

ON THE SOURCE OF THE PARDONER'S TALE

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It has long been recognized that the ultimate source of the *Pardoner's Tale* is one of the Buddhist Birth-Stories, entitled *Vedabha Jataka*, the 48th of Fausboll's edition of the Pali text of the *Jataka* book. The following is the summary of the *Jataka* story as it appears in the *Originals and Analogues*.

Bodhisattva said: Long ago, a certain Brahman was traveling with a pupil of his and was caught by a band of robbers, who sent the pupil to bring back the ransom for the master. Now the Brahman knew the art of producing a rain of seven kinds of precious things under a certain solar condition. Knowing this, the pupil before his departure urgently warned the master against using his art since it would bring grievous danger on the master's person. However, as soon as the pupil left, the Brahman could no longer resist the temptation, and on the night the favorable condition for the exercise of the art happened he caused the rain of precious things to fall in the hope that now he would be set free. The robbers were overjoyed. Then came another band of robbers and made captive of the former band of robbers, who said, "If you desire wealth, take this Brahman, for he can cause the rain of precious things to fall," and were immediately set free. Naturally the new band of robbers who took over the Brahman demanded wealth, but the Brahman could no longer exercise his art since the solar condition occurs only once a year. The robbers were wrathful and, having killed the Brahman, took the wealth. But soon they quarreled over the distribution of the wealth and killed each other until only two remained. One of them went to the town and bought some boiled rice, into which he put poison. The other killed him on his return to the

cave, but his joy over having become the sole possessor of the wealth was not to last long, for he ate the rice which had been poisoned by the victim.

The pupil, on returning, found only the corpses, and knew what had happened. He grieved that his master did not listen to him. "Now I was that pupil before I was born," said Bodhisattva.⁽¹⁾

Comparison with the *Pardoner's Tale* reveals the following similarity: The *Pardoner's Tale* closely follows the latter half of the *Jataka* tale, in that the robbers kill each other over the wealth until the last few (in the *Pardoner's Tale* down to the last three, and in the *Jataka* to the two), of which one goes to town and brings back the poisoned food but is killed by the poison.

The *Jataka* tale, however, does not contain the motifs used in the first half of the *Pardoner's Tale*, which is briefly as follows:

Three rioters in Flanders set out in their drunkenness to fight Death. They inquired of an old man they met on the street where they could find him. The old man answered, "Turn up this crooked path, for I left him there under a tree." They went there, and found under a tree a heap of coins instead of Death which they had expected to find there, and, overjoyed, took the money. However, soon they fell into a desperate fight over the distribution of the wealth.....

There ensues the poison plot similar to the *Jataka* tale.

The *Jataka*, one of the sutras used by the Lesser Vehicle (*Hinryana*; *Shojo* in Japanese pronunciation) sect of Buddhism, spread eastward through the land and sea routes to the present Burma, Thailand, and the southern islands, which are now the main citadel of the Lesser Vehicle Buddhism. On the other hand, the Greater Vehicle (*Mahayana*; *Daijo* in Japanese pronunciation) was conveyed northward through the Gobi Desert and by the almost untraversed pass among the Himalayan

(1) *Originals and Analogues* (Chaucer Society), p. 418.

Mountains to China and eventually to Japan in 552 A.D., where it has more power and has been studied more diligently than in India and China. In the *Law (Dasadhyaya Vinaya)*, Vol. XV, the *Tripitaka*, which is the main sutra of Mahayana Buddhism introduced to China by a Buddhist saint named Hsuen-tsang in the year 645 A. D., there appears the following tale (from Chinese translation in 1064):

Once, while Bodhisattva was staying in his castle, he got up early one morning, donned his clothes and with a bowl in his hand set out begging toward the castle, accompanied by Ananda. It had rained and at a certain place the water had washed out a buried hoard. On his way to Mt. Grdhrakuta after begging and taking a meal, Buddha saw the hoard. He was walking ahead, Ananda following him six feet behind. Ananda said to himself, "If I walked nearer to Bodhisattva, I should trouble him with my breath and sound of feet." On seeing the hoard, Buddha said to Ananda, "Viper, Ananda," and passed by without stopping. Ananda also saw the hoard and retorted, "Viper, Bodhisattva," but passed by without stopping.

