

For the Baseball-Lovers' Library

THE BABE RUTH STORY. By Babe Ruth, as told to Bob Considine. Photographs. 250 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$3.

WALTER JOHNSON: King of the Pitchers. By Roger L. Treat. Illustrated. 192 pp. New York: Julian Messner. \$2.75.

By REX LARDNER

THE word "fabulous," as descriptive of modern athletes, is an overworked modifier; it is conceivable, however, that it can be applied with some accuracy to a quash-nosed, heavy-set man by the name of George Herman Ruth. As a youngster he chewed a wad of tobacco in his father's saloon, learned the trade of tailoring in a training home for orphans and incorrigibles (he was not an orphan) and went on from there to become, by the skill of his arm and the power of his bat, the highest-paid player in the history of baseball. Most people will agree that he was worth every cent he got.

It was Ruth, they say, who restored the popularity of the game after eight members of the White Sox threw the world series to the Cincinnati team in 1919, and the Yankee Stadium is called, with as much logic as sentiment, "the house that Ruth built." At one time Ruth's prestige in Japan was considered to be so high that he was very nearly assigned the job of broadcasting an exhortation to the Japs to cease waging a futile war. When the Yankee management announced occasionally that he would be unable to play, it was confronted with a spate of ticket cancellations.

HE hit 714 home runs in his twenty-two seasons in the majors, and he still holds, despite a hopped-up ball, some forty-five American League or major league batting records. And he is, of course, the man who called his shot, to the discomfiture of the Chicago fans attending the third game of the 1932 world series. As Ruth says of himself, however, in "The Story of Babe Ruth," he was a man who couldn't stand prosperity, and he was in a constant squabble with his managers or the baseball commissioner. His work on the ball field suffered from his eschewal of training rules, and if it had not been for his tremendous loyalty to his fans—particularly the kids—his bad years would not have been followed by good years as often as they were.

Bob Considine, who wrote the book in the first person, has done much more than describe Ruth's vagaries and exploits. He has captured the team personality of the Yankees of the Twenties and Thirties, and he has lively stories to tell: of Durocher, the cocky busher, giving Ty Cobb the hip as the latter rounded second and sending him flying; of the detective who was hired by the Yankee management to report on the supposititious transgressions of the players; of Meusel throwing his bat at a Detroit pitcher after being hit in the back by a duster and precipitating a riot.

Jack Keefe, the former White Sox right-hander, once said disparagingly of Walter Johnson, "He ain't got nothing but a fast

ball." But Johnson's fast one had a whoosh and a jump to it, and it seemed to serve Johnson's purpose for a great many years. Never using a duster or spitter for fear of hitting a batter, he pitched three shut-outs in four days and holds the record for total games won in a major league. The former Washington player's career has been covered in "Walter Johnson, King of the Pitchers" much in the manner of that of a fictional character—say, Baseball Joe Matson. The dialogue is stilted and the players are represented for the most part as being more senti-



The Babe at Bat.

mental than seems probable. The author's descriptions of ball games are well done and authoritative, but Johnson deserves better than this.

JACKIE ROBINSON: My Own Story. By Jackie Robinson, as told to Wendell Smith. Foreword by Branch Rickey. Illustrated with photographs. 172 pp. New York: Greenberg. \$2.

THE DODGERS: An illustrated story of those Unpredictable Bums, the Brooklyn Baseball Club. By John Durant. 154 pp. New York: Hastings House. \$2.75.

By JOHN KIERAN

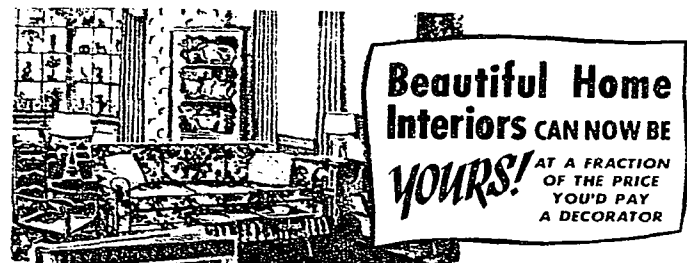
HERE are two books that will provide hearty enjoyment for baseball fans, particularly the followers of the Brooklyn Dodgers, occasionally known as the Headless Horsemen of the national pastime. The Robinson autobiography, of course, carries an extra interest because it is the personal history of the first Negro player to break into big league baseball. On that basis it is an appealing and a revealing document and Jackie Robinson, with a neat assist from Wendell Smith, makes it a moving story from start to finish. Though Jackie is now a big league star and accepted as such around the baseball circuit, he still isn't able to exercise all the rights and

privileges of his white teammates and opponents at all times and places. He encountered racial prejudice here and there on his climb to big league stardom, but the heartening point made by Jackie in his story is that, for every spectator or player who objected to him as a Negro intruder on what had been exclusively white man's territory up to his arrival, there were ten baseball fans and players ready to help him and root for his success.

It must be admitted that Jackie helped himself mightily by his own deportment. This much was expected by Branch Rickey, his sponsor, because he knew Jackie's background as a college product. Jackie was a football and track star at UCLA. He was also a good scholar. His experience in intercollegiate competition had given him poise and quiet confidence. He knew when he accepted the bid to move into organized baseball that it was a difficult row to hoe and he acted accordingly. He was modest where he might have been assertive. He was diplomatic where he might have been defiant. He met outright injustice under which he had to control his temper and he shrugged off the inconvenience of petty prejudice with a grin. But once the social problem had been solved and Jackie was a big league player, the important problem was, could he hit big league pitching? He could and did. He's still at it, and the applause is generous all around the circuit.

THE Durant history of the Dodgers is, like the Robinson autobiography, liberally illustrated with interesting and amusing photos. Durant dug back to the most ancient of Brooklyn teams, the Excelsiors, an amateur nine organized in 1854. But the author quickly gets down to the Ebbets-McKeever era of club ownership and the delirious years of Uncle Wilbert Robinson as the manager, the point in baseball history when the Dodgers began to acquire a reputation—honestly earned, it must be said—for startling eccentricity in individual behavior and team play.

Author Durant offers many jovial anecdotes of the dizzy days when baseballed by the Dodgers—or Robins, as they were known under Uncle Wilbert—was often referred to as "idiots' delight," and many of the photographs are good for a hearty laugh. But it seems to this reviewer that John Durant might have added an extra delectable touch of the ridiculous to his descriptions of Dodger antics if he had consulted Tom Meany, Roscoe McGowen, Edward T. Murphy, Tommy Holmes, Garry Schumacher or some other veteran scribe who lived and traveled with the Dodgers in their wildest days. The author brings the account right on down to last year's world series, with photos to match. One picture of slightly earlier vintage shows an umpire on his back at Ebbets Field and an irate fan punching away at him. That alone should make the book a best seller in Brooklyn.



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