Ja 5 — Tandulanali Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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Pinned source revision: https://github.com/suttacentral/sc-data/commit/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

Scope: Complete numbered source article from the traditional Jātaka commentary; canonical verses appear in story context. This is not a verse-only edition.

Changes: Converted the pinned SuttaCentral HTML article to plain text; removed inline print page-reference labels and normalized whitespace. The original source retains references.

Text

“Dost ask how much a peck of rice is worth?”—This was told by the Master, whilst at Jetavana, about the Elder Udayi, called the Dullard.

At that time the reverend Dabba, the Mallian, was manciple to the Brotherhood. When in the early morning Dabba was allotting the checks for rice, sometimes it was choice rice and sometimes it was an inferior quality which fell to the share of the Elder Udayi. On days when he received the inferior quality, he used to make a commotion in the check-room, by demanding, “Is Dabba the only one who knows how to give out checks? Don’t we know?” One day when he was making a commotion, they handed him the check-basket, saying, “Here! you give the checks out yourself to-day!” Thenceforth, it was Udayi who gave out the checks to the Brotherhood. But, in his distribution, he could not tell the best from the inferior rice; nor did he know what seniority was entitled to the best rice and what to the inferior. So too, when he was making out the roster, he had not an idea of the seniority of the Brethren thereon. Consequently, when the Brethren took up their places, he made a mark on the ground or on the wall to shew that one detachment stood here, and another there. Next day there were fewer Brethren of one grade and more of another in the check-room; where there were fewer, the mark was too low down; where the number was greater, it was too high up. But Udayi, quite ignorant of detachments, gave out the checks simply according to his old marks.

Hence, the Brethren said to him, “Friend Udayi, the mark is too high up or too low down; the best rice is for those of such and such seniority, and the inferior quality for such and such others.” But he put them back with the argument, “If this mark is where it is, what are you standing here for? Why am I to trust you? It’s my mark I trust.”

Then, the boys and novices thrust him from the check-room, crying, “Friend Udayi the Dullard, when you give out the checks, the Brethren are docked of what they ought to get; you’re not fit to give them out; get you gone from here.” Hereupon, a great uproar arose in

the check-room.

Hearing the noise, the Master asked the Elder Ananda, saying, “Ananda, there is a great uproar in the check-room. What is the noise about?”

The Elder explained it all to the Buddha. “Ananda,” said he, “this is not the only time when Udayi by his stupidity has robbed others of their profit; he did just the same thing in bygone times too.”

The Elder asked the Blessed One for an explanation, and the Blessed One made clear what had been concealed by re-birth.

Once on a time Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares in Kasi. In those days our Bodhisatta was his valuer. He used to value horses, elephants, and the like; and jewels, gold, and the like; and he used to pay over to the owners of the goods the proper price, as he fixed it.

But the king was greedy and his greed suggested to him this thought: “This valuer with his style of valuing will soon exhaust all the riches in my house; I must get another valuer.” Opening his window and looking out into his courtyard, he espied walking across a stupid, greedy hind in whom he saw a likely candidate for the post. So the king had the man sent for, and asked him whether he could do the work. “Oh yes,” said the man; and so, to safeguard the royal treasure, this stupid fellow was appointed valuer. After this the fool, in valuing elephants and horses and the like, used to fix a price dictated by his own fancy, neglecting their true worth; but, as he was valuer, the price was what he said and no other.

At that time there arrived from the north country a horse-dealer with 500 horses. The king sent for his new valuer and bade him value the horses. And the price he set on the whole 500 horses was just one measure of rice, which he ordered to be paid over to the dealer, directing the horses to be led off to the stable . Away went the horse-dealer to the old valuer, to whom he told what had happened, and asked what was to be done. “Give him a bribe,” said the ex-valuer, “and put this point to him: ‘Knowing as we do that our horses are worth just a single measure of rice, we are curious to learn from you what the precise value of a measure of rice is; could you state its value in the king’s presence?’ If he says he can, then take him before the king; and I too will be there.”

Readily following the Bodhisatta’s advice, the horse-dealer bribed the man and put the question to him. The other, having expressed his ability to value a measure of rice, was promptly taken to the palace, whither also went the Bodhisatta and many other ministers. With due obeisance the horse-dealer said, “Sire, I do not dispute it that the price of 500 horses is a single measure of rice; but I would ask your majesty to question your valuer as to the value of that measure of rice.” Ignorant of what had passed, the king said to the fellow, “Valuer, what are 500 horses worth?” “A measure of rice, sire,” was the reply. “Very good, my friend; if 500 horses then are worth one measure of rice, what is that measure of rice worth?” “It is worth all Benares and its suburbs,” was the fool’s reply.

(Thus we learn that, having first valued the horses at a measure of hill-paddy to please the king, he was bribed by the horse-dealer to estimate that measure of rice at the worth of all Benares and its suburbs. And that though the walls of Benares were twelve leagues round by themselves, while the city and suburbs together were three hundred leagues round! Yet the fool priced all this vast city and its suburbs at a single measure of rice!)

Hereupon the ministers clapped their hands and laughed merrily. “We used to think,” they said in scorn, “that the earth and the realm were beyond price; but now we learn that the kingdom of Benares together with its king is only worth a single measure of rice! What talents the valuer has! How has he retained his post so long? But truly the valuer suits our king admirably.”

Then the Bodhisatta repeated this stanza :

Dost ask how much a peck of rice is worth?

—Why, all Benares, both within and out.

Yet, strange to tell, five hundred horses too

Are worth precisely this same peck of rice!

Thus put to open shame, the king sent the fool packing, and gave the Bodhisatta the office again. And when his life closed, the Bodhisatta passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended and the two stories told, the Master made the connexion linking both together, and identified the Birth by saying in conclusion,—“Udayi the Dullard was the stupid rustic valuer of those days, and I myself the wise valuer.”

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