Ja 131 — Asampadana Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

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

“If a friend.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove, about Devadatta. For at that time the Brethren were discussing in the Hall of Truth the ingratitude of Devadatta and his inability to recognise the Master’s goodness, when the Master himself entered and on enquiry was told the subject of their talk. “Brethren,” said he, “this is not the first time that Devadatta has been ungrateful; he was just as ungrateful in bygone days.” So saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time, when a certain king of Magadha was reigning in Rajagaha, the Bodhisatta was his Treasurer, worth eighty crores, and known as the ‘Millionaire.’ In Benares there dwelt a Treasurer also worth eighty crores, who was named Piliya, and was a great friend of the Millionaire. For some reason or other Piliya of Benares got into difficulties, and lost all his property, and was reduced to beggary. In his need he left Benares, and with his wife journeyed on foot to Rajagaha, to see the Millionaire, the last hope left him. And the Millionaire embraced his friend and treated him as an honoured guest, asking, in due course, the reason of the visit. “I am a ruined man,” answered Piliya, “I have lost everything, and have come to ask you to help me.”

“With all my heart! Have no fear on that score,” said the Millionaire. He had his strong-room opened, and gave to Piliya forty crones. Also he divided into two equal parts the whole of his property, live stock and all, and bestowed on Piliya the just half of his entire fortune. Taking his wealth, Piliya went back to Benares, and there dwelt.

Not long after a like calamity overtook the Millionaire, who, in his turn, lost every penny he had. Casting about whither to turn in the hour of need, he bethought him how he had befriended Piliya to the half of his possessions, and might go to him for assistance without fear of being thrown over. So he set out from Rajagaha with his wife, and came to Benares. At the entrance to the city he said to her, “Wife, it is not befitting for you to trudge along the streets with me. Wait here a little till I send a carriage with a servant to bring you into

the city in proper state." So saying, he left her under shelter, and went on alone into the town, till he came to Piliya's house, where he bade himself be announced as the Millionaire from Rajagaha, come to see his friend.

"Well, show him in," said Piliya; but at sight of the other's condition he neither rose to meet him, nor greeted him with words of welcome, but only demanded what brought him here.

"To see you," was the reply.

"Where are you stopping?"

"Nowhere, as yet. I left my wife under shelter and came straight to you."

"There's no room here for you. Take a dole of rice, find somewhere to cook and eat it, and then begone and never come to visit me again." So saying, the rich man despatched a servant with orders to give his unfortunate friend half-a-quartern of pollard to carry away tied up in the corner of his cloth; and this, though that very day he had had a thousand waggon-loads of the best rice threshed out and stored up in his overflowing granaries. Yes, the rascal, who had coolly taken four hundred millions, now doled out half-a-quartern of pollard to his benefactor! Accordingly, the servant measured out the pollard in a basket, and brought it to the Bodhisatta, who argued within himself whether or no he should take it. And he thought, "This ingrate breaks off our friendship because I am a ruined man. Now, if I refuse his paltry gift, I shall be as bad as he. For the ignoble, who scorn a modest gift, outrage the first idea of friendship. Be it, therefore, mine to fulfil friendship so far as in me lies, by taking his gift of pollard." So he tied up the pollard in the corner of his cloth, and made his way back to where he had housed his wife.

"What have you got, dear?" said she.

"Our friend Piliya gives us this pollard, and washes his hands of us."

"Oh, why did you take it? Is this a fit return for the forty crores?"

"Don't cry, dear wife," said the Bodhisatta. "I took it simply because I wanted not to violate the principle of friendship. Why these tears?" So saying, he uttered this stanza—

If a friend plays the niggard's part,

A simpleton is cut to th' heart;

His dole of pollard I will take,

And not for this our friendship break.

But still the wife kept on crying.

Now, at that moment a farm-servant whom the Millionaire had given to Piliya was passing by and drew near on hearing the weeping of his former mistress. Recognising his master and mistress, he fell at their feet, and with tears and sobs asked the reason of their coming. And the Bodhisatta told him their story.

“Keep up your spirits,” said the man, cheerily; and, taking them to his own dwelling, there made ready perfumed baths, and a meal for them. Then he let the other slaves know that their old master and mistress had come, and after a few days marched them in a body to the King’s palace, where they made quite a commotion.

The King asked what the matter was, and they told him the whole story. So he sent forthwith for the two, and asked the Millionaire whether the report was true that he had given four hundred millions to Piliya.

“Sir,” said he, “when in his need nay friend confided in me, and came to seek my aid, I gave him the half, not only of my money, but of my live stock and of everything that I possessed.”

“Is this so?” said the king to Piliya.

“Yes, sire,” said he.

“And when, in his turn, your benefactor confided in you and sought you out, did you show him honour and hospitality?”

Here Piliya was silent.

“Did you have a half-quartern of pollard doled out into the corner of his cloth?”

Still Piliya was silent.

Then the king took counsel with his ministers as to what should be done, and finally, as a judgment on Piliya, ordered them to go to Piliya’s house and give the whole of Piliya’s wealth to the Millionaire.

“Nay, sire,” said the Bodhisatta; “I need not what is another’s. Let me be given nothing beyond what I formerly gave him.”

Then the king ordered that the Bodhisatta should enjoy his own again; and the Bodhisatta, with a large retinue of servants, came back with his regained wealth to Rajagaha, where he put his affairs in order, and after a life spent in charity and other good works, passed away to fare according to his deserts.

His lesson ended, the Master identified the Birth by saying, “Devadatta was the Treasurer Piliya of those days, and I myself the Millionaire.”

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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