Ja 445 — Nigrodha Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

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Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 4, 1901

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

“Who is the man,” etc.—This story the Master told in the Bamboo Grove, about Devadatta. One day the Brethren said to him, “Friend Devadatta, the Master is most helpful to you! From the Master you received your Orders, lesser and greater; you have learnt the Three Baskets, the voice of Buddha; you have caused the Ecstasy to arise within you; the glory and gain of the Dasabala belong to you.” At this he held up a blade of grass, with the words, “I can see no good that the ascetic Gotama has done me, not even this much!” They talked it over in the Hall of Truth. When the Master came in, he asked what they talked of as they sat together. They told him. Said he, “Brethren, this is not the first time, but long ago as now Devadatta was ungrateful and treacherous to friends.” And he told them a tale of olden days.

Once upon a time a great monarch named Magadha reigned in Rajagaha. And a merchant of that city brought home for his son’s wife the daughter of some country merchant. But she was barren. In course of time less respect was paid to her for this cause; they all talked, that she might hear, as thus: “While there is a barren wife in our son’s household, how can the family line be kept up?” As this talk kept coming to her ears, she said to herself, “Oh, well, I will pretend to be with child, and trick them.” So she asked a good old nurse of hers, “What is it that women do when they are with child?” and being instructed what to do for preserving the child, concealed the time of her courses; showed a fancy for sour and strange tastes; at the time when the arms and legs begin to swell, she caused them to beat hands and feet and back until they grew swollen; day by day she bandaged her body round with rags and cloths and made it appear greater; blackened the nipples of her breasts; and save that nurse alone, permitted no other to be present at her toilet. Her husband too showed her the attentions proper to her state. After nine months had passed in this fashion, she declared her wish to return home and bring forth her child in her father’s house. So taking leave of her husband’s parents, she mounted a carriage, and with a large number of attendants left Rajagaha behind her, and proceeded along the road.

Now travelling in front of her was a caravan; and she always came about breakfast time to the place whence that caravan had just gone. And one night, a poor woman in that caravan had borne a son under a banyan tree; and thinking that without the caravan she could not get along, but that if she lived she might receive the child, covered him up as he was, and left him lying there, at the foot of the banyan tree. And the deity of the tree took care of him; he was not any ordinary child, but the Bodhisatta himself had come into the world in that form.

At breakfast time the other travellers arrived at the spot. The woman, with her nurse, going apart to the shade of the banyan tree for her toilet, saw a babe of the colour of gold lying there. By-and bye she called out to the nurse that their object was gained; unwound the bandages from her loins; and declared that the babe was her own, and that she had just brought him forth.

The attendants at once raised a tent to seclude her, and in high delight sent a letter back to Rajagaha. Her husband's parents wrote in reply that as the babe was born, there was no longer need for her to go to her father's house; let her return. So to Rajagaha she returned at once. And they acknowledged the babe: and when the babe came to be named, named him after the place where he was born, Nigrodha-Kumara, or Master Banyan. That same day, the daughter-in-law of a merchant, on her way home to her father for the birth, brought forth a son beneath the branches of a tree; and him they named Sakha-Kumara, Master Branch. And on the same day, the wife of a tailor in the employ of this merchant bore a son amidst his bits of cloth; and him they called Pottika, or Dollie.

The great merchant sent for these two children, as having been born on Master Banyan's birthday, and brought them up with him.

They all grew up together, and by-and-bye went to Takkasila to complete their education. Both the merchants' sons had two thousand pieces to give their teacher for a fee; Master Banyan provided Pottika with an education under his own wing.

When their education was finished, they took leave of their teacher, and left him, with intent to learn the customs of the country folk; and travelling on and on, in time they came to Benares, and lay down to rest in a temple. It was then the seventh day since the king of Benares had died. Proclamation was made through the city by beat of drum, that on the morrow the festal car would be prepared. The three comrades were lying under a tree asleep, when at dawn Pottika awoke, and sitting up began to chafe Banyan's feet. Some cocks were roosting upon that tree, and the cock at the top let a dropping fall upon a cock near the bottom." What is that fell upon me?" asked this cock. "Do not be angry, Sir," answered the other, "I did not mean to do it." "Oh, so you think my body is a place for your droppings! You don't know my importance, that is plain!" To this said the other, "Oho, still angry, though I declared that I did not mean it! And what is your importance, pray?"—"Whoever kills me and eats my flesh will receive a thousand pieces of money this very morning! Is not that something to be proud of?" "Pooh, pooh," quoth the other, "proud of a little thing like that! Why, if any one kills me and eats of my fat, he will become a king this very morning; he that eats the middle flesh, becomes commander-in-chief; who

eats the flesh about the bones, he will be treasurer!"

All this Pottika overheard. "A thousand pieces—"thought he, "What is that? Best to be a king!" So gently climbing the tree, he seized the cock that was roosting atop, and killed it, and cooked it in the embers; the fat he gave to Banyan, the middle flesh to Branch, and himself ate the flesh that was about the bones. When they had eaten, he said, "Banyan, Sir, to-day you will be king; Branch, Sir, you will be commander-in-chief; and as for me, I'm the treasurer!" They asked him how he knew; he told them.

So about the time for the first meal of the day, they entered the city of Benares. At the house of a certain brahmin they received a meal of rice-porridge, with ghee and sugar; and then emerging from the city, they entered the royal park.

