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A SWISS GIRL GROWS UP.

Two years ago Mrs. Alyse Simpson's first book: "Red Dust of Africa" was published. It described her experiences as a young bride on her husband's farm in Kenya and the hardships, discomforts and loneliness she endured. The book was well received and had a good Press. One critic wrote, "If ever a book cried out for a sequel this is it".

Alyse Simpson's second book has now appeared. Published by Cassell and Co., Ltd., at 12/6 net, it bears the pretty title: I Threw a Rose into the Sea. But it is not a sequel to the first story, it is a retrospect. Autobiographical like the previous book, it covers the author's life from childhood to marriage. The title suggested itself when, on her way from Switzerland to England, Alyse dropped a rose into the sea and watched it drift to the wind and the tide until it disappeared, symbolical, to her mind, of her own destiny.

We see the little girl growing up in the lovely surroundings of her native Appenzell from the tomboy stage to that of the well-educated young lady who is sent to a finishing school in Neuchâtel. On her return home an emotional crisis develops. Her mother wishes her to marry the son of the local doctor, Alyse had fallen in love with John, a young Englishman, who is not in a position to marry for some time. She makes up her mind to remain single rather than marry anyone else; if she cannot get her John, she will enter a convent and become a nun. And enter a convent she did.

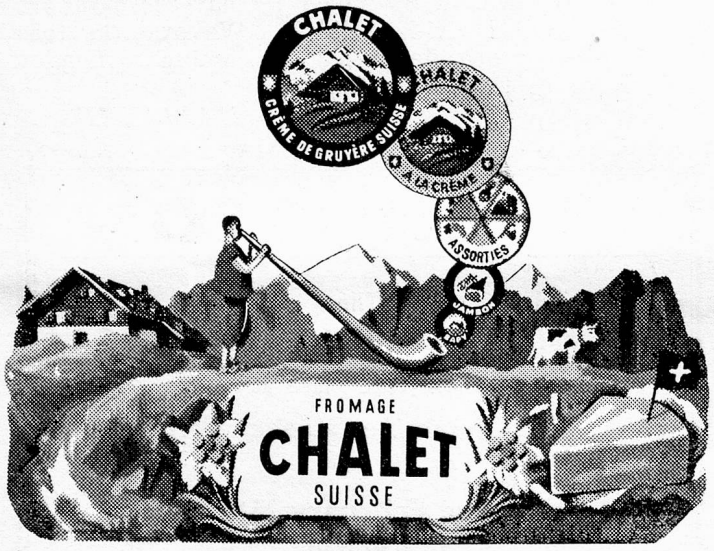
The two years she spent as a novice in the convent provided Alyse with material for her gift of observation and description. It was a period of strict training and almost harsh discipline, a life of poverty, obedience, lack of comfort, coarse food and incredibly hard work. Yet she never complains and if in the end she leaves the convent it is not because of these conditions but because she gradually came to realise that she had no vocation for the monastic life and that she could not conscienciously take the vows. And so, early one morning, she slipped out of the nunnery and made her way home.

The narrative is rich in vivid descriptions which often approach the poetical. The characters are well-drawn and lifelike, a gallery of captivating personalities. Her aunts with whom she used to spend her holidays, disillusioned, frustrated women one of whom seeks solace in Kant, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, the other keeping a large number of cats; in contrast uncle Hypolite, captain of a steamer plying on the Lake of Constance, a fine figure of a man with his flowing red beard, virile, boisterous, rabelaisian and fond of the good things of life; her matriarchal grandmother; her rather shadowy father, quiet, reserved, taciturn, passionately fond of music and mountaineering ,and above all her all-dominating Mama, a beautiful and elegant woman with an exquisite taste in dress (she ordered her frocks from Paris), well-read, writing poetry, artistic, musical, at the same time capricious, restless and original, the kind of woman you would least expect to find in a Swiss mountain valley. Equally well-drawn are the nuns and novices of the convent, each with her own individuality.

It is an unusual and a charmingly written story. Much of it is slight and trivial but it is told with such ingeneous sincerity that criticism on that account would be out of place.

Altogether a tranquil and absorbing book which all English-speaking Swiss and especially their womenfolk will find fascinating and delightful reading.

J.J.F.S.



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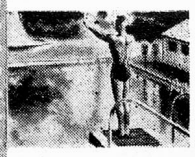

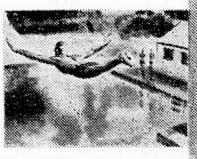

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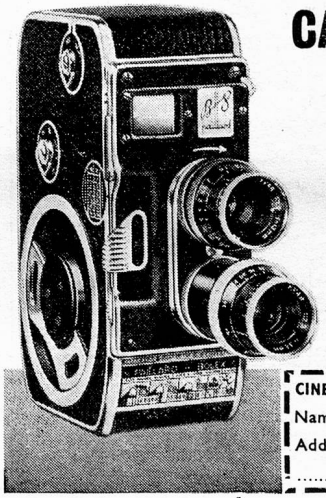

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