

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Heathen Master Filcsik, by Kálmán Mikszáth

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Heathen Master Filcsik

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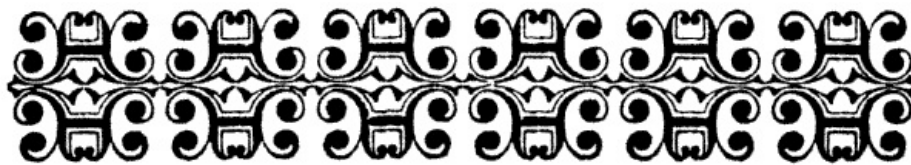
Heathen Master Filcsik,
From the Magyar of Kál-
mán Mikszáth: Trans-
lated by William N. Loew. . .



Cleveland Ohio: Printed at The
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**Heathen Master Filcsik, From the Magyar of
Kálmán Mikszáth: Translated by William N. Loew.:**

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Introductory Note.

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Through the kindness of William N. Loew, Esq., of the New York Bar, who has generously placed the manuscript at our disposal, we are able to offer a translation of one of the shorter stories by a living Hungarian writer.

The Magyar literature offers a mine of gold to the translator, but on account of the difficulties of the language very few have explored it. With the exception of the great novelist, Maurus Jókai, the works of the majority of the first class authors are unknown to the average American reader.

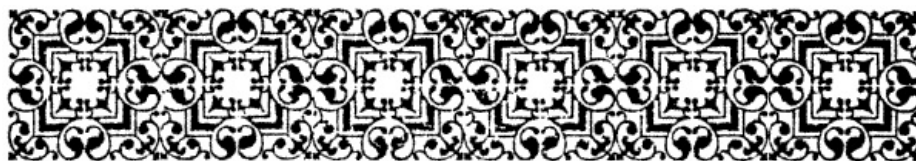
The difficulties of the Magyar tongue have been referred to. It is the one great literary language of Europe that is of non-Aryan origin. It is syllabic agglutinative, that is, the word inflections are made up by adding syllables to the root word that is never lost. The verb is particularly flexible and many of the tenses cannot be rendered adequately in English because they are constructed after a different system. The fine distinctions possible for the Magyar verb can only be felt, and not translated. This will explain the seeming inconsistency of the tenses in our story, where presents, futures, and perfects appear to be used indiscriminately, and yet the whole action has taken place in the more or less remote past. In this way the translator has endeavored to convey the vivid action of the original so far as the English verb system would allow him.

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The author, Kálmán Mikszáth, is a follower of Jókai, but without the great master's originality. He has been called the "Mark Twain" of Magyar literature, and is looked upon by his compatriots as their leading humorist. He is a prolific writer of the *feuilleton*, that peculiar institution of the continental newspaper, and several collections of these have been published. Some of his works have been translated into English, but so far as could be learned, not this story of "Heathen Master Filcsik." His subjects are drawn generally from scenes relating to North Hungarian peasant life, and are told with a directness that makes the action move along rapidly. He also uses the folk lore in his works, the present tale being founded upon older material current in the country districts. Many of the details of his stories are left to the reader's imagination; he touches only the high lights, the shadows must be given form by the reader himself. His humor manifests

itself in the most unexpected ways, even in this grim story of the unforgiving cobbler, there are touches of a sly, suggestive humor that brighten the otherwise sombre narrative.

Cleveland, Ohio,
March 17th, 1910.



Heathen Master Filcsik.

[Pg 1]

There is a foolish rumor current all over Csolt, Majornok and Bodok, that the famous fur cloak of old Filcsik is only a figment of his imagination. He speaks constantly of it; he boasts about it; he claims to wear it somewhere, but, as a matter of fact (so it is said) he has no fur cloak, and in all likelihood never had one.

Yet he did have one. The people of Gozon (he moved into our midst from beyond the Bágy) and especially the older ones recollect it well.

