Ja 475 — Phandana Jātaka

English translation by W. H. D. Rouse.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol4/ja475.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

"O man, who stand," etc.—This story the Master told on the bank of the river Rohini, about a family quarrel. The circumstances will be described at large under the Kunala Birth. On this occasion the Master addressed himself to the kinsmen, O king, and said:

Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was king of Benares, there stood without the city a village of carpenters. In it was a brahmin carpenter, who gained his livelihood by bringing wood from the forest, and making carts.

At that time there was a great plassey tree in the region of Himalaya. A black Lion used to go and lie at its root when a-hunting for food. One day a wind smote the tree, and a dry branch fell, and came down upon his shoulder. The blow gave him pain, and speedily in fear he uprose, and sprang away; then turning, he looked on the path he came by, and seeing nothing, thought, "There is no other lion or tiger, nor any in pursuit. Well, methinks, the deity of yon tree cannot away with my lying there. I will find out if so it be." So thinking, he grew angry out of season, and struck the tree, and cried—"Not a leaf on your tree I eat, not a branch I break; you can put up with other creatures abiding here, and you cannot put up with me! What is wrong with me? Wait a few days, and I will tear you out root and branch, I will get you chopt up chipmeal!" Thus he upbraided the deity of the tree, and then away he went in search of a man.

At that time the brahmin carpenter aforesaid with two or three other men, had come in a waggon to that neighbourhood to get wood for his trade of cartwright. He left his waggon in a certain spot, and then adze and hatchet in hand went searching for trees. He happened to come near this plassey tree. The Lion seeing him went and stood under the tree, for, thought he, "to-day I must see the back of my enemy!" But the wright looking this way and that fled from the neighbourhood of the tree. "I will speak to him before he gets quite away," thought the Lion, and repeated the first stanza:

“O man, who stand with axe in hand, within this woodland haunt,

Come tell me true, I ask of you, what tree is it you want?”

“Lo, a miracle!” quoth the man, on hearing this address, “I swear, I never yet saw beast that could talk like a man. Of course he will know what kinds of wood are good for the cartwright. I’ll ask him.” Thus thinking, he repeated the second stanza:

“Up hill, down dale, along the plain, a king you range the wood:

Come tell me true, I ask of you—what tree for wheels is good?”

The Lion listened, and said to himself, “Now I shall gain my heart’s desire!” then he repeated the third stanza:

“Not sal, acacia, not mare’s-ear, much less a shrub is good;

There is a tree they call plassey, and there’s your best wheel-wood.”

The man was pleased to hear this, and thought, “A happy day it was brought me into the woodland. Here’s a creature in the shape of a beast to tell me what wood is good for the wheelwright! Hey, but that’s fine!” So he questioned the Lion in the fourth stanza:

“What is the fashion of the leaves, what sort the trunk to see,

Come tell me true, I ask of you, that I may know that tree?”

In reply the Lion repeated two stanzas:

“This is the tree whose branch you see droop, bend, but never break;

This is the plassey, on whose roots my standing-place I take.

“For spoke or felloe, pole of car, or wheel, or any part,

This plassey tree will do for thee in making of a cart.”

After this declaration, the Lion moved aside, joy in his heart. The wright began to fell the tree. Then the tree-deity thought, “I never dropt anything on that beast; he fell in a rage out of season, and now he is for destroying my home, and I too shall be destroyed. I must find some way of destroying his majesty.” So assuming the shape of a woodman, he came up to the wright, and said to him, “Ho man! a fine tree you have there! what will you do with it when it is down?”—“Make a cart wheel.”—“What! has any one told you that tree is good for a cart?” “Yes, a black Lion.”—“Very good, well said black Lion. You can make a fine cart out of that tree, says he. But I tell you that if you flay off the skin from a black lion’s neck, and put it around the outer edge of the wheel, like a sheath of iron, just a strip four fingers wide, the wheel will be very strong, and you will gain a great deal by it.”—“But

where can I get the skin of a black lion?"—"How stupid you are! The tree stands fast in the forest, and won't run away. You go and find the lion who told you about this tree, and ask him in what part of the tree you are to cut, and bring him here. Then while he suspects nothing, and points out this place or that, wait till he sticks his jaw out, and smite him as he speaks with your sharpest axe, kill him, take the skin, eat the best of the flesh, and fell the tree at your leisure." Thus he indulged his wrath.

To explain this matter, the Master repeated the following stanzas:

"Thus did at once the plassey tree his will and wish make clear:

"I too a message have to tell: O Bharadvaja, hear!

"'From shoulder of the king of beasts cut off four inches wide,

And put it round the wheel, for so more strong it will abide."

"So in a trice the plassey tree, indulging in his ire,

On lions born and those unborn brought down destruction dire."

The cartwright hearing the tree-deity's directions, cried out, "Ah, this is a lucky day for me!" He killed the Lion, cut down the tree, and away he went.

The Master explained the matter by reciting:

"Thus plassey tree contends with beast, and beast with tree contends,

So each with mutual dispute to death the other sends.

"So among men, where'er a feud or quarrel doth arise,

They, as the beast and tree did now, cut capers peacock-wise.

"This tell I you, that well is you what time ye are at one:

Be of one mind, and quarrel not, as beast and tree have done.

"Learn peace with all men; this the wise all praise; and who is fain

Of peace and righteousness, he sure will final peace attain."

When they heard the discourse of the king, they were reconciled.

The Master, having brought this discourse to an end, identified the Birth: "At that time, I was the deity who lived in that wood, and saw the whole business."

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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