Ja 270 — Uluka 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/ja270.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 2, 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 owl is King,” etc.—This story the Master told while living at Jetavana, about a quarrel between Crows and Owls.

At the period in question, the Crows used to eat Owls during the day, and at night, the Owls flew about, nipping off the heads of the Crows as they slept, and thus killing them. There was a certain brother who lived in a cell on the outskirts of Jetavana. When the time came for sweeping, there used to be a quantity of crows’ heads to throw away, which had dropt from the tree, enough to fill seven or eight potties. He told this to the brethren. In the Hall of Truth the Brethren began to talk about it. “Friend, Brother So-and-so finds over so many crows’ heads to throw away every day in the place where he lives!” The Master came in, and asked what they were talking about as they sat together. They told him. They went on to ask how long it was since the Crows and Owls fell a-quarrelling. The Master replied, “Since the time of the first age of the world;” and then he told them an old-world tale.

Once upon a time, the people who lived in the first cycle of the world gathered together, and took for their king a certain man, handsome, auspicious, commanding, altogether perfect. The quadrupeds also gathered, and chose for king the Lion; and the fish in the ocean chose them a fish called Ananda. Then all the birds in the Himalayas assembled upon a flat rock, crying,

“Among men there is a king, and among the beasts, and the fish have one too; but amongst us birds king there is none. We should not live in anarchy; we too should choose a king. Fix on some one fit to be set in the king’s place!”

They searched about for such a bird, and chose the Owl; “Here is the bird we like,” said they. And a bird made proclamation three times to all that there would be a vote taken on this matter. After patiently hearing this announcement twice, on the third time up rose a

Crow, and cried out,

“Stay now! If that is what he looks like when he is being consecrated king, what will he look like when he is angry? If he only looks at us in anger, we shall be scattered like sesame seeds thrown on a hot plate. I don’t want to make this fellow king!” and enlarging upon this he uttered the first stanza—

“The owl is king, you say, o’er all bird-kind:

With your permission, may I speak my mind?”

The Birds repeated the second, granting him leave to speak—

“You have our leave, Sir, so it be good and right:

For other birds are young, and wise, and bright.”

Thus permitted, he repeated the third—

“I like not (with all deference be it said)

To have the Owl anointed as our Head.

Look at his face! if this good humour be,

What will he do when he looks angrily?”

Then he flew up into the air, cawing out “I don’t like it! I don’t like it!” The Owl rose and pursued him. Thenceforward those two nursed enmity one towards another. And the birds chose a golden Goose for their king, and dispersed.

When the Master had ended this discourse, he declared the Truths and identified the Birth—“At that time, the wild Goose chosen for king was I myself.”

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.