It was a long yellow cloak, with a wide collar of black lambskin from the two ends of which two lamb's feet were hung, hoofs and all, in their natural state. It was buckled in front by two beautiful silver clasps and in the corners below each clasp were embroidered two large green tulips. In addition it was ornamented by the needle worker's art with many kinds of birds in bright colors, while on the back you discovered the city of Miskolcz with its rows of houses and many churches. You could even see plainly a Calvinistic chanticleer on one of the church towers! It was perfect—a masterpiece of furrier's work, on which its maker had spared no labor or material.

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True, it was not Master Mocsik, the furrier of Gozon, who made it, but it was the most famous furrier in the city of Miskolcz who had been entrusted with its construction.

Even if Filcsik picked up half a yard of it in buttoning it, the train of this ninth wonder of the world still swept the ground, and all who saw it said that, compared to this fur cloak, that of the muscovite Czar was but a swaddling garment.

Nonetheless, wonderful though the fur cloak was and however much Stephen Filcsik prided himself upon its possession, the iron teeth of time had no respect for it. They dealt it the same scant consideration that they accorded the winter-coat of the poor young law student, the son of the village notary. Its brightly colored embroideries faded and its needlework grew ragged, while its yellow background became soiled and greasy. Moths ate their share of it and caused dire destruction, especially in the lining and the collar.

But Filcsik, like the lover-husband who never notices how the rosy bloom fades from his wife's face, never took notice of its sad transformation; he only saw his good old fur cloak when he looked at its remnants; and when he said, "I will put my fur cloak on," he said it without the loss of a particle of his characteristic old pride.

It hung on a big bright nail all the year round, just opposite his working stool, so that, even while at his work, he could look up and admire it.

But it is true that he sat very little on his stool, and he was called for that reason "the bootmaker to God" because he had practically no customers at all. The old fellow was lazy. If he occasionally did make a pair of boots for someone, he acted as though he were doing an act of charity. "What dost thou wish to walk in boots for?" he would ask his customers. "Thou art a peasant and to walk bare-footed is good for thee."

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A callous man, he loved nobody, and nothing in this world except that fur cloak.



No cruelty ever cried louder to heaven than his, and he directed it mainly upon his only child, his daughter Therese.

And yet, what was it that she had done? She had refused to marry the lame miller of Csoltó when her father commanded. He had wanted to plant in one jar the rezeda flower and the thistle!

Is it any wonder that the melancholy Therese, embittered and bewildered by her father's treatment, escaped at the first opportunity and eloped with the young County Justice? It was an almost unheard of indiscretion, but youth is often guilty of much folly. Yet, though all the world condemned her, her father should have been the first to forgive her.

Old Filcsik became ruder and more austere, and when Therese came home to see him and tearfully begged his forgiveness, he turned away and said he did not know the hussy; took his fur cloak from its big nail and left the house and returned only when Therese was gone.

Therese never ventured near him again. She saw him only on one other occasion, while driving through the village with the County Justice. They saw old Filcsik on his way to the tavern of "The Linen Shirt." "Oh, father, father, dear!" the girl cried passionately.

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Old Filcsik looked up, ceremoniously tipped his hat, and silently turned and entered the tavern. Surely, there must have been a stone in the place of the heart of this old man!

Those of the people of Majornok who had an occasion to go to the home of the Judge could not but envy the lot in life that had fallen to Therese Filcsik. "Why," they would all exclaim, "she is a gracious lady. She has learned all the manners of the nobility. And how the neighborhood has improved since she became the Judge's wife!"

The administration of Justice of Majornok is far better than that in all the surrounding villages.

Old Filcsik was informed by his neighbors of the messages she had indirectly sent to him: her father should call on her; she would send a wagon for him; she would place downy, silk cushions on the seat of the wagon; that whenever he desired, day and night, he could have honeyed whiskey, and that he would be honored—the Judge himself would first bow to him, but only that he should come to her and forgive her because she was afraid herself to go to him.

But all this seemed to produce no impression on old Filcsik. Yet had he been but just to her, he could have helped not only his own lot, but he could have secured forever the prosperity of the noble village itself.

