

FEBRUARY
SELECTION

1964

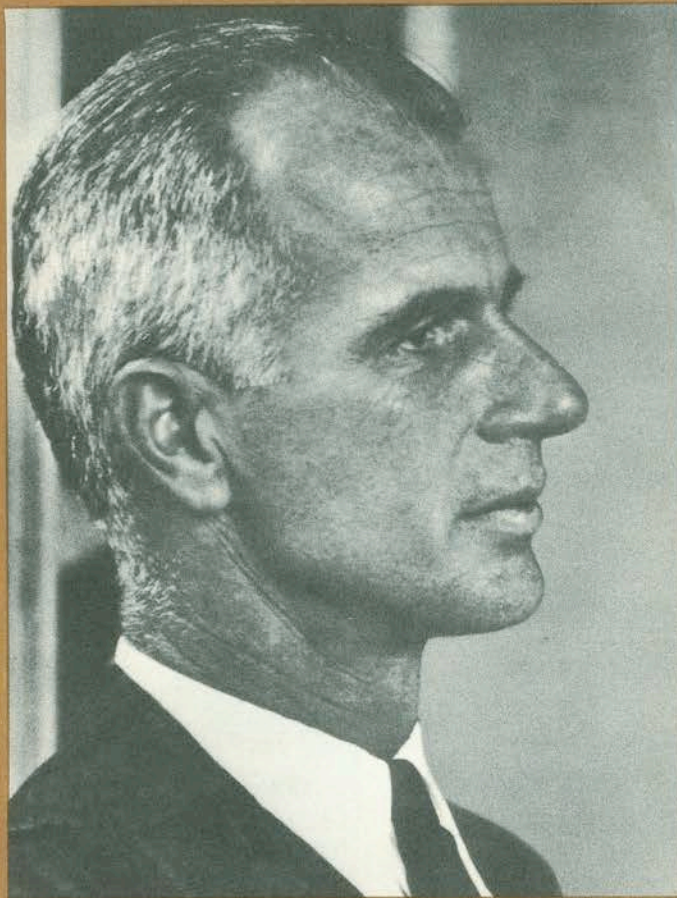


PHOTO: ALFRED A. KNOPF

WHITE LOTUS

EDITORIAL BOARD

*John Mason Brown
Basil Davenport
Clifton Fadiman
Gilbert Highet
John K. Hutchens*



By REX STOUT

THE bare facts of John Hersey's history are too well known to be recounted here in detail. Born in 1914, in China, of missionary parents, schooled at Hotchkiss and Yale and Cambridge, secretary for Sinclair Lewis, correspondent for *Time* magazine—those and many other details have been often told and printed. But the point is, who and what is this man now, at 50?

John Hersey the storyteller. In 1946, having won a Pulitzer Prize for *A Bell for Adano*, he went to Hiroshima as a journalist, to report on the grisly triumph of the debut of the fissioned atom, and came out with a collection of stories, making his report a contribution to world literature. In 1947, writing a long chronicle of the massacre by the Germans of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, he had it nearly all down and was approaching the end—but he felt it wouldn't do. He scrapped it and started over again, and produced *The Wall*, not only an epic record of human suffering, valor and fortitude, but also an unforgettable story. In 1955 he decided to write a book about a river, the Yangtze, but three things happened to it: it took the form of a novel; it centered on a man, Old Pebble; and the man, not the river, got the title—*A Single Pebble*. It was a story.

JOHN has never said (I call him John because I have been calling him that for twenty years) that when he started *The War Lover* his purpose was to write a book about the killing instinct in man, but I think it was, because I know him. But what he wrote was a story about Marrow and Boman and Daphne,

Rex Stout, creator of Nero Wolfe, is president of the Authors League of America.

actually more about the loving instinct than the killing instinct. I think that what happens is that John is taken with an idea for a tract, and probably he would love to write a tract, but he can't, because people keep butting in—because he is a born storyteller.

John Hersey the professional writer. He never spouts or struts about his work and his dedication to it, as many have and do, but he has strong convictions about the honor and consequence of the profession of writing, and also he has deep concern for the material interests of those who practice it. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, of the P.E.N. Club, and of the Councils of the Authors Guild and the Authors League of America; and he is a working member. He devotes much time and energy and ingenuity to the affairs of the Guild and League in such temporal but vital matters as copyright revision, tax laws and terms of book contracts. If the Authors League followed the example of a baseball league's Most Valuable Player Award and gave a Most Valuable Member Award, I can guess who would get it.

JOHN HERSEY the person. He is tall, slender, erect, quick and sure in movement. With a little less chin and a shorter neck he could have sat for Michelangelo's Isaiah. At a dinner table he talks as much as the next one; at a Council meeting he is slow to speak, but when he does, it is to the point and incisive. At a meeting of the Writers Board for World Government some years ago, when a member objected to the Board's policy and program, and discussion was getting heated, John said to him, "Perhaps the simplest way to resolve it would be for you to resign." No censure or animus, merely a (Continued on page 13)