000 for the basic paperback rights. The author doesn't know how he'll spend the summer, but probably will travel; he has some ideas for his next book but nothing is yet on paper.

### Nero's Creator

In a review of "The Father Hunt" a couple of weeks ago, our reviewer of mysteries noted that its author, Rex Stout, is now in his 82nd year. If memories serve, including Mr. Stout's, this would make him the oldest practitioner in the field in this country.

He is no creaking elder statesman, mouthing halting reminiscences in his beard, although he has one. Fast at the typewriter, he sits at it a couple of months in the winter, and so, on a recent day, was between books. On that day, and on his 58-acre place along the Danbury, Conn. — Brewster, N.Y. corridor, he was doing the following: thinning peaches, spacing strawberry runners, picking 11 quarts of strawberries, cutting chives and

putting up a wire fence to keep the deer at a distance. It was a thoroughly exhausting day for a visitor, who felt 100.

He has written 41 books about Nero Wolfe, his all but immobile hero; and five omnibus volumes have been derived from these. There also have been 7 non-Nero books. His outdoor months are May through October; and he says that while gardening, he doesn't think of Nero plots to be used during the months of November through April. Pressed about this, he finally conceded, "I suspect that while I'm doing other things I do think — but this is below the level of consciousness. But then, all my important de-



Rex Stout.

cisions are taken below the level of consciousness."

To Nero and his more active associate, Archie Goodwin, Mr. Stout can ascribe no origin beyond "they are created characters, which like Topsy just grew." As to his own reading of detective stories, he is a tough critic, starting maybe five a month, finishing one and "often finding that one isn't very good." Whither detective stories? "It all depends on who is competent in writing them in the next 20 years. They will define the direction."

### A.A.U.P.

Random notes picked up at the annual meeting of the Association of American University Presses, recently held on the campus of Princeton University:

Present, 350 delegates from the 68 member presses. These are mostly university presses, but a few like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Smithsonian Institution belong because they *think* like university