Ja 186 — Dadhi-Vahana Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol2/ja186.html

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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

“Sweet was once the mango’s savour,” etc.—This story the Master told whilst dwelling in Jetavana, on the subject of keeping bad company. The circumstances were the same as above. Again the Master said: “Brethren, bad company is evil and injurious; why should one talk of the evil effects of had company on human beings? In days long gone by, even a vegetable, a mango tree, whose sweet fruit was a dish fit for the gods, turned sour and bitter through the influence of a noisome and bitter nimb tree.” Then he told a story.

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, four brahmins, brothers, of the land of Kasi, left the world and became hermits; they built themselves four huts in a row in the highlands of the Himalaya, and there they lived.

The eldest brother died, and was born as Sakka. Knowing who he had been, he used to visit the others every seven or eight days, and lend them a helping hand.

One day, he visited the eldest of the anchorites, and after the usual greeting, took his seat to one side. “Well, Sir, how can I serve you?” he enquired. The hermit, who was suffering from jaundice, replied, “Fire is what I want.” Sakka gave him a razor-axe. (A razor-axe is so called because it serves as razor or as axe according as you fit it into the handle.) “Why,” said the hermit, “who is there to get me firewood with this?” “If you want a fire, Sir,” replied Sakka, “all you have to do is to strike your hand upon the axe, and say—‘Fetch wood and make a fire!’ The axe will fetch the wood and make you the fire.”

After giving him this razor-axe he next visited the second brother, and asked him the same question—“How can I serve you, Sir?” Now there was an elephant track by his hut, and the creatures annoyed him. So he told Sakka that he was annoyed by elephants, and wanted them to be driven away. Sakka gave him a drum. “If you beat upon this side, Sir,” he explained, “your enemies will run away; but if you strike the other, they will become your firm friends, and will encompass you with an army in fourfold array.” Then he handed him

the drum.

Lastly he made a visit to the youngest, and asked as before how he could serve him. He too had jaundice, and what he said was—"Please give me some curds." Sakka gave him a milk-bowl, with these words: "Turn this over if you want anything, and a great river will pour out of it, and will flood the whole place, and it will be able even to win a kingdom for you." With these words he departed.

After this the axe used to make fire for the eldest brother, the second used to beat upon one side of his drum and drive the elephants away, and the youngest had his curds to eat.

About this time a wild boar, that lived in a ruined village, lit upon a gem possessed of magic power. Picking up the gem in his mouth, he rose in the air by its magic. From afar he could see an isle in mid-ocean, and there he resolved to live. So descending he chose a pleasant spot beneath a mango tree, and there he made his abode.

One day he fell asleep under the tree, with the jewel lying in front of him. Now a certain man from the Kasi country, who had been turned out of doors by his parents as a ne'er-do-well, had made his way to a seaport, where he embarked on shipboard as a sailors' drudge. In mid-sea the ship was wrecked, and he floated upon a plank to this island. As he wandered in search of fruit, he espied our boar fast asleep. Quietly he crept up, seized the gem, and found himself by magic rising through the air! He alighted on the mango tree, and pondered. "The magic of this gem," thought he, "has taught yon boar to be a sky-walker; that's how he got here, I suppose. Well! I must kill him and make a meal of him first; and then I'll be off." So he snapt off a twig, dropping it upon the boar's head. The boar woke up, and seeing no gem, ran trembling up and down. The man up in the tree laughed. The boar looked up, and seeing him ran his head against the tree, and killed himself.

The man came down, lit a fire, cooked the boar and made a meal. Then he rose up in the sky, and set out on his journey.

As he passed over the Himalaya, he saw the hermits' settlement. So he descended, and spent two or three days in the eldest brother's hut, entertaining and entertained, and he found out the virtue of the axe. He made up his mind to get it for himself. So he showed our hermit the virtue of his gem, and offered to exchange it for the axe. The hermit longed to be able to pass through mid-air, and struck the bargain. The man took the axe, and departed; but before he had gone very far, he struck upon it, and said—"Axe! smash that hermit's skull and bring the gem to me!" Off flew the axe, clove the hermit's skull, and brought the gem back.