Now on the foot of the hill there was a poor man cutting wheat. On hearing the words passed between the two, he thought, "This is the first time I have ever seen priests afraid of a viper. Now I will go and see." On going, he saw the hoard. The delighted man said, "I love what the priest and his pupil call Viper." It took a whole day to bring home the hoarded things on a wagon and in bags. He suddenly became rich and built a large mansion, storehouses for gold, silver, workers, copper, jewels, elephants, horses, cows and oxen, sheep, vehicles, servants and slaves.

Now there was a man long at feud with this man, and in his envy and anger at seeing the man build large houses and imperil his livelihood, he went to the king's palace and said to

(2) The supposed date of its writing is 500 B. C.

the king. "There is a man I know who has long been poor but is suddenly become rich, and intends to build a large mansion, storehouses for gold, silver, workers, copper, jewels, elephants, horses, cows and oxen, sheep, vehicles, servants and slaves. He must have discovered some hoard which he does not wish to report to the king." The king sent for the man.

When he came, the king asked if he had gained a hoard. The man denied it. The king thought that the man would not confess unless forced by torture, and said, "Thou shalt be deprived of his treasure and tied to a pole." The king told his people, "This is the fate of whoever finds a hoard but does not report to the king." The man said to himself, "Viper, Ananda; Viper, Bodhisattva." People told him, "Do not cry, Viper, Ananda; Viper, Bodhisattva, because this is the fate of a man who finds a hoard but does not report to the king." The man, however, prayed to Buddha and kept crying, "Viper, Ananda; Viper, Bodhisattva!" People told the king that the man on the pole was crying, "Viper, Ananda; Viper, Bodhisattva!" The king asked the man, "Didst thou cry on the pole, 'Viper, Ananda; Viper, Bodhisattva!'?" The man answered, "If Your Majesty gives me no fear, I will tell the truth." The king answered, "I will give thee no fear." The man said, "I have the hoard. I was once poor and was harvesting my wheat at the foot of a hill, when two priests came along the path above. One of them walked ahead, the other behind. The former priest said, 'Viper, Ananda,' and went by without stopping or taking anything. The latter responded, 'Viper, Bodhisattva,' and went by without stopping or taking anything. I thought that was the first time I had ever seen priests afraid of a viper. I went and saw. I found there a hoard washed out by water. I was delighted and took it home on a wagon and in bags. I became rich and built a

large mansion and storehouses for gold, silver, workers, copper, jewels, elephants, horses, cows and oxen, sheep vehicles, servants and slaves. Now I am punished and recall the words. The viper is going to take my life. The hoard had done this. I have been deprived of all my things and am going to die." The king thought, "The priests must have been Buddha and Ananda," and said, "Dread not of thy life. Thou shalt have five hundred coins. Thou escapedst death by telling Buddha's and his pupil's words in this emergency." Among those present there were ministers and officials of high ranks and they all cried that it was indeed a wonderful event, that a man escaped death by recalling Buddha's words. Priests heard of this and told Buddha, who said, "All this and more will come from taking a hoard," but made no law about the deed.⁽³⁾

In spite of crude repetitions, the tale carries a strong resemblance to the *Pardoner's Tale* in the following points:

1. The idea of calling treasure Death. The abundance of viper parables in Buddhist sermons convinces us that in the tropical regions vipers are synonymous with death, then as now.
2. The wise man's words that riches are death prove too true.
3. The finder of the riches is at first blind to the real implication of the sage's words.

The same story appears also in the *Vinaya* (or *Law*), Vol. XL, the *Tripitaka*, where a man overhears "Viper, Ananda; Viper, Bodhisattva," conversation, finds the treasure, suddenly becomes rich, and escapes narrow death by recalling the words. The exact translation is as follows:

Once Bhagavat [one of the names given to Bodhisattva] was staying in his castle near Mt. Grdhrakuta. Early one morning he took his bowl, went down the mountain into the

(3) *Law*, II, Vol. XXIII, *Tripitaka* (*Tripitaka, Taisho New Edition*), Taisho Issaikyo Kanko Kai, Tokyo, 1924.

