

*Edna Ferber's Best*

"SO BIG" (Doubleday, Page) is a novel of power, delicacy, and understanding. There is no question that this season the American women novelists have completely outdistanced the men, with "A Lost Lady", "The Able McLaughlins", "A Son at the Front", "Lummox", "Jennifer Lorn", and now "So Big". Miss Ferber has chosen a difficult theme, and she has used her remarkable dramatic quality, her admirable restraint, and her firmly developing technique to attain her effect. This story of Dirk De Jong and his mother, of beauty and its absence in life, of how carefully planned lives shatter and reconstruct in the face of circumstance, of the emptiness of a certain type of American youth, is a far better book than "The Midlander". In a sense, Miss Ferber set out to do exactly what Booth Tarkington did, and she has done it with a stirring quality that is totally lacking in Mr. Tarkington's dry periods. Character after character stands out as memorable, incident after incident remains in the mind. This is a realistic study of a Dutch community on the outskirts of Chicago as contrasted with life on its "Gold Coast". All are treated with sympathy—and, better than all else, Miss Ferber is never for an instant dull. Even in her moments of realistic description, her details take on the importance of emotions. I remember particularly a passage where she describes Selina preparing a picnic basket. In a book which is so nearly perfect it is, perhaps, unwise to state

that the first part is more satisfying artistically, while in the latter part the story gets under way with greater speed. After finishing "So Big", for the first time in many months I found myself wishing that a book had not ended, that it would go on and on. I am inclined to think that in spite of the perfection of "A Lost Lady", the power of "Lummox", the beautiful characterizations of "A Son at the Front", Edna Ferber, with her remarkable warmth of intuition held in check by her technique, has written the best American novel of the year.