

Manfred Mai/ Henriette Sauvant

Das verkaufte Glück

HAPPINESS: SOLD. THE LONG ROAD OF THE SWABIAN CHILDREN.

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A historical novel about the ever-contentious theme of child labor.

CONTENT

With heavy hearts, eleven year old Jakob and his younger brother Kilian have to go to Swabia, a region of southern Germany bordering on Austria and Switzerland, in order to earn money. At home there just isn't enough; there are too many mouths to eat what little bread there is.

On a winter morning they and other children from their village in the Austrian region of Tyrol depart to make their way across the mountains on foot. It is cold, hardly any of them has decent shoes, and they have to beg for food and lodging as they proceed. Children come from all over to the "children's market" in Ravensburg to offer their service to farmers in exchange for clothing and a little money. Jakob is lucky: he ends up with a farmer who makes a good impression. The only thing that scares him is that his brother has to go to a different farm.

Jakob has to help wherever there is work to be done, tend the cows and muck their stalls. The days are long and the work hard. Exhaustion and homesickness plague him, but his hardest trial is the farm hand Hermann. He makes Jakob's life hard at every turn, and even steals money from the farmer to make him suspect Jakob. Jakob is able to convince the farmer of his innocence and Hermann is let go. After that life on the farm improves a little, even though there is more work than before. One time Jakob even falls asleep while tending the cows and almost loses a valuable animal. The only bright spots are Sunday afternoons, when he doesn't have to work and can visit his brother.

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In November, the Swabian children's servitude ends. The children are relieved to finally head home. But the year spent among strangers has left its mark on each of them.

This exhaustively researched historical novel deals with a sad chapter of child labor in Germany. The migration of children from the poor regions of the Alps to more prosperous areas around the Lake of Constance to work on farms from March to November took place from the 16th century until well into the 20th century, and was hardly questioned.

THE AUTHOR

Manfred Mai was born in 1949 in a small town in southern Germany. Only after he had finished school did he discover his love of reading, and went back to school to become a teacher. His first writing appeared in 1978 and he has written numerous books since, particularly for beginning readers. Today he is a freelance author and lives in the town where he was born with his wife and two daughters.

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