

## Take Me out to the Binder

*Now is the time of year the thoughts of boys of all ages—and girls too—turn to the baseball diamond. SR continues its occasional series on the literature of recreation with a discussion of the season's outstanding books on baseball.*

By Al Silverman

SOME day in the world of letters there will come along a completely unselfish public figure, one who will publish his memoirs under his own byline, but who will dedicate them not to his mother, father, wife, or mistress, but to "Joe Doakes, without whose writing this book could never have been written." Meanwhile a most anonymous profession, ghost-writing, continues in its obscurity, except for the apologetic "as told to" or "edited by" inscribed in small type in an inconspicuous corner.

When ghost-writer Charles Einstein, to get down to cases, collaborated with Willie Mays on his new autobiography, **"Born to Play Ball"** (Putnam, \$3), funny things happened. Einstein had the occasion one afternoon to call Mays on the telephone to clear up a few story points.

"Hello, Willie," Einstein said, "this is Charlie."

"Charlie who?" Mays answered.

"Charlie Einstein," the author replied with considerable pique, "the fellow who's writing the book for you."

"What book?"

Be that as it may, **"Born to Play Ball"** is a genuine *tour de force*, surely the first time in baseball history that an autobiography has been written by a twenty-three-year-old player who has had only one full season as a major-leaguer. After all, Stendhal's private diaries weren't made public until long after his death. And Thomas De Quincey didn't write his **"Confessions of an Opium-Eater"** until he was thirty-six. Then again, it is unlikely that either man could play center field in the altogether incredible manner Willie Mays does for the New York Giants.

This young innocent is touched with magic. In 1951 he joins the Giants at mid-season and the Giants promptly ascend from the lower depths to a

pennant. In 1952 and 1953 Mays plays his baseball for the U.S. Army and the Giants play their baseball as if they only had eight men on the field. In 1954 Mays returns to the Polo Grounds and not only do the Giants win another pennant but Willie Mays wins the league batting title and its most-valuable-player award.

It is a tribute to ghost-writer Einstein, who is also the author of a recent perceptive baseball novel, **"The Only Game in Town,"** that he can extract so much juice from such an unripe orange. Naturally, Willie's contributions to the Giants' two pennants make up the bulk of the book, but there are also revealing little sketches of Willie growing up in Fairfield, Alabama, and being called "Buckduck" by his friends, personal tips on how to play center field, his relationship with his manager, Leo Durocher, and his fellow ballplayers. There are moments, too, when Einstein the ghost runs off and forgets about Mays the author, as in a learned and somewhat prolonged discussion of inside baseball strategy. But, above all, there is always the good humor, the "I-am-twenty-three-and-can-never-die" feeling which is so integral to the Mays personality.

In the matter of autobiographies, Herr Alexander Schacht, more extensively known as the "Clown Prince of Baseball," goes one up on Mr. Willie Mays. This is only justice because Al Schacht, at sixty-two, is considerably more sophisticated in the ways of the world. He has, in his time, been a hard-luck pitcher, a serio-comic coach at third base, a wartime overseas entertainer, and, today, a successful restaurateur. Fourteen years ago, in 1941, Schacht wrote his first autobiography, **"Clowning through Baseball."** This spring he erupts with a new book, **"My Own Particular Screwball"** (Doubleday, \$3.50), and an entirely new point of view. Incidentally, the "editing" is handled by Ed Keyes, one more neglected ghost.

The most interesting thing about Al's new one is in comparing it with the 1941 model. There is bound to be repetition, and there is. But the

dissimilarities are even more evident. Then, Schacht was writing with charm and innocence, and throwing in overabundant quantities of corn and apocryphal stories. But he was curiously reticent about Mr. Schacht himself. **"My Own Particular Screwball"** is just the opposite, which may be the way to write two autobiographies within a fourteen-year period. It is bare of corn and full of the biting realism of the period, inspired perhaps by those two momentous products of the postwar era—the Bomb and the earthy Italian movie. So Schacht tells his story with a good deal more letting down of hair, how it was growing up "a Jewboy who was born in Catherine Street on the East Side of New York . . . who had to grow up tough, and shrewd, in order to outsmart the toughies, or in case he got caught, to try to fight his way clear." It contains all the substance the earlier book lacked, but anyone who read the old and compares it with the new might get a terribly wistful feeling for those lost and oh so simple times which seem so far away today.

THERE are two remarkable things about Lee Allen's new book, **"The Hot Stove League"** (A. S. Barnes, \$3), this baseball season of 1955. One, it isn't ghost-written. Two, it is the first time in memory that a baseball book largely concerned with anecdotes contains not one Dizzy Dean story. The author is to be blessed for this superhuman show of restraint.

Actually, Allen is primarily concerned with the little-known, neglected bits of baseball memorabilia. He is, if you will, a combination Dr. Kinsey and Malcolm Cowley. Thus we get such statistical nuggets as these: The average major-leaguer weighs 180.6 and is six feet tall. Best ballplayers are second-generation Americans. The divorce rate among ballplayers is extremely low. Phil Rizzuto's first name is Fiero, not Philip. Myril Hoag, the old Yankee outfielder, wore a size four shoe on his left foot and four and a half on his right. When Cincinnati organized its first professional team its famous Red Stockings were sewed by a girl whose name was Margaret Truman, and who later married the star pitcher. It's all a lot of fun and Allen, who has authored a number of books, including a history of the Cincinnati Reds, performs professionally throughout.

