Ja 409 — Dalhadhamma Jātaka

English translation by H. T. Francis and R. A. Neil.

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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

“I carried for the king,” etc. The Master told this when dwelling in the Ghosita forest near Kosambi, concerning Bhaddavatika, king Udena’s she-elephant. Now the way in which this elephant was adorned and the royal lineage of Udena will be set forth in the Matanga Birth. One day this elephant going out of the city in the morning saw the Buddha surrounded by a multitude of saints, in the incomparable majesty of a Buddha, entering the city for alms, and falling at the Tathagata’s feet, with lamentation she prayed to him, saying, “Lord who knowest all, saviour of the whole world, when I was young and able to do work, Udena, the rightful king, loved me, saying, “My life and kingdom and queen are all due to her,” and gave me great honour, adorning me with all ornaments; he had my stall smeared with perfumed earth, and coloured hangings put round it, and a lamp lit with perfumed oil, and a dish of incense set there, he had a golden pot set on my dunghill, and made me stand on a coloured carpet, and gave me royal food of many choice flavours: but now when I am old and cannot do work, he has cut off all that honour; unprotected and destitute I live by eating ketaka fruit in the forest; I have no other refuge: make Udena think on my merits and restore me again my old honour, O Lord.” The Master said, “Go thou, I will speak to the king and get thy old honour restored,” and he went to the door of the king’s dwelling. The king made Buddha enter, and gave great entertainment in the palace to the assembly of brethren following Buddha. When the meal was over, the Master gave thanks to the king and asked, “O king, where is Bhaddavatika?” “Lord, I know not.” “O king, after giving honour to servants, it is not right to take it away in their old age, it is right to be grateful and thankful; Bhaddavatika is now old, she is worn with age and unprotected, and she lives by eating ketaka fruit in the wood: it is not meet for you to leave her unprotected in her old age”: so telling Bhaddavatika’s merits and saying, “Restore all her former honours,” he departed. The king did so. It was spread over the whole city that the former honour was restored because the Buddha had told her merits. This became known in the assembly of the Brethren, and the Brethren discussed it in their meeting. The Master, coming and hearing that this was their subject, said, “Brethren, this is not the first time that the Buddha has by telling her merits got her former honours restored”: and he

told the tale of old.

Once upon a time there was a king named Dalhadhamma reigning in Benares. At that time the Bodhisatta was born in a minister's family, and when he grew up he served the king. He received much honour from the king, and stood in the place of the most valued minister. The king had a certain she-elephant, endowed with might and very strong. She went a hundred leagues in one day, she did the duties of messenger for the king, and in battle she fought and crushed the enemy. The king said, "She is very serviceable to me," gave her all ornaments and caused all honour to be given her such as Udena gave to Bhaddavatika. Then when she was weak from age the king took away all her honour. From that time she was unprotected and lived by eating grass and leaves in the forest. Then one day when the vessels in the king's court were not sufficient, the king sent for a potter, and said, "The vessels are not sufficient." "O king, I have no oxen to yoke in carts to bring cow-dung (for baking clay)." The king hearing this tale said, "Where is our she-elephant?" "O king, she is wandering at her own will." The king gave her to the potter, saying, "Henceforth do thou yoke her and bring cow-dung." The potter said, "Good, O king," and did so. Then one day she, coming out of the. city, saw the Bodhisatta coming in, and falling at his feet, she said, lamenting: " Lord, the king in my youth considered me very serviceable and gave me great honour: now that I am old, he has cut it all away and takes no thought of me; I am unprotected and live by eating grass and leaves in the forest; in this misery he has now given me to a potter to yoke in a cart; except thee I have no refuge: thou knowest my services to the king; restore me now the honour I have lost": and she spoke three stanzas—

I carried for the king of old: was he not satisfied?

With weapons at my breast I faced the fight with mighty stride.

My feats in battle done of old does not the king forget,

And such good services I did for couriers as are set?

Helpless and kinless now am I: surely my death is near,

To serve a potter when I'm come as his dung-carrier.

The Bodhisatta, hearing her tale, comforted her, saying, "Grieve not, I will tell the king and restore thy honour": so entering the city, he went to the king after his morning meal and took up the talk, saying, "Great king, did not a she-elephant, named so and so, enter battle at such and such places with weapons bound on her breast, and on such a day with a writing on her neck did she not go a hundred leagues on a message? Thou gavest her great honour: where is she now?" "I gave her to a potter for carrying dung." Then the Bodhisatta said, "Is it right, great king, for thee to give her to a potter to be yoked in a cart?" And for admonition he spoke four stanzas—

By selfish hopes men regulate the honours that they pay:

As you the elephant, they throw the outworn slave away.

Good deeds and services received whenever men forget,

Ruin pursues the business still on which their hearts are set.

Good deeds and services received if men do not forget,

Success attends the business still on which their hearts are set.

To all the multitude around this blessed truth I tell:

Be grateful all, and for reward you long in heaven shall dwell.

With this beginning the Bodhisatta gave instruction to all gathered there. Hearing this the king gave the old elephant her former honour, and established in the Bodhisatta's instruction gave alms and did works of merit and became destined for heaven.

After the lesson, the Master identified the Birth—"At that time the she-elephant was Bhaddavatika, the king Ananda, the minister 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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