Ja 412 — Kotisimbali Jātaka

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

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol3/ja412.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 3, 1897

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 bore with me,” etc.—The Master told this tale while dwelling in Jetavana, concerning rebuke of sin. The incident leading to the tale will appear in the Panna Birth. On this occasion the Master, perceiving that five hundred Brethren were overcome by thoughts of desire in the House of the Golden Pavement, gathered the assembly and said, “Brethren, it is right to distrust where distrust is proper; sins surround a man as banyans and such plants grow up around a tree: in this way of old a spirit dwelling in the top of a cotton-tree saw a bird voiding the banyan seeds it had eaten among the branches of the cotton-tree, and became terrified lest her abode should thereby come to destruction:” and so he told a tale of old.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was a tree-spirit dwelling in the top of a cotton-tree. A king of the rocs assumed a shape a hundred and fifty leagues in extent, and dividing the water in the great ocean by the blast of his wings, he seized by the tail a king of snakes a thousand fathoms long, and making the snake disgorge what he had seized in his mouth, he flew along the tree tops towards the cotton-tree. The snake-king thought, “I will make him drop me and let me go,” so he stuck his hood into a banyan-tree and wound himself round it firmly. Owing to the roe-king’s strength and the great size of the snake-king the banyan was uprooted. But the snake-king would not let go the banyan. The roc-king took the snake-king, banyan-tree and all, to the cotton-tree, laid him on the trunk, opened his belly and ate the fat. Then he threw the rest of the carcase into the sea. Now in that banyan there was a certain bird, who flew up when the banyan was thrown away, and perched in one of the boughs high on the cotton-tree. The tree-spirit seeing the bird shook and trembled with fear, thinking, “This bird will let its droppings fall on my trunk; a growth of banyan or of fig will arise and go spreading all over my tree: so my home will be destroyed.” The tree shook to the roots with the trembling of the spirit. The roc-king perceived the trembling, and spoke two stanzas in enquiry as to the reason—

I bore with me the thousand fathoms length of that king-snake:

His size and my huge bulk you bore and yet you did not quake.

But now this tiny bird you bear, so small compared to me:

You shake with fear and tremble; but wherefore, cotton-tree?

Then the deity spoke four stanzas in explanation of the reason—

Flesh is thy food, O king: the bird's is fruit:

Seeds of the banyan and the fig he'll shoot

And bo-tree too, and all my trunk pollute;

They will grow trees in shelter of my stem,

And I shall be no tree, thus hid by them.

Other trees, once strong of root and rich in branches, plainly show

How the seeds that birds do carry in destruction lay them low.

Parasitic growths will bury e'en the mighty forest tree:

This is why, O king, I quiver when the fear to come I see.

Hearing the tree-spirit's words, the roc-king spoke the final stanza—

Fear is right if things are fearful: 'gainst the coming danger guard:

Wise men look on both worlds calmly if they present fears discard.

So speaking, the roc-king by his power drove the bird away from that tree.

After the lesson, the Master declared the Truths, beginning with the words: "It is right to distrust where distrust is proper," and identified the Birth—after the Truths five hundred Brethren were established in Sainthood—"At that time Sariputta was the roc-king and I myself the tree-spirit."

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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