

REVIEW

MOONLIGHT AT MIDDAY

By SALLY CARRIGHAR. *New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958. 8½ x 5¾ inches; xx + 392 + viii pages, sketch map, numerous illustrations. \$7.25 (in Canada).*

The reader should not be put off by the words on the dust-jacket, or "The Forty-Ninth Star" preface which is obviously a topical afterthought added during final editing or publication. This is not just another book pretending to tell all about Alaska while really aiming to cash in on recent interest and the excitement of Alaska's giant step from territorial status to full statehood. It is much better than that because it is about a part of the "Great Land" that Miss Carrighar called home for almost 10 years, and consequently it is written not only with authority but with insight and sensitivity. Every Alaskan has his or her own special "Alaska" and Sally Carrighar's can be roughly identified on a map by two lines diverging westward from Fairbanks toward the International Dateline, one passing a little north of Kotzebue, the other a little south of Unalakleet. Her previous books were about the flora and fauna of places she had known: the Sierras of California, Jackson Hole in Wyoming, and the Bering Sea and Arctic coasts of Alaska. In this book the focus shifts to the people who inhabit a region and their ways of life. It also turns inward to the mind of the author, for in many ways this is a personal journal.

The contents appear in three parts. The first part comprises about two-thirds of the book, which is fortunate because it is by far the best. From its title "A Fine, Complete People", this can be described as a fine complete piece of writing, beautifully blending three intensely interesting and provocative themes into one harmonious whole. The

prime subject, the Eskimo caught between two cultures, is a familiar topic, which nevertheless still calls urgently for the sort of restatement given here. Miss Carrighar takes up key aspects of the Eskimo's present way of life as she found it at Unalakleet, an Eskimo village where the old ways are still strongly held although they are being modified by contacts with the white man's ways, represented by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the missionary, and the trader; at Nome, a white man's town in which the Eskimo account for about half of the population but is culturally adrift; and at big towns like Fairbanks, or in the vicinities of military installations, where the Eskimo is overwhelmed by the worst and most destructive elements of the new culture. All through this discussion there runs the theme suggested by the title of the first chapter, "Stormy Route to a Quiet Mind", in which the author expresses her deep personal indebtedness to the Eskimo without becoming maudlin. From time to time the Eskimo's old way of life is held as a mirror to our own culture and as a comment upon those trends within it that threaten to destroy us spiritually if not physically.

The narrative of the other two short parts reads unevenly and they are disappointing after the excellent opening. The author has not only tried to compress several incompatible elements into too small a space, she has also adopted several styles unnatural to her special talents, which may have been intended to fit the subject matter, but which appear to me as inept imitations of several stock styles. Best is the "Egg and I" style used in recounting her struggles to "outwit the Arctic" and describing the tangled "supply lines" in the part entitled "Modern Pioneering", but this part is padded with three chapters sounding like a government leaflet for

prospective settlers, which might have been presented as an appendix, or even by referring the reader to the readily available sources upon which they drew. The final part "Alaska Summons its Own" attempts to present the essential Alaska in three rather heavily symbolic chapters. The first, dealing with an old gold prospector, reads like a "My Most Unforgettable Character" from *The Reader's Digest*. The second, about a sanity hearing and its aftermath under Alaska's commitment procedure now

mercifully abolished, might be the reporting of a backwoods Rebecca West. The last chapter is a contrived scene in which the reader is introduced to Fairbanks' leading citizens in the lobby of the Nordale Hotel on the last night of Alaska's biggest guessing game, the Nenana Ice Pool. Although this last chapter reads like something Edna Ferber decided not to include in her Alaskan novel *Ice Palace* the book as a whole can be well recommended.

GEORGE W. ROGERS

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Consolidation of the offices in the United States

In August of this year all the administrative functions of the U.S. offices were consolidated in Washington where an enlarged staff will handle the centralized records and procedure. The office has been remodelled and newly decorated, and facilities and equipment have been modified or expanded to handle the increased volume of work.

Dr. Walter A. Wood

Dr. Walter Wood, Director of the New York office since 1945, retired from the position in June this year and was elected to the Board of Governors filling the vacancy left when Dr. M. Westergaard resigned from the Board last year.

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