OUIDA

FINDELKIND

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There was a little boy, a year or two ago, who lived under the shadow of Martinswand. Most people know, I should suppose, that the Martinswand is that mountain in the Oberinnthal, where, several centuries past, brave Kaiser Max lost his footing as he stalked the chamois, and fell upon a ledge of rock, and stayed there, in mortal peril, for thirty hours, till he was rescued by the strength and agility of a Tyrol hunter,—an angel in the guise of a hunter, as the chronicles of the time prefer to say.

The Martinswand is a grand mountain, being one of the spurs of the greater Sonnstein, and rises precipitously, looming, massive and lofty, like a very fortress for giants, where it stands right across that road which, if you follow it long enough, takes you through Zell to Landeck,—old, picturesque, poetic Landeck, where Frederick of the Empty Pockets rhymed his sorrows in ballads to his people,—and so on by Bludenz into Switzerland itself, by as noble a highway as any traveller can ever desire to traverse on a summer's day. It is within a mile of the little burg of Zell, where the people, in the time of their emperor's peril, came out with torches and bells, and the Host lifted up by their priest, and all prayed on their knees underneath the steep, gaunt pile of limestone, that is the same today as it was then, whilst Kaiser Max is dust; it soars up on one side of this road, very

steep and very majestic, having bare stone at its base, and being all along its summit crowned with pine woods; and on the other side of the road are a little stone church, quaint and low, and gray with age, and a stone farmhouse, and cattle-sheds, and timber-sheds, all of wood that is darkly brown from time; and beyond these are some of the most beautiful meadows in the world, full of tall grass and countless flowers, with pools and little estuaries made by the brimming Inn River that flows by them; and beyond the river are the glaciers of the Sonnstein and the Selrain and the wild Arlberg region, and the golden glow of sunset in the west, most often seen from here through the veil of falling rain.

At this farmhouse, with Martinswand towering above it, and Zell a mile beyond, there lived, and lives still, a little boy who bears the old historical name of Findelkind, whose father, Otto Korner, is the last of a sturdy race of yeomen, who had fought with Hofer and Haspinger, and had been free men always.

Findelkind came in the middle of seven other children, and was a pretty boy of nine years, with slenderer limbs and paler cheeks than his rosy brethren, and tender dreamy eyes that had the look, his mother told him, of seeking stars in midday: de chercher midi a quatorze heures, as the French have it. He was a good little lad, and seldom gave any trouble from disobedience, though he often gave it from forgetfulness. His father angrily complained that he was always in the clouds,—that is, he was always dreaming, and so very often would spill the milk out of the pails, chop his own fingers instead of the wood, and

stay watching the swallows when he was sent to draw water. His brothers and sisters were always making fun of him; they were sturdier, ruddier, and merrier children than he was, loved romping and climbing, and nutting, thrashing the walnut-trees and sliding down snow-drifts, and got into mischief of a more common and childish sort than Findelkind's freaks of fancy. For, indeed, he was a very fanciful little boy: everything around had tongues for him; and he would sit for hours among the long rushes on the river's edge, trying to imagine what the wild green-gray water had found in its wanderings, and asking the water-rats and the ducks to tell him about it; but both rats and ducks were too busy to attend to an idle little boy, and never spoke, which vexed him.

Findelkind, however, was very fond of his books: he would study day and night, in his little ignorant, primitive fashion. He loved his missal and his primer, and could spell them both out very fairly, and was learning to write of a good priest in Zirl, where he trotted three times a week with his two little brothers. When not at school, he was chiefly set to guard the sheep and the cows, which occupation left him very much to himself, so that he had many hours in the summer-time to stare up to the skies and wonder—wonder—wonder about all sorts of things; while in the winter—the long, white, silent winter, when the post-wagons ceased to run, and the road into Switzerland was blocked, and the whole world seemed asleep, except for the roaring of the winds—Findelkind, who still trotted over the snow to school in Zirl,

would dream still, sitting on the wooden settle by the fire, when he came home again under Martinswand. For the worst—or the best—of it all was that he was Findelkind.

This is what was always haunting him. He was Findelkind; and to bear this name seemed to him to mark him out from all other children, and to dedicate him to heaven. One day, three years before, when he had been only six years old, the priest in Zirl, who was a very kindly and cheerful man, and amused the children as much as he taught them, had not allowed Findelkind to leave school to go home, because the storm of snow and wind was so violent, but had kept him until the worst should pass, with one or two other little lads who lived some way off, and had let the boys roast a meal of apples and chestnuts by the stove in his little room, and, while the wind howled and the blinding snow fell without, had told the children the story of another Findelkind, —an earlier Findelkind, who had lived in the flesh on Arlberg as far back as 1381, and had been a little shepherd lad, "just like you," said the good man, looking at the little boys munching their roast crabs, and whose country had been over there, above Stuben, where Danube and Rhine meet and part.

The pass of Arlberg is even still so bleak and bitter that few care to climb there; the mountains around are drear and barren, and snow lies till midsummer, and even longer sometimes. "But in the early ages," said the priest (and this is quite a true tale that the children heard with open eyes, and mouths only not open because they were full of crabs and chestnuts), "in the early ages,"

