Ja 434 — Cakkavaka 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/ja434.html

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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

"Twin pair of birds," etc.—This story the Master dwelling at Jetavana told concerning a greedy Brother. He was, it was said, greedy after the Buddhist requisites and casting off all duties of master and pastor, entered Savatthi quite early, and after drinking excellent rice-gruel served with many a kind of solid food in the house of Visakha, and after eating in the daytime various dainties, paddy, meat and boiled rice, not satisfied with this he goes about thence to the house of Culla-Anathapindika, and the king of Kosala, and various others. So one day a discussion was raised in the Hall of Truth concerning his greediness. When the Master heard what they were discussing, he sent for that Brother and asked him if it were true that he was greedy. And when he said "Yes," the Master asked, "Why, Brother, are you greedy? Formerly too through your greediness, not being satisfied with the dead bodies of elephants, you left Benares and wandering about on the bank of the Ganges, entered the Himalaya country." And hereupon he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, a greedy crow went about eating the bodies of dead elephants, and not satisfied with them he thought, "I will eat the fat of fish on the bank of the Ganges," and after staying a few days there eating dead fish he went into the Himalaya and lived on various kinds of wild fruits. Coming to a large lotus-tank abounding in fish and turtles, he saw there two golden-coloured geese who lived on the sevala plant. He thought, "These birds are very beautiful and well-favoured: their food must be delightful. I will ask them what it is, and by eating the same I too shall become golden-coloured." So he went to them, and after the usual kindly greetings to them as they sat perched on the end of a bough, he spoke the first stanza in connexion with their praises:

Twin pair of birds in yellow dressed,

So joyous roaming to and fro;

What kind of birds do men love best?

This is what I am fain to know.

The ruddy goose on hearing this spoke the second stanza:

O bird, of human kind the pest,

We above other birds are blest.

All lands with our “devotion “ ring

And men and birds our praises sing.

Know then that ruddy geese are we,

And fearless wander o’er the seat.

Hearing this the crow spoke the third stanza:

What fruits upon the sea abound,

And whence may flesh for geese be found?

Say on what heavenly food ye live,

Such beauty and such strength to give.

Then the ruddy goose spoke the fourth stanza:

No fruits are on the sea to eat,

And whence should ruddy geese have meat?

Sevala plant, stript of its skin,

Yields food without a taint of sin.

Then the crow spoke two stanzas:

I like not, goose, the words you use:

I once believed the food we choose

To nourish us, ought to agree

With what our outward form might be.

But now I doubt it, for I eat

Rice, salt, and oil, and fruit, and meat:

As heroes feast returned from fight,

So I too in good cheer delight.

But though I live on dainty fare,

My looks with yours may not compare.

Then the ruddy goose told the reason why the crow failed to attain to personal beauty, while he himself attained to it, and spoke the remaining stanzas:

Not satisfied with fruit, or garbage found

Within the precincts of the charnel ground,

The greedy crow pursues in wanton flight

The casual prey that tempts his appetite.

But all that thus shall work their wicked will,

And for their pleasure harmless creatures kill,

Upbraided by their conscience pine away,

And see their strength and comeliness decay.

So happy beings that no creatures harm

In form gain vigour and in looks a charm,

For beauty surely be it understood

Depends not wholly on the kind of food.

Thus did the ruddy goose in many ways reproach the crow. And the crow having brought this reproach upon himself said, “I want not your beauty.” And with a cry of “Caw, Caw,” he flew away.

The Master, his lesson ended, revealed the Truths and identified the Birth—At the conclusion of the Truths the greedy Brother attained to fruition of the Second Path—“In those days the crow was the greedy Brother, the she-goose was the mother of Rahula, the

he-goose 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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