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A SWISS GIRL IN AFRICA.

“Red Dust of Africa” by Alyse Simpson.
(Cassell’s 15/-.)

This is not a work of fiction. It is an autobiographical account, beautifully written, of what befell a Swiss girl in her adolescence and in her early married life when from the lush mountain valley in which she was born she was transplanted to the arid wilds of equatorial Africa.

At the age of 15, Alyse — Lyseli as she was affectionately called by her family and friends — met John, an English youth who happened to be in Switzerland. She fell in love with him and a few years later they were married. Her mother disapproved of the match, she would have preferred to see her daughter become the wife of a prosperous farmer or of the young Doctor who paid her attention.

John, with youthful enthusiasm, had bought a farm in Kenya, hoping to earn a living from the cultivation of the land. The farm house which was to be the home of the young bride proved a terrible disappointment. Fashioned of sun-baked clay, unpainted, with paneless windows covered with sacking, uneven mud-floors, bats in the rafters, the corners alive with lizards, and even frogs and snakes finding their way into the building, it presented a fearsome contrast to the orderly home and solid comforts she had known in her native land.

With dogged perseverance John toiled and slaved to wring a living from the unwilling soil. Everything was against him: the merciless African sun, long spells of drought alternating with terrific rain-storms which flooded out the farmhouse and the land, and washed away the seeds, all this made his a heart-breaking task. But he worked on, undaunted, and never gave up hope.

Lyseli, cultured, artistic, sensitive, found it difficult to accept the monotony, loneliness and discomforts that were her lot. She required all her fortitude and loyalty to bear them. And it was in these unsatisfactory surroundings, with none but a hired nurse to assist her, that her child, a little girl, was born. Now more than ever the memory of her happy Swiss home haunted her and soon her health began to fail.

Release, however, was at hand. One of her uncles and the young Swiss Doctor who had been her suitor came out to Africa and offered to take her and her child away to Switzerland for a rest and a change.

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John raised no objection and she prepared for the voyage.

She was on the point of departure, had in fact started on the journey to the coast, when disaster overtook her husband’s farm. A swarm of locusts, obscuring the sun, descended on his land and utterly destroyed the pitiful crop — the first he had managed to raise — on which his income depended.

This was Lyseli’s decisive hour. She knew that she could not desert her husband at this moment and let him face alone the tragedy and the ruin. She stopped the car and returned to the dilapidated and ramshackle farm house, accepting once more the insecurity and the trials of a pioneer’s wife in the African jungle.

It is a moving, poignant story, told with a sincerity that grips and appeals. Mrs. Simpson possesses an indubitable talent for writing, a gift for vivid and often poetic description and the ability to convey an atmosphere.

To write lucidly and faultlessly in a language other than one’s mother-tongue is not always an easy task. Mrs. Simpson has performed it with credit. Her idiomatic English is almost perfect. There are traces here and there of an alien influence but these do not more detract from the beauty of her book than does a lisp lessen the charm of an attractive woman.

We warmly recommend the book to our readers, be they British or Swiss. They will find it absorbing and delightful reading.

J.J.F.S.



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