said the priest to them, "the Arlberg was far more dreary than it is now. There was only a mule-track over it, and no refuge for man or beast; so that wanderers and peddlers, and those whose need for work or desire for battle brought them over that frightful pass, perished in great numbers, and were eaten by the bears and the wolves. The little shepherd boy Findelkind—who was a little boy five hundred years ago, remember," the priest repeated—"was sorely disturbed and distressed to see these poor dead souls in the snow winter after winter, and seeing the blanched bones lie on the bare earth, unburied, when summer melted the snow. It made him unhappy, very unhappy; and what could he do, he a little boy keeping sheep? He had as his wages two florins a year; that was all; but his heart rose high, and he had faith in God. Little as he was, he said to himself he would try and do something, so that year after year those poor lost travellers and beasts should not perish so. He said nothing to anybody, but he took the few florins he had saved up, bade his master farewell, and went on his way begging,—a little fourteenth century boy, with long, straight hair, and a girdled tunic, as you see them," continued the priest, "in the miniatures in the black-letter missal that lies upon my desk. No doubt heaven favoured him very strongly, and the saints watched over him; still, without the boldness of his own courage, and the faith in his own heart, they would not have done so. I suppose, too, that when knights in their armour, and soldiers in their camps, saw such a little fellow all alone, they helped him, and perhaps struck some blows for him, and so sped him on his way,

and protected him from robbers and from wild beasts. Still, be sure that the real shield and the real reward that served Findelkind of Arlberg was the pure and noble purpose that armed him night and day. Now, history does not tell us where Findelkind went, nor how he fared, nor how long he was about it; but history does tell us that the little barefooted, long-haired boy, knocking so loudly at castle gates and city walls in the name of Christ and Christ's poor brethren, did so well succeed in his quest that before long he had returned to his mountain home with means to have a church and a rude dwelling built, where he lived with six other brave and charitable souls, dedicating themselves to St. Christopher, and going out night and day to the sound of the Angelus, seeking the lost and weary. This is really what Findelkind of Arlberg did five centuries ago, and did so quickly that his fraternity of St. Christopher, twenty years after, numbered among its members archdukes, and prelates, and knights without number, and lasted as a great order down to the days of Joseph II. This is what Findelkind in the fourteenth century did, I tell you. Bear like faith in your hearts, my children; and though your generation is a harder one than this, because it is without faith, yet you shall move mountains, because Christ and St. Christopher will be with you."

Then the good man, having said that, blessed them, and left them alone to their chestnuts and crabs, and went into his own oratory to prayer. The other boys laughed and chattered; but Findelkind sat very quietly, thinking of his namesake, all the day

after, and for many days and weeks and months this story haunted him. A little boy had done all that; and this little boy had been called Findelkind: Findelkind, just like himself.

It was beautiful, and yet it tortured him. If the good man had known how the history would root itself in the child's mind, perhaps he would never have told it; for night and day it vexed Findelkind, and yet seemed beckoning to him and crying, "Go thou and do likewise!"

But what could he do?

There was the snow, indeed, and there were the mountains, as in the fourteenth century, but there were no travellers lost. The diligence did not go into Switzerland after autumn, and the country people who went by on their mules and in their sledges to Innspruck knew their way very well, and were never likely to be adrift on a winter's night, or eaten by a wolf or a bear.

When spring came, Findelkind sat by the edge of the bright pure water among the flowering grasses, and felt his heart heavy. Findelkind of Arlberg who was in heaven now must look down, he fancied, and think him so stupid and so selfish, sitting there. The first Findelkind, a few centuries before, had trotted down on his bare feet from his mountain pass, and taken his little crook, and gone out boldly over all the land on his pilgrimage, and knocked at castle gates and city walls in Christ's name, and for love of the poor! That was to do something indeed!

This poor little living Findelkind would look at the miniatures in the priest's missal, in one of which there was the little

fourteenth-century boy, with long hanging hair and a wallet and bare feet, and he never doubted that it was the portrait of the blessed Findelkind who was in heaven; and he wondered if he looked like a little boy there, or if he were changed to the likeness of an angel.

"He was a boy just like me," thought the poor little fellow, and he felt so ashamed of himself,—so very ashamed; and the priest had told him to try and do the same. He brooded over it so much, and it made him so anxious and so vexed, that his brothers ate his porridge and he did not notice it, his sisters pulled his curls and he did not feel it, his father brought a stick down on his back, and he only started and stared, and his mother cried because he was losing his mind, and would grow daft, and even his mother's tears he scarcely saw. He was always thinking of Findelkind in heaven.

When he went for water, he spilt one-half; when he did his lessons, he forgot the chief part; when he drove out the cow, he let her munch the cabbages; and when he was set to watch the oven he let the loaves burn, like great Alfred. He was always busied thinking, "Little Findelkind that is in heaven did so great a thing: why may not I? I ought! I ought!" What was the use of being named after Findelkind that was in heaven, unless one did something great, too?

Next to the church there is a little stone lodge, or shed, with two arched openings, and from it you look into the tiny church, with its crucifixes and relics, or out to great, bold, sombre Martinswand, as you like best; and in this spot Findelkind would

sit hour after hour while his brothers and sisters were playing, and look up at the mountains or on to the altar, and wish and pray and vex his little soul most wofully; and his ewes and his lambs would crop the grass about the entrance, and bleat to make him notice them and lead them farther afield, but all in vain. Even his dear sheep he hardly heeded, and his pet ewes, Katte and Greta, and the big ram Zips, rubbed their soft noses in his hand unnoticed. So the summer droned away,—the summer that is so short in the mountains, and yet so green and so radiant, with the torrents tumbling through the flowers, and the hay tossing in the meadows, and the lads and lasses climbing to cut the rich, sweet grass of the alps. The short summer passed as fast as a dragon-fly flashes by, all green and gold, in the sun; and it was near winter once more, and still Findelkind was always dreaming and wondering what he could do for the good of St. Christopher; and the longing to do it all came more and more into his little heart, and he puzzled his brain till his head ached. One autumn morning, whilst yet it was dark, Findelkind made his mind up, and rose before his brothers, and stole down-stairs and out into the air, as it was easy to do, because the house-door never was bolted. He had nothing with him; he was barefooted, and his school-satchel was slung behind him, as Findelkind of Arlberg's wallet had been five centuries before.

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