Banyan lay down upon a slab of stone, the other two lay beside it. It so happened that at the moment they were just sending forth the ceremonial chariot, with the five symbols of royalty in it. (The details of this will be given in the Mahajanaka Birth.) In rolled the car, and stopping, stood ready for them to enter. "Some being of great merit must be present here!" thought the chaplain to himself. He entered the park, and espied the young man; and then removing the cloth from his feet he examined the marks upon them. "Why," said he, "he is destined to be King of all India, let alone Benares!" and he ordered all the gongs and cymbals to strike up.

Banyan awaking threw the cloth from his face, and saw a crowd assembled round him! He turned round and for a moment or two he lay still; then arose, and sat with his legs crossed. The chaplain fell upon one knee, saying, "Divine being, the kingdom is thine!" "So be it," said the youth; the chaplain placed him upon the heap of precious jewels, and sprinkled him to be king.

Thus made king, he gave the post of Commander-in-chief to his friend Branch, and entered the city in great pomp; and Pottika went with them.

From that day onward the Great Being ruled righteously in Benares.

One day the memory of his parents came into his mind; and addressing Branch, he said, "Sir, it is impossible to live without father and mother; take a large company of people, and go fetch them." But Branch refused; "That is not my business," said he. Then he told Pottika to do it. Pottika agreed, and making his way to Banyan's parents, told them that their son had become a king, and begged them to come to him. But they declined, saying that they had power and wealth: enough of that, go they would not. He asked Branch's parents also to come, and they too preferred to stay; and when he invited his own, said they, "We live by tailoring; enough, enough," and refused like the rest.

As he failed to hit off their wishes, he then returned to Benares. Thinking that he would rest from the fatigue of the journey in the house of the Commander-in-chief, before seeing Banyan, he went to that house.

“Tell the Commander-in-chief,” said he to the door-keeper, “that his comrade Pottika is here.” The man did so. But Branch had conceived a grudge against him, because, quoth he, the man had given his comrade Banyan the kingdom instead of himself; so on hearing this message, he waxed angry. “Comrade indeed! who is his comrade? A mad baseborn churl! seize him!” So they beat him and kicked him, and belaboured him with foot, knee and elbow, then clutching him by the throat cast him forth.

“Branch,” thought the man, “gained the post of Commander-in-Chief through me, and now he is ungrateful, and malicious, and has beaten me, and cast me forth. But Banyan is a wise man, grateful and good, and to him I will go.” So to the king’s door he went, and sent a message to the king, that Pottika his comrade was waiting at the door. The king asked him in, and as he saw him approach, rose up from his seat, and went forth to meet him, and greeted him with affection; he caused him to be shaved and cared for, and adorned with all manner of ornaments, then gave him rich meats of every sort to eat; and this done, sat graciously with him, and enquired after his parents, who as the other informed him refused to come.

Now Branch thought to himself, “Pottika will be slandering me in the king’s ear, but if I am by, he will not be able to speak”; so he also repaired thither. And Pottika, even in his presence, spoke to the king saying, “My lord, when I was weary with my journey, I went to Branch’s house, hoping to rest there first and then to visit you. But Branch said, “I know him not!” and evil entreated me, and haled me forth by the neck! Could you believe it!” and with these words, he uttered three stanzas of verse:

“‘Who is the man? I know him not! and the man’s father, who?

Who is the man?” so Sakha said—Nigrodha, what think you?

“Then Sakha’s men at Sakha’s word dealt buffets on my face,

And seizing me about the throat forth cast me from the place.

“That such a deed in treachery an evil man should do!

An ingrate is a shame, O king—and he your comrade, too!”

On hearing these, Banyan recited four stanzas:

“I know not, nor have ever heard in speech from any one,

Any such ill as this you tell which Sakha now has done.

With me and Sakha you have lived; we both your comrades were;

Of empery among mankind you gave us each a share:

We have by thee got majesty, and not a doubt is there.

“As when a seed in fire is cast, it burns, and cannot grow;

Do a good turn to evil men, it perishes even so.

“The grateful, good, and virtuous, such men are not as they;

In good soil seeds, in good men deeds, are never thrown away.”

As Banyan was reciting these lines, Branch stood still where he was. Then the king asked him, “Well, Branch, do you recognise this man Pottika?” He was dumb. And the king laid his bidding upon the man in the words of the eighth stanza:

“Seize on this worthless traitor here, whose thoughts so evil be;

Spear him! for I would have him die—his life is nought to me!”

But Pottika, on hearing this, thought within himself—“Let not this fool die for my sake!” and uttered the ninth stanza:

“Great king, have mercy! life once gone is hard to bring again:

My lord forgive, and let him live! I wish the churl no pain.”

When the king heard this, he forgave Branch; and he wished to bestow the place of Commander-in-chief upon Pottika, but he would not. Then the king gave him the post of Treasurer, and with it went the judgeship of all the merchant guilds. Before that no such office had existed, but there was this office ever after. And by-and-bye Pottika the Royal Treasurer, being blest with sons and with daughters, uttered the last stanza for their admonition:

“With Nigrodha one should dwell;

To wait on Sakha is not well.

Better with Nigrodha death

Than with Sakha to draw breath.”

This discourse ended, the Master said, “So, Brethren, you see that Devadatta was ungrateful before,” and then identified the Birth: “At that time, Devadatta was Sakha, Ananda was Pottika, and I myself was Nigrodha.”

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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