The book on the Reds, incidentally  
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# The Saturday Review

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## Fifteenth Birthday

THIS is going to be personal. There is no excuse for it except the occasion of our fifteenth anniversary at *The Saturday Review*. Moreover, new things are afoot at the magazine and this may be a good occasion both for some reminiscent notes and a report to the customers.

First, we have always felt a little uneasy about being in the editor's chair. It was capaciously built in 1924 to fit Henry Seidel Canby, requiring no alterations for Bernard DeVoto and George Stevens; but it took on cosmic dimensions when we tried it on for size in 1940. We sat in it only because no one else would. Eight or nine men of considerable prominence in the world of letters were offered the editorship; all declined. Nor could they be blamed. The magazine was broke. After a decade of depression *The Saturday Review of Literature* was beginning to show its ribs. It was kept going in 1938 and 1939 because its creditors were a hardy band of optimistic gamblers. It helped, too, to have a man of the persistence of Harrison Smith as president of the company, and a person of the capacity and energy of Miss Amy Loveman as chief sustainer of the editorial burden.

From 1924 to 1937 the magazine had made up its annual deficit through the generosity of Thomas Lamont. After that it was on its own, which is to say its uppers. When George Stevens resigned as editor to join Lippincott's at the end of 1939 Mr. Smith had the responsibility to find a successor. He dutifully made the rounds. The men he approached were highly qualified but also highly rational; they were of no mind to engage in a tilting contest with creditors, however genial.

We met Mr. Smith only because of

a happy proximity. At the time we were working on a monthly magazine in the same building. When Mr. Stevens resigned we would go down to the eighth floor after hours to lend a hand to Mr. Smith and Miss Loveman. We even accompanied Mr. Smith on his tour of duty in quest of an editorial captain, adding our own hopeful voice to his in describing our joint faith in the ability of *SRL* to match its editorial excellence with business success. It was a pretty story and we believed it; but it was the kind of thing you had to prove before you could get others to go along—almost like having to convince a banker that you didn't need and couldn't use any money before he was willing to lend you a dime.

We're not quite sure at this distance exactly how it happened that we actually got the editor's job. We suspect that Mr. Smith grew tired of looking at about the same time that we became convinced of our own sales talk in making the job appealing to others.

The new editor, then, was a fellow in his mid-twenties who literally had nothing to lose and everything to learn. He had behind him some experience as a book reviewer, education writer, and managing editor for a world-affairs monthly. He was interested in history, ideas, and people; but he badly needed seasoning, and perhaps still does. This much, however, he did have: confidence in the fact that there was a strong and growing audience in America for a magazine that made good taste its franchise—good taste in the things that make for an exciting life of the mind. He believed deeply in books as molders of ideas and shapers of events.

The editor's job, as he saw it early

in 1940, was not to raze a magnificent structure in order to get rid of the mortgage, but to retire the debt by strengthening the props. He knew that the only thing greater than the book-keeping liabilities were the human assets. In addition to Mr. Smith and Miss Loveman he could count on an inspiring duo: Henry Seidel Canby, who agreed to resume some of his former duties and serve as chairman of the editorial board, and William Rose Benét, *SRL*'s poetry editor, who made it clear that he would work double and triple time as needed. The new editor had everything he needed, in fact, except cash in the bank and a business staff.

Then came a long run of good luck. First, the mortgage was lifted by a scientist-booklover who also happened to have, among his many talents, a great knack for knowing where to look for oil, and who became Chairman of the Board of Directors. Not much cash was invested—as magazine investments are reckoned—but it was enough to start up the motor. Next, the new editor could hardly believe his good fortune when he was able in 1942 to bring a man in charge of business operations who had the energy of a nuclear reactor and a gift for the high altitudes. Most importantly, he had an understanding of and respect for the editorial product; in short, J. R. Cominsky was to make an ideal business partner. And, since every magazine needs an enlightened but tightfisted pessimist as Controller, *SR* could pride itself on a man who was one of the best in the business—Nathan Cohn.

THE good luck became compounded as the editorial staff took shape. In John Mason Brown the magazine could boast of a critic and reporter-at-large whose interest in the theatre was exceeded only by his interest in the living human drama. Irving Kolodin was the talented man of music who was to guide the magazine in perhaps its most important single new development—the Recordings Section. Eloise Hazard and Raymond Walters, in charge of editorial production and book reviews respectively, helped to make it possible for a too-itinerant editor to keep his job. William Patterson handled the problems of editorial liaison, ministered to our growing pains and almost everything else. Horace Sutton did more than introduce a new department to the magazine; he substantially influenced the entire field of travel writing. Bennett Cerf confounded those of his colleagues who predicted that he couldn't keep up the fast pace he set for himself in *TRADE WINDS* for more than six months. Mr. Cerf is now in his thirteenth year with *SR*. The department