American Notebook

BY LEWIS NICHOLS

"Adam Smith"

The hot book these July days — witness the best-seller list — is "Dooney's Game," by "Adam Smith." A lighthearted account of the workings of the Stock Exchange and kindred matters brings up the question of what sort of Wall Street type can be lighthearted about such weighty things. Turns out he's a temporarily deflected novelist.

Behind "Adam Smith" lies George J. W. Goodman, editorial board member of New York magazine and editor of the monthly pieces for fun on financial investing, for professional money managers. Of medium height, he has prematurely gray, curly hair and horn-rim glasses and is 37.

Born in St. Louis, he graduated from Harvard (1952), moved over to Oxford. Told that a thesis he wanted to write on partitioning was "too contemporary" for Oxford, he decided to go home. Oxford relented, said to write what he liked, so he wrote a story. This first novel "Dooney's Game" was subsequently expanded into a novel — about a Harvard graduate — called "The Bubble Makers" (1959). Later he wrote two other novels, "A Time for Paris" and "The Wheeler Dealers"; collaborated on a mystery, "A Kill- ing in the West," and wrote a children's book, "Bascombe the Fastest Hound Alive."

Between times, he was on the staffs of Collier's magazine, Time, Fortune. Back home to Wall Street in 1960, working with a mutual fund. Left to go to Hollywood to do the screenplay of "The Wheeler Dealers." He stayed there doing other screenplays, TV pilots and the like, before returning to New York in 1965.

He began writing the "Adam Smith" story for fun on Wall Street days, and about half "The Money Game" was first published as such pieces in New York magazine. The putting-together of the whole book took place last summer in Princeton, N.J., where he lives with his wife and two children. In print now are 140,000 copies, and since the Stock Exchange estimates that 24,000,000 Americans own stock in publicly owned corporations, it could be sales are just starting.

Postscript: James Silberman, executive editor at Random

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House, the book's publisher, gave a lively party for "Adam Smith"-Goodman. Some book people were there, and money people, and it was estimated that at one point, money people counted 29 million 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. But most books ever are, this due to the prevalence of masturbation shown in four excerpts published in magazines. Some questions that 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 Yad- do 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 account 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.

Mr. Roth 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 are to be believed, including Mr. Stout's, this would make him the oldest practitioner in the field in this country.

He is no creaking elder statesman, mounting 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 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 decisions 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." Whether 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 presses. . . . The 350 contrast w ith some 1,200 people who met informally in the twenties to discuss scholarly works. Two of the eight survive, Charles G. Proffitt, director of the Columbia University Press and Donald P. Bean, director emeritus of the Syracuse University Press. . . . Mr. Bean, now 73, is an example of how university presses can play the same game of musical chairs as do book people everywhere. During his career, he directed the presses at Chicago, Cincinnati, and Syracuse, and, retiring, returned to live in Palo Alto. . . . Unlike most conventionees, the university-press people work at it. No sooner is the opening day dinner ended than delegates rushed off to various rooms of the Woodrow Wilson School to hear papers and discuss such subjects as jacket design, selling American book rights to European publishers and publishing the complete works of such authors as Herman Melville. . . . university sent delegates with the shortest miniskirts, thus one up to Canada. . . . One of the subjects to concern the university presses is whether or not to publish doctoral dissertations. These correspond to the "over-the-transom" items sent in hopefully by unknowns to commercial publishers. A panel and discussion agreed: Don't turn them all down. Publish those a good editor can turn into book form. These dissertations may not be the greatest books, but you have an author, and as is true of book world reasoning everywhere, his second book may be the year's winner. . . . One oldtimer to another, "I feel out of place here with all these young minds and hands." . . . This oldtimer, "Since we can't get young, we'd better grow better. . . ." A representative of the United States Information Agency told the delegates that since 1950 the U.S.A. had made available to readers in other lands some quarter-billion copies of American books, this by gift, translation aid, etc. . . . The costs of the Vietnam war have cut into the Federal Government's allotment of money to be spent on books. Delegates were told that this will continue until the war is over. . . . The social highlight of the convention was a lawn party thrown by four university presses having a similar address — California, founded in 1898, Columbia (1893), Johns Hopkins (1878) and Yale (1908). There was a tent, a band, dancing, beer and pretzels, and on the program at 11 p.m., the middle of the night, everyone began to look just a bit like either Scott or Zelda.