Ja 21 — Kurunga Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja21.html

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

“The antelope knows well.”—This story was told by the Master while at the Bamboo-grove about Devadatta. For once when the Brethren were gathered together in the Hall of Truth, they sat talking reproachfully of Devadatta, saying, “Sirs, with a view to destroy the Buddha Devadatta hired bowmen, hurled down a rock, and let loose the elephant Dhana-palaka; in every way he goes about to slay the Lord of Wisdom.” Entering and seating himself on the seat prepared for him, the Master asked, saying, “Sirs, what is the theme you are discussing here in conclave?” “Sir,” was the reply, “we were discussing the wickedness of Devadatta, saying that he was always going about to slay you.” Said the Master, “It is not only in these present days, Brethren, that Devadatta goes about seeking to slay me; he went about with the like intent in bygone days also,—but was unable to slay me.” And so saying, he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta came to life as an antelope, and used to live on fruits in his haunts in the forest.

At one period he was subsisting on the fruit of a sepanni-tree. And there was a village hunter, whose method was to build a platform in trees at the foot of which he found the track of deer, and to watch aloft for their coming to eat the fruits of the trees. When the deer came, he brought them down with a javelin, and sold the flesh for a living. This hunter one day marked the tracks of the Bodhisatta at the foot of the tree, and made himself a platform up in the boughs. Having breakfasted early, he went with his javelin into the forest and seated himself on his platform. The Bodhisatta, too, came abroad early to eat the fruit of that tree; but he was not in too great a hurry to approach it. “For,” thought he to himself, “sometimes these platform-building hunters build themselves platforms in the boughs. Can it be that this cell have happened here?” And he halted some way off to reconnoitre. Finding that the Bodhisatta did not approach, the hunter, still seated aloft on his platform, threw fruit down in front of the antelope. Said the latter to himself, “Here’s the fruit coming to meet me; I wonder if there is a hunter up there.” So he looked, and

looked, till he caught sight of the hunter in the tree; but, feigning not to have seen the man, he shouted, “My worthy tree, hitherto you have been in the habit of letting your fruit fall straight to the ground like a pendant creeper; but to-day you have ceased to act like a tree. And therefore, as you have ceased to behave as becomes a tree, I too must change, and look for food beneath another tree.” And so saying, he repeated this stanza:

The antelope knows well the fruit you drop.

I like it not; some other tree I’ll seek.

Then the hunter from his platform hurled his javelin at the Bodhisatta, crying, “Begone! I’ve missed you this time.” Wheeling round, the Bodhisatta halted and said, “You may have missed me, my good man; but depend upon it, you have not missed the reward of your conduct, namely, the eight Large and the sixteen Lesser hells and all the five forms of bonds and torture.” With these words the antelope bounded off on its way; and the hunter, too, climbed down and went his way.

When the Master had ended this discourse and had repeated what he had said about Devadatta’s going about to slay him in bygone days also, he showed the connexion and identified the Birth, by saying, “Devadatta was the platform-hunter of those days, and I myself the antelope.”

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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Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.