Ja 107 — Salittaka Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja107.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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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

"Prize skill."—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a Brother who threw and hit a swan. We are told that this Brother, who came of a good family in Savatthi, had acquired great skill in hitting things with stones; and that hearing the Truth preached one day he gave his heart to it and, giving up the world, was admitted to full Brotherhood. But neither in study nor practice did he excel as a Brother. One day, with a youthful Brother, he went to the river Aciravati, and was standing on the hank after bathing, when he saw two white swans flying by. Said he to the younger Brother, "I'll hit the hinder swan in the eye and bring it down." "Bring it down indeed!" said the other; "you can't hit it." "Just you wait a moment. I'll hit it on the eye this side through the eye on the other." "Oh, nonsense." "Very well; you wait and see." Then he took a three-cornered stone in his hand and flung it after the swan. 'Whiz' went the stone through the air and the swan, suspecting danger, stopped to listen. At once the Brother seized a smooth round stone and as the resting swan was looking in another direction hit it full in the eye, so that the stone went in at one eye and came out at the other. And with a loud scream the swan fell to the ground at their feet. "That is a highly improper action," said the other Brother, and brought him before the Master, with an account of what had happened. After rebuking the Brother, the Master said, "The same skill was his, Brethren, in past times as now." And he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was one of the King's courtiers. And the royal chaplain of those days was so talkative and longwinded that, when he once started, no one else could get a word in. So the King cast about for someone to cut the chaplain short, and looked high and low for such an one. Now at that time there was a cripple in Benares who was a wonderful marksman with stones, and the boys used to put him on a little cart and draw him to the gates of Benares, where there is a large branching banyan-tree covered with leaves. There they would gather round and give him half-pence, saying 'Make an elephant,' or 'Make a horse.' And the cripple would throw stone after stone till he had cut the foliage into the shapes asked for. And the ground was

covered with fallen leaves.

On his way to his pleasaunce the King came to, the spot, and all the boys scampered off in fear of the King, leaving the cripple there helpless. At the sight of the litter of leaves the King asked, as he rode by in his chariot, who had cut the leaves off. And he was told that the cripple had done it. Thinking that here might be a way to stop the chaplain's mouth, the King asked where the cripple was, and was shewn him sitting at the foot of the tree. Then the King had him brought to him and, motioning his retinue to stand apart, said to the cripple, "I have a very talkative chaplain. Do you think you could stop his talking?"

"Yes, sire,—if I had a peashooter full of dry goat's dung," said the cripple. Then the King had him taken to the palace and set with a pea-shooter full of dry goat's dung behind a curtain with a slit in it, facing the chaplain's seat. When the brahmin came to wait upon the King and was seated on the seat prepared for him, his majesty started a conversation. And the chaplain forthwith monopolized the conversation, and no one else could get a word in. Hereon the cripple shot the pellets of goat's dung one by one, like flies, through the slit in the curtain right into the chaplain's gullet. And the brahmin swallowed the pellets down as they came, like so much oil, till all had disappeared. When the whole peashooter-full of pellets was lodged in the chaplain's stomach, they swelled to the size of half a peck; and the King, knowing they were all gone, addressed the brahmin in these words: "Reverend sir, so talkative are you, that you have swallowed down a peashooter-full of goat's dung without noticing it. That's about as much as you will be able to take at a sitting. Now go home and take a dose of panick seed and water by way of emetic, and put yourself right again."

From that day the chaplain kept his mouth shut and sat as silent during conversation as though his lips were sealed.

"Well, my ears are indebted to the cripple for this relief," said the King, and bestowed on him four villages, one in the North, one in the South, one in the West, and one in the East, producing a hundred thousand a year.

The Bodhisatta drew near to the King and said, "In this world, sire, skill should be cultivated by the wise. Mere skill in aiming has brought this cripple all this prosperity." So saying he uttered this stanza—

Prize skill, and note the marksman lame;

—Four villages reward his aim.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, "This Brother was the cripple of those days, Ananda the King, and I the wise courtier."

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

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