Ja 453 — Maha-Mangala Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

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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

“Declare the truth,” etc. This story the Master told while dwelling in Jetavana, about the Maha-mangala Scripture, or the Treatise on Omens. At the city of Rajagaha for some cause or another a great company had gathered in the royal resting-house, and among these was a man who got up, and went out, with the words, “This is a day of good omen.” Some one else heard it, and said, “Yon fellow has gone out talking of “omens”; what does he mean by omen?” Said a third, “The sight of anything with a lucky look is a good omen; suppose a man rise betimes and see a perfectly white bull, or a woman with child, or a red fish, or a jar filled to the brim, or new-melted ghee of cow’s-milk, or a new unwashen garment, or rice porridge, there is no omen better than these.” Some of the bystanders commended this explanation; “Well put,” said they. But another broke in, “No, there’s no omen in those; what you hear is the omen. A man hears people saying “Full,” then he hears “Full-grown” or “Growing,” or he hears them say “Eat” or “Chew”: there’s no omen better than these.” Some bystanders said, “Well put,” and commended this explanation. Another said, “There’s no omen in all that; what you touch is the omen. If a man gets up early, and touches the earth, or touches green grass, fresh cow-dung, a clean robe, a red fish, gold or silver, food, there’s no better omen than these.” And here too some of the bystanders approved, and said it was well put. And then the partisans of omens of sight, omens of sound, omens of touch formed into three groups, and were unable to convince one another. From the deities of the earth to Brahma’s heaven none could say exactly what an omen was. Sakka thought, “Among gods and men no one but the Blessed One is able to solve this question of the omens. To the Blessed One I will go, and put the question to him.” So at night he paid a visit to the Blessed One, and greeted him, and placing his hands together in supplication, he put the question beginning, “Many gods and men there be.” Then the Master in twelve stanzas told him the eight-and-thirty great omens. And as he repeated the omen-scriptures one after another, gods to the number of ten thousand millions attained to sainthood, and of those who entered the other three Paths there is no counting. When Sakka had heard the omens he returned to his own place. When the Master had told the omens, the world of men and the world of gods approved, and said,

“Well put.”

Then in the Hall of Truth they began to discuss the virtues of the Tathagata: “Sirs, the Omen Problem was beyond the scope of others, but he comprehended the hearts of men and of gods, and solved their doubt, as if he were making the moon rise in the sky! Ah, very wise is the Tathagata, my friends!” The Master entering asked what they were talking of, as they sat there. They told him. Said he, “It is no marvel, Brethren, that I solved the problem of the omens now that I am possessed of perfect wisdom; but even when I walked on earth as Bodhisatta, I solved the doubts of men and of gods, by answering the Omen Problem.” So saying, he told a story of the past.

Once upon a time the Bodhisatta was born in a certain town in the family of a wealthy brahmin, and they named him Rakkhita-Kumara. When he grew up, and had completed his education at Takkasila, he married a wife, and on his parents’ demise, he made enquiry into his treasures; then being much exercised in mind, he distributed alms, and mastering his passions became a hermit in the regions of Himalaya, where he developed supernatural powers, and dwelt in a certain spot, nourishing himself upon the roots and fruits of the forest. In course of time his followers became a great number, five hundred disciples that lived with him.

One day, these ascetics, approaching the Bodhisatta, thus addressed him: “Teacher, when the rainy season comes, let us go down from Himalaya, and traverse the country side to get salt and seasoning; thus our bodies will become strong, and we shall have performed our pilgrimage.” “Well, you may go,” said he, “but I will abide where I am.” So they took leave of him, and went down from Himalaya, and proceeded on their rounds till they came to Benares, where they took up their dwelling in the king’s park. And much honour and hospitality was shown to them.

Now one day there was a great crowd come together in the royal rest-house at Benares, and the Omen Problem was discussed. All must be understood to happen as in the introduction to this story. Then, as before, the crowd saw no one who could allay the doubts of men and solve the problem of the omens; so they repaired to the park, and put their problem to the body of sages. The sages addressed the king, saying, “Great King, we cannot solve this question, but our Teacher, the hermit Rakkhita, a most wise man, dwells in Himalaya; he will solve the question, for he comprehends the thoughts of men and of gods.” Said the king, “Himalaya, good sirs, is far, and hard to come at; we cannot go thither. Will you not go yourselves to your Teacher, and ask him the question, and when you have learnt it, return and tell it to us?” This they promised to do; and when they had returned to their Teacher, and greeted him, and he had asked of the king’s well-being and the practices of the country folk, they told him all the story of the omens of sight and so forth, from beginning to end, and explained how they came on the king’s errand, to hear the answer to the question with their own ears; “Now, Sir,” said they, “be pleased to make clear this Omen Problem to us, and tell us the truth.” Then the eldest disciple asked his question of the Teacher by reciting the first stanza:

“Declare the truth to mortal man perplext,

And tell what scripture, or what holy text,

Studied and said at the auspicious hour,

Gives blessing in this world and in the next?"

When the eldest disciple had put the omen problem in these words, the Great Being, allaying the doubts of gods and men, answered, "This and this is an omen," and thus describing the omens with a Buddha's skill, said,

"Whoso the gods, and all that fathers be,

And reptiles, and all beings, which we see,

Honours for ever with a kindly heart,

Surely a Blessing to all creatures he."

Thus did the Great Being declare the first omen, and then proceeded to declare the second, and all the rest:

"Who shows to all the world a modest cheer,

To men and women, sons and daughters dear,

Who to reviling answers not in kind,

Surely a blessing he to every fere.

"Who clear of intellect, in crisis wise,

Nor playmates nor companions does despise,

Nor boasts of birth or wisdom, caste, or wealth,

Among his mates a blessing doth arise.

"Who takes good men and true his friends to be,

That trust him, for his tongue from venom free,

Who never harms a friend, who shares his wealth,

Surely a blessing among friends is he.

"Whose wife is friendly, and of equal years,

Devoted, good, and many children bears,

Faithful and virtuous and of gentle birth,

That is the blessing that in wives appears.

“Whose King the mighty Lord of Beings is,

That knows pure living and all potencies,

And says, “He is my friend,” and means no guile

That is the blessing that in monarchs lies.

“The true believer, giving drink and food,

Flowers and garlands, perfumes, ever good,

With heart at peace, and spreading joy around—

This in all heavens brings beatitude.

“Whom by good living virtuous sages try

With effort strenuous to purify,

Good men and wise, by tranquil life built up,

A blessing he mid saintly company.”

Thus the Great Being brought his discourse to a topstone in sainthood; and having in eight stanzas explained the Omens, in praise of those same Omens recited the last stanza:

“These blessings then, that in the world befall,

Esteemed by all the wise, magnifical,

What man is prudent let him follow these,

For in the omens is no truth at all.”

The sages, having heard about these Omens, stayed for seven or eight days, and then took leave and departed to that same place.

The king visited them and asked his question. They explained the Problem of the Omens in the same way as it had been told to them, and went back to Himalaya. Thenceforward the matter of omens was understood in the world. And having attended to the matter of

omens, as they died they went each to swell the hosts of heaven. The Bodhisatta cultivated the Excellences, and along with his band of followers was born in Brahma's heaven.

The Master having ended this discourse, said: "Not now alone, Brethren, but in olden days I explained the Problem of the Omens"; and then he identified the Birth—"At that time, the company of Buddha's followers were the band of sages; Sariputta was the senior of the pupils, who asked the question about omens; and I myself was the Teacher."

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.

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Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

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