Because (and this is written to you in strict confidence) Majornok is the most impoverished village of the entire country thereabout. Her people are poor and the village itself is neglected. It has not a single paved street—not a bridge, nor a Town Hall to give it dignity.

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This is, it is true, in no wise remarkable. None of the county officers had chanced upon a sweetheart in Majornok, and they therefore built the country roads and paved the village streets only in that portion of the county where they frequently went.

There is, for instance, the county road of Csoltó. It is as smooth as a polished floor and the people of Bány have pretty Eliza Bitro to thank for it, while the paved roads of Karancsalja call for blessings upon the beautiful head of Mistress John Vér.

Well, such is the way of the world. The face of a beautiful woman glorifies the appearance of an entire neighborhood. But it did not beautify Majornok. There it was commonly said that the deputy county engineer, who prepared the maps for the road commissioners from those at the county seat, had intentionally left the place out, and even that the honorable representatives and the electors of the county had offered one hundred and eighty paper gulden to the neighboring county of Hont, if it would claim Majornok as its own, but Hont county would not have the place even for money. Why should they have her, that all the fun poked at, and all disgrace coming from Majornok should revert upon the honorable county?

But if Filcsik had wanted it, there would have been a country road leading to and from Majornok, if need be, one constructed of red marble. All of them would be happy now. But he repelled the good intentions of his Honor the Squire, though he needed some kind of help badly enough, for the "bootmaker of God" was very meagerly provided with worldly goods. One day last week the silver clasps from his fur cloak wandered into the coffers of Mistress Sadie, the landlady of the inn of "The Linen Shirt."

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But he was not in vain the "bootmaker of God," otherwise He, his only customer, would not have come to his rescue at a time of his greatest need. All at once letters began to come to him by mail containing ten, twenty, or even fifty gulden. Usually it was the letter of some old customer who informed him that having become well-to-do he now wished, with expressions of great gratitude, to repay to Master Filcsik some old debt. There are, after all, many honest men living in this world.

For a time he believed that if the debtors did not owe him anything, it must have been to his father, whose name too was Steve. The only thing that was remarkable was, how could his father have given so much away on credit?

As soon as his suspicion was aroused, so soon did he solve the riddle. One by one he returned the money letters to the Judge. How does he dare to send presents to Steve Filcsik? Does not the Judge know that his grandmother is descended from the famous Becsky family and the like?

The money letters ceased to come thereafter but there came many sad tidings. Beautiful Therese Filcsik had become mortally ill. All wherein she had heretofore found pleasure she now rejected; pomp and luxury, the fine various and delicious meats she turned away from; refused her medicines and expressed a wish to see her father. Poor Therese! she was after all not such a bad girl!

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And the wish of Therese was so pressing that in the end the Judge himself was bound to call for old Filcsik. "Well, old man, now you come with me, you must whether you want to or not; don't deny this request of your very sick daughter—"

"I have no daughter!"

"You come with me! that is settled!"

"It cannot be: I beg of you respectfully, do not press me; it cannot be, I have very urgent work."

"Do please, come with me for my sake!" said the Judge amicably.

Filcsik sighed. Probably this was the first occasion in all his life that he had done so.

"You refuse to come? You discard your only child?"

"Yes, sir, if you please!"

"You! the outcast of society?"

"Well, sir, that is not impossible, such a plain common old bootmaker like myself is capable of doing anything."

The honorable young Justice now began to use sweet words of persuasion and promise, but they all rebounded from the marble heart just as did the threatening words.

"Why don't your grace," he said, "have me arrested and put me in irons? Then I will have to go along wherever you may wish to take me." [Pg 8]

After all, the mighty judge who ruled over all the county, was compelled to return without the bootmaker.

But the judge had not in vain a hoary veteran Michael Suska, for his body servant, who concocted a shrewd plan to attain the end desired.

"Gracious Sir! I know this man Filcsik. He would run after us just as a little pig will run after a sack from which corn is dropping, if—"

"Well, what? speak up!"

