

**OLD GAMUL:
A LYRIC PLAY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649429448

Old Gamul: A Lyric Play by Thomas Newbigging

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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THOMAS NEWBIGGING

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BY

THOMAS NEWBIGGING

LONDON:
T. FISHER UNWIN,
PATERNOSTER SQUARE.

1892.

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INTRODUCTION.

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THE Story of Old Gamul is one that my "honoured Grannie" used to relate to amuse my childhood. I was entirely unaware of its source until this was pointed out to me by Mr. W. E. A. Axon, who, in a Paper read before the Manchester Literary Club (1884), gives the following particulars: "A work by a German named Massenius was published in Cologne in 1657. It was entitled *Palaestra Dramatica*, and contained, amongst other curious narratives, one of a certain Sgr. Vitalis, who fell into a pit in which a lion, a monkey, and a serpent had also fallen. They were all rescued by an honest countryman, Massaccio, to whom Vitalis promised a marriage dower and his palace. Once safe, he denies all knowledge of his deliverer. The beasts prove more grateful, but a gem which is given to the peasant by the serpent leads to a suspicion that he has stolen it. At the trial Vitalis again denies him, but is overwhelmed with confusion

when the beasts enter the court, and force from him an involuntary confession. A translation of this story appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for March, 1835. The fable was, however, not invented by Massenius; for, in a slightly different form, it occurs in the *Gesta Romanorum*, that famous collection of mediæval stories. It forms the thirty-ninth tale of the second volume of Wright's edition. It had attracted the notice of Gower, and is told in the *Confessio Amantis*; in this the lion is omitted. Matthew Paris gives it as an apologue told by Richard the Lion Heart. Finally it is found in that storehouse of Eastern legend, the *Calilah u Dimnah*. This was translated by Doni into Italian, and an English rendering of his version appeared in 1570. Massenius may have obtained the story either from the *Gesta* or from this book of Doni."

The following is the Tale (cxix.) as given in the Rev. C. Swan's translation into English of the *Gesta Romanorum*, published in 1824:

"In the reign of a certain king there lived a proud and oppressive Seneschal. Now, near the Royal Palace, was a forest well-stocked with game; and, by the direction of this person, various pits were dug there, and covered with leaves, for the purpose of entrapping the beasts. It happened that the Sene-

schal himself went into the forest, and, with much exaltation of heart, exclaimed internally, 'Lives there a being in the empire more powerful than I am?' This braggart's thought was scarcely formed, ere he rode upon one of his own pitfalls, and immediately disappeared. The same day had been taken a lion, a monkey, and a serpent. Terrified at the situation into which fate had thrown him, he cried out lustily, and his noise awoke a poor man called Guido, who had come with his ass into that forest to procure firewood, by the sale of which he got his bread. Hastening to the mouth of the pit, he was promised great wealth if he would extricate the Seneschal from his perilous situation. 'My friend,' answered Guido, 'I have no means of obtaining a livelihood except by the faggots which I collect. If I neglect this for a single day, I shall be thrown into the greatest difficulties.' The Seneschal reiterated his promises of enriching him; and Guido went back to the city, and returned with a long cord, which he let down into the pit, and bade the Seneschal bind it round his waist. But before he could apply it to the intended purpose, the lion leaped forward, and seizing upon the cord, was drawn up in his stead. Immediately, exhibiting great signs of pleasure, the beast ran off into the wood. The rope again descended, and the monkey, having

noticed the success of the lion, vaulted above the man's head, and shaking the cord, was in like manner set at liberty, and hurried off to his haunts. A third time the cord was let down, and the serpent, twining around it, was drawn up, gave signs of gratitude, and escaped. 'Oh, my good friend,' said the Seneschal, 'the beasts are gone, now draw me up quickly, I pray you.' Guido complied, and afterwards succeeded in drawing up his horse, which the Seneschal instantly mounted and rode back to the palace. Guido returned home; and his wife, observing that he had come without wood, was very dejected, and inquired the cause. He related what had occurred, and the riches he was to receive for his service. The wife's countenance brightened. Early in the morning her husband went to the palace, but the Seneschal denied all knowledge of him, and ordered him to be whipped for his presumption. The porter executed the directions, and beat him so severely that he left him half dead. As soon as Guido's wife understood this, she saddled their ass, and brought him home in a very infirm state. The sickness which ensued consumed the whole of their little property; but as soon as he had recovered, he returned to his usual occupation in the wood. Whilst he was thus employed, he beheld afar off ten asses laden with packs, and a lion following

close on them, pursuing the path which led toward Guido. On looking narrowly on this beast, he remembered that it was the same which he had freed from its imprisonment in the pit. The lion signified with his foot that he should take the loaded asses, and go home. This Guido did, and the lion followed. On arriving at his own door, the noble beast fawned upon him ; and, wagging his tail as if in triumph, ran back to the woods. Guido caused a proclamation to be made in the different churches, that if any asses had been lost, the owners should come to him ; but no one appearing to demand them, he opened the packages, and to his great joy discovered them full of money. On the second day Guido returned to the forest, but forgot an iron instrument to cleave the wood. He looked up, and beheld the monkey, whose liberation he had effected, and the animal, by the help of teeth and nails, accomplished his desires. Guido then loaded his asses and went home. The next day he renewed his visit to the forest ; and, sitting down to prepare his instrument, discovered the serpent, whose escape he had aided, carrying a stone in its mouth of three colours—on one side white, on another black, and on the third red. It opened its mouth and let the stone fall into Guido's lap. Having done this, it departed. Guido took the stone to a skillful