Then the man hid the axe away, and paid a visit to the second brother. With him the visitor stayed a few days, and soon discovered the power of his drum. Then he exchanged his gem for the drum, as before, and as before made the axe cleave the owner's skull. After this he went on to the youngest of the three hermits, found out the power of the milk-bowl, gave his jewel in exchange for it, and as before sent his axe to cleave the man's

skull. Thus he was now owner of jewel, axe, drum, and milk-bowl, all four.

He now rose up and past through the air. Stopping hard by Benares, he wrote a letter which he sent by a messenger's hands, that the king must either fight him or yield. On receipt of this message the king sallied forth to "seize the scoundrel." But he beat on one side of his drum, and was promptly surrounded by an army in fourfold array. When he saw that the king had deployed his forces, he then overturned the milk-bowl, and a great river poured forth; multitudes were drowned in the river of curds. Next he struck upon his axe. "Fetch me the king's head!" cried he; away went the axe, and came back and dropt the head at his feet. Not a man could raise hand against him.

So encompassed by a mighty host, he entered the city, and caused himself to be anointed king under the title of king Dadhi-vahana, or Carried-on-the-Curds, and ruled righteously.

One day, as the king was amusing himself by casting a net into the river, he caught a mango fruit, fit for the gods, which had floated down from Lake Kannamunda. When the net was hauled out, the mango was found, and shown to the king. It was a huge fruit, as big as a basin, round, and golden in colour. The king asked what the fruit was: Mango, said the foresters. He ate it, and had the stone planted in his park, and watered with milk-water.

The tree sprouted up, and in three years it bore fruit. Great was the worship paid to this tree; milk-water was poured about it; perfumed garlands with five sprays were hung upon it; wreaths were festooned about it; a lamp was kept burning, and fed with scented oil; and all round it was a screen of cloth. The fruit was sweet, and had the colour of fine gold. King Dadhi-vahana, before sending presents of these mangoes to other kings, used to prick with a thorn that place in the stone where the sprout would come from, for fear of their growing the like by planting it. When they ate the fruit, they used to plant the stone; but they could not get it to take root. They enquired the reason, and learnt how the matter was.

One king asked his gardener whether he could spoil the flavour of this fruit, and turn it bitter on the tree. Yes, the man said he could; so his king gave him a thousand pieces and sent him on his errand.

So soon as he had arrived in Benares, the man sent a message to the king that a gardener was come. The king admitted him to the presence. After the man had saluted him, the king asked, "You are a gardener?" "Yes, Sire," said the man, and began to sound his own praises. "Very well," said the king, "you may go and assist my park-keeper." So after that these used both to look after the royal grounds.

The new comer managed to make the park look more beautiful by forcing flowers and fruit out of their season. This pleased the king, so that he dismissed the former keeper and gave the park into sole charge of the new one. No sooner had this man got the park into his own hands than he planted nimbs and creepers about the choice mango tree. By and by the nimbs sprouted up. Above and below, root with root, and branch with branch, these were all entangled with the mango tree. Thus this tree, with its sweet fruit, grew bitter as

the bitter-leaved nimb by the company of this noxious and sour plant. As soon as the gardener knew that the fruit had gone bitter, he took to his heels.

King Dadhi-vahana went a-walking in his pleasaunce, and took a bite of the mango fruit. The juice in his mouth tasted like a nasty nimb; swallow it he could not, so he coughed and spat it out. Now at that time the Bodhisatta was his temporal and spiritual counsellor. The king turned to him. “Wise Sir, this tree is as carefully cared for as ever, and yet its fruit has gone bitter. What’s the meaning of it?” and asking this question, he repeated the first stanza—

“Sweet was once the mango’s savour, sweet its scent, its colour gold:

What has caused this bitter flavour? for we tend it as of old.”

The Bodhisatta explained the reason in the second stanza—

“Round about the trunk entwining, branch with branch, and root with root,

See the bitter creeper climbing; that is what has spoilt your fruit;

And so you see bad company will make the better follow suit.”

On hearing this the Bodhisatta caused all the nimbs and creepers to be removed, and their roots pulled up; the noxious soil was all taken away, and sweet earth put in its place; and the tree was carefully fed with sweet water, milk-water, scented water. Then by absorbing all this sweetness its fruit grew sweet again. The king put his former gardener in charge of the park, and after his life was done passed away to fare according to his deserts.

After this discourse was ended, the Master identified the Birth—“In those days I was the wise counsellor.”

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

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