"If we would steal his fur cloak. His life and death depend upon that cloak. He is a very peculiar man—"

"Well, then, see to it that his cloak is stolen away!"

The hoary veteran could not be trusted with a better job. Ever since the revolution he had no more important task on hand. Oh, well, in those days—but wherefore speak of his deeds then? No one would believe him now.

In the meantime the sick lady was restless on her couch amidst silken pillows, shuddering whenever she heard the noise of approaching wheels. She half leaned on her arms listening, burying her emaciated hands in her long black hair which flowed down over her white night gown.

She is provided with all that her longing can desire, yet she is the poorest being in the world, for she lacks health, and something else—love.

That love that burned within her for husband is naught to the love that warms the heart, the filial love for parents, and she never felt as cold as now.

Nothing does her any good; the voice of the man whom she loved is painful to her; it were better he were not walking at her side and would leave her to herself; the bed is hard; in vain it is made of silk and soft feathers, in vain do the servants fix it and repeatedly put it in order. [Pg 9]

How well would it be if she could lie at home beneath the paternal roof, however poor that home, beside the capacious stove, and she could hear at the open window the voice of the evening bells of Majornok, and if her cold feet were covered with the famous fur cloak of her father.

Of this she spoke, of this she dreamed last night and behold—in the morning, fate had fulfilled her wish, when she awoke, over the beautiful red quilt, there lay spread out her old acquaintance the fur cloak.

And those roses and red tulips which render its collar so pretty, throw their shades over the deathly pale face of Therese. This last enjoyed pleasure is as sweet as long ago the first might have been.

Michael Suska redeemed his promise soon enough and he speculated well. When old Filcsik came home in the night time from the tavern of "The Linen Shirt" he found his house burglariously entered, and his fur cloak gone. The big nail was empty, bereft and bare of its ornament. It was then towards the end of October. The winter stood on the threshold of the season.

Filcsik roamed about in the village with lowering brows, his hat pulled down sullenly over his eyes. He did not drink; he uttered no word. His misfortune completely broke him down. He was afraid to look into the eyes of men, because he feared that from the lips of all would come the malicious question, "What has become of your famous fur cloak?" [Pg 10]

But hope did not forsake him. He felt it that the dear treasure would ere long come back to him. It could not be lost; whoever stole it could not use it. The whole county knew it to be his.

And he was not mistaken. The news came that the thieves were caught and the stolen property recovered and was by that time in the hands of the County Judge. Within four days the rightful owner could recover it, or else it would be auctioned off as property found or recovered whose

owner could not be identified.

Immediately he started on his way to the castle to reclaim it; he did not hesitate a second, he went to demand his own.

The County Judge made no objections, he admitted that the fur cloak was there and silently beckoned him to follow. Through many bright rooms on the floors of which fine carpets were spread, Filcsik trod with his muddy boots behind the Judge until at last they arrived at a dark room.

"There is your fur cloak," the Judge said with trembling voice and pointed to a corner, "take it!"

The old eyes became but slowly accustomed to the darkness, but he found his way to the corner whence groans and moans came.

The Judge stepped up and withdrew the bed-curtain, Filcsik staggered back.

Therese lay there, pale as a broken stemmed lily, her long black eyelashes closed, her feet covered with the famous tulip embroidered fur cloak.

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She was beautiful even though now dying, an angel saying good-bye to this world. Where is she hurrying? To the heaven from which she once came.

It may be that she will never again open those charming eyes of hers, which could glance so archly, or those lips of hers which to kiss was such supreme bliss.

Filcsik stood mute, motionless, as if in thought, but only for a minute; then he boldly stepped up to the dying, and took off that cloak for which she had pined so much. It may be that she would have no use for it any more.

The dying angel did not even move. Filcsik's hand did not even tremble. He did not even cast a last glance on his dying daughter. Mute, without uttering a syllable, he went out as if nothing could pain him.

He did not even turn back when the Judge, as he was crossing the threshold, savagely addressed to him the epithet, "Heathen!"

