Ja 42 — Kapota Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

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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 headstrong man.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana, about a certain greedy Brother. His greediness will be related in the Ninth Book in the Kaka Jātaka.

But on this occasion the Brethren told the Master, saying, “Sir, this Brother is greedy.”

Said the Master, “Is it true as they say, Brother, that you are greedy?” “Yes, sir,” was the reply.

“So too in bygone days, Brother, you were greedy, and by reason of your greediness lost your life; also you caused the wise and good to lose their home.” And so saying he told this story of the past.

Once on a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a pigeon. Now the Benares folk of those days, as an act of goodness, used to hang up straw-baskets in divers places for the shelter and comfort of the birds; and the cook of the Lord High Treasurer of Benares hung up one of these baskets in his kitchen. In this basket the Bodhisatta took up his abode, sallying out at daybreak in quest of food, and returning home in the evening; and so he lived his life.

But one day a crow, flying over the kitchen, snuffed up the goodly savour from the salt and fresh fish and meat there, and was filled with longing to taste it. Casting about how to have his will, he perched hard by, and at evening saw the Bodhisatta come home and go into the kitchen. “Ah!” thought he, “I can manage it through the pigeon.”

So back he came next day at dawn, and, when the Bodhisatta sallied out in quest of food, kept following him about from place to place like his shadow. So the Bodhisatta said, “Why do you keep with me, friend?”

“My lord,” answered the crow, “your demeanour has won my admiration; and henceforth it is my wish to follow you.” “But your kind of food and mine, friend, is not the same,” said the Bodhisatta; “you will be hard put to it if you attach yourself to me.” “My lord,” said the crow, “when you are seeking your food, I will feed too, by your side.” “So be it, then,” said the Bodhisatta; “only you must be earnest.” And with this admonition to the crow, the Bodhisatta ranged about pecking up grass-seeds; whilst the other went about turning over cowdung and picking out the insects underneath till he had got his fill. Then back he came to the Bodhisatta and remarked, “My lord, you give too much time to eating; excess therein should be shunned.”

And when the Bodhisatta had fed and reached home again at evening, in flew the crow with him into the kitchen .

“Why, our bird has brought another home with him;” exclaimed the cook, and hung up a second basket for the crow. And from that time onward the two birds dwelt together in the kitchen.

Now one day the Lord High Treasurer had in a store of fish which the cook hung up about the kitchen. Filled with greedy longing at the sight, the crow made up his mind to stay at home next day and treat himself to this excellent fare.

So all the night long he lay groaning away; and next day, when the Bodhisatta was starting in search of food, and cried, “Come along, friend crow,” the crow replied, “Go without me, my lord; for I have a pain in my stomach.” “Friend,” answered the Bodhisatta, “I never heard of crows having pains in their stomachs before. True, crows feel faint in each of the three night-watches; but if they eat a lamp-wick, their hunger is appeased for the moment. You must be hankering after the fish in the kitchen here. Come now, man’s food will not agree with you. Do not give way like this, but come and seek your food with me.” “Indeed, I am not able, my lord,” said the crow. “Well, your own conduct will show,” said the Bodhisatta. “Only fall not a prey to greed, but stand steadfast.” And with this exhortation, away he flew to find his daily food.

The cook took several kinds of fish, and dressed some one way, some another. Then lifting the lids off his saucepans a little to let the steam out, he put a colander on the top of one and went outside the door, where he stood wiping the sweat from his brow. Just at that moment out popped the crow’s head from the basket. A glance told him that the cook was away, and, “Now or never,” thought he, “is my time. The only question is shall I choose minced meat or a big lump?” Arguing that it takes a long time to make a full meal of minced meat, he resolved to take a large piece of fish and sit and eat it in his basket. So out he flew and alighted on the colander. “Click” went the colander.

“What can that be?” said the cook, running in on hearing the noise. Seeing the crow, he cried, “Oh, there’s that rascally crow wanting to eat my master’s dinner. I have to work for my master, not for that rascal! What’s he to me, I should like to know?” So, first shutting the door, he caught the crow and plucked every feather off his body. Then, he pounded up ginger with salt and cumin, and mixed in sour butter-milk—finally sousing the crow in the

pickle and flinging him back into his basket. And there the crow lay groaning, overcome by the agony of his pain.

At evening the Bodhisatta came back, and saw the wretched plight of the crow. “Ah! greedy crow,” he exclaimed, “you would not heed my words, and now your own greed has worked you woe.” So saying, he repeated this stanza—

The headstrong man who, when exhorted, pays

No heed to friends who kindly counsel give,

Shall surely perish, like the greedy crow,

Who laughed to scorn the pigeon’s warning words.

Then, exclaiming “I too can no longer dwell here,” the Bodhisatta flew away. But the crow died there and then, and the cook flung him, basket and all, on the dust-heap.

Said the Master, “You were greedy, Brother, in bygone times, just as you are now; and all because of your greediness the wise and good of those days had to abandon their homes.” Having ended this lesson, the Master preached the Four Truths, at the close whereof that Brother won the Fruit of the Second Path. Then the Master shewed the connexion and identified the Birth as follows—“The greedy Brother was the crow of those times, and I the pigeon.”

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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