Outside, he hung his rightful property around his neck, and notwithstanding that it had become dark, he started for home by an unused route. He did not want to meet with men just then. He probably felt that he was no longer a man.

From his face naught could be read; seemingly it was calm. Probably it even expressed some satisfaction on account of the regained fur cloak. Truly there must be a stone in the place of the heart of this man.

When he reached the rivulet at the foot of the Majornok mountain opening, (just there where, it is said, the soul of Mistress Gebyi rides nightly on frightened horses) he stumbled over something in the way.

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It was a beggar's bag filled with pieces of dry bread. Its owner must have prayed successfully—there was enough of the daily bread there even for tomorrow.

But lo! there lies the owner thereof beneath a tree, a ragged beggar woman, in her lap a child.

He placed the bag at their side and then lit a match to see better whether or not they were dead.

Their heavy breathing revealed that both were alive, mother and child; exhausting fatigue alone could have sent them into such profound slumber. The cold weather, the bitter wind and the ragged dress are not favorable to such sleep. Only they can sleep as these do, who are exhausted. Their faces, especially that of the child, are already blue from cold and the tiny limbs tremble like frozen jelly.

Filcsik took out his pipe from the pocket of his coat, filled and lit it, and then sat down on the ground beside the sleepers.

He looked at them a long time. He could see very well; the sky was full of stars. The stars looked at him and perhaps beckoned to him encouragingly.

All at once he bent lower over the sleepers; his forehead was perspiring, his head was bowed down and the famous fur cloak slipped off his shoulders. It was well, for he was warm anyhow. And then the fur cloak never burdened him as much as now; it had never been as heavy as at present.

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When it slipped down, he suddenly picked it up and spread it over the two sleepers.

Then he jumped up and slowly and thoughtfully began to walk towards home. Once he stood still, then retraced his steps. Did he intend to go back for it?

No, no! what would those million eyes looking at him from above say to that!

Now he hurried; he almost ran towards home.

The night was quiet but cold. The old man was without his fur cloak and yet he felt no cold.

One thought warmed him within, in that place where other men have their hearts but where,

according to general belief, providence had substituted in him a stone.

Since that time he has had no fur cloak. But for all that he speaks of it as if he still possessed it. He brags of it, he bets on it.

Men know the fact already and were they not afraid of his vituperative proclivities they would laugh at him; as it is, they don't concern themselves about him. God, men, have turned from him because he is a godless, unchristian fellow. If one of these days he dies on a heap of straw, a raven or a crow will act as mourner, the ditch of the churchyard will be his resting place.



Here endeth this Veracious History of "Heathen Master Filcsik" Wherein is evidently shown that no matter howsoever hard a man's heart may be there are times and occasions When, ruled by a Higher Power, he is moved to do a kindly act. Written originally in the Magyar language by Kálmán Mikszáth, and translated by Wm. N. Loew. Done into Type by me, Charles Clinch Chubb, Clerk in Holy Orders, and one hundred Copies printed at our Press in the Parish of Grace Church, Cleveland, Ohio this seventeenth day of March, in the year of our Lord, mcmx.

Number .52. .



Here endeth this Veracious History of "Heathen Master Filcsik" Wherein is evidently shown that no matter howsoever hard a man's heart may be there are times and occasions When, ruled by a Higher Power, he is moved to do a kindly act. Written originally in the Magyar language by Kálmán Mikszáth, and translated by Wm. N. Loew. Done into Type by me, Charles Clinch Chubb, Clerk in Holy Orders, and one hundred Copies printed at our Press in the Parish of Grace Church, Cleveland, Ohio this seventeenth day of March, in the year of our Lord, mcmx.

Number 52

[Transcriber's Note: The following typographical errors have been corrected: "Filscik" in the sentence beginning "But Filscik, like the lover-husband" has been changed to "Filcsik", and "delcious" in the phrase "various and delcious meats" has been changed to "delicious". No other corrections have been made to the original text.]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HEATHEN MASTER FILCSIK ***

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