castle begging, followed by St. Dnanda. Now it happened that a heavy rainfall had caused a cliff to fall and had washed out an old hidden hoard glittering in gold. Bodhisattva said to Ananda, "Look, a big black snake. Dreadful poison." Ananda answered, "Verily, dreadful poison, my Lord." It happened that when he said so, there was, not far away from the two, a poor man who eked out his meagre life by gathering roots and fruits. When the man heard the word viper, he thought to himself, "I will go and see. I will see how poisonous it is lest it should bite me during the night." So he went there and found the hoard shedding golden light. When he saw this he was overjoyed and thought to himself: "I would that this viper bite me. My parents, wife, children, and relatives would not mind being bitten by this snake." So he covered the treasure with leaves and little by little brought it to his home. With this he bought clothes and food, enjoyed it with his relatives and became rich. Now at that time King Ajatasatru killed his own father and succeeded to the throne. He sent one of his men to seek throughout the country for rich men. The man saw the man who took hold of the hoard, how he lived in a large house, clothed himself richly and ate sumptuously, having uncommonly large numbers of servants, cows, oxen, and sheep. The king's man asked him, "Thou wert poor, without clothes and food in old days. Why is it that thou hast become so suddenly rich? Certainly thou hast stolen the king's hidden hoard." Saying so, the king's man took him to the king. The king asked, "Thou art now rich because thou hast taken my hoard?" The man denied. The king said, "The man deserves death since he has disobeyed me. Also put all his relatives into prison." The order was immediately done. The gaoler led the man to the place of execution. On the way the man said, "'Ananda, a big black snake. Dreadful poison.' Ananda answered, 'Verily, dreadful

poison, my Lord.' So is the law of the kingdom." He repeated this till the time of execution. Man heard this and reported to the king. The king summoned him. The man came to the king, who asked, "Why art thou saying all this?" The man told him what had happened before. Upon this the king arouse faith in Bodhisattva in his heart, and asked, "Dost thou believe Bodhisattva's words?" The man answered, "Yea, very deeply, Sire." Hearing this, the king was moved to tears and said to the man, "I will set thee and all thy relatives free." The man could not suppress his joy at being set free and thought, "I owe all my riches and prosperity to Bodhisattva. I must go now and salaam at His feet, and ask the priests to dine at the hall." After the dinner he listened to the sermon, at the spot understood the four rules of the cause and effect, and gained *surot'panna* [the first step of enlightenment]. This is one of the tales. Bodhisattva made no law about this.⁽⁴⁾

A very short story appears in Chapter 14, Part I of *Miscellaneous Parables, Tripitaka*, Vol. IV. The following is the translation of the Chinese version.

When Buddha was walking with a priest, he took refuge among the grass. The priest, whose name was Ananda, asked him why he hid himself in the grass. Buddha said, "There is a robber ahead, and the three Brahmacarin⁽⁵⁾ who come behind us are sure to be captured by the robber." Soon the three Brahmacarin came along and, seeing a heap of gold on the wayside, stopped to take it. One of them went to the town to buy food. He put poison into the food so that he could kill the other two and take the gold for himself. The other two, on his returning, killed him, but soon fell dead because they ate of the poisoned food. Thus three killed each other through

(4) *ibid.*, p. 845.

(5) It was customary in ancient time in India for men to become Brahmins for several years and study; these temporary Brahmins were called Brahmacarin.

their avarice.

The general plot, the number of the persons, and the sage's warning tally with the *Pardoner's Tale*, but it fails to give such vivid presentation of the theme, "Riches are death," as the story in *Law*, Vol. XV of the *Tripitaka* does.

From the fact that an Italian tale in the 1572 edition of the *Cento Antiche Novelle*, which is supposed to be the closest parallel of the now lost source of the *Pardoner's Tale*, already contains the idea of a sage calling riches death, it is most probable that the *Tripitaka Tale* whether in the *Law*, Vol. XV, form, or in the *Vinaya*, Vol. XL, form, had already found its way into the source used by Chaucer. But how and when is still left for us to solve.

(It has been pointed out by Prof. John J. Parry of the University of Illinois that in *Sources and Analogues* of 1941 Prof. Tupper concluded that the Oriental versions could add nothing to the data on Chaucer's source supplied by the Occidental versions. However, admitting that he is right, the comparison of the Oriental and the Occidental sources will add to our knowledge of comparative literature.)

〔上野直藏著〕

大正 大 藏 經 第二十三卷 律部二

〔大正十四年十月十五日發行
東京・大正一切經刊行會〕

十誦 律卷第十五 第三誦之二

後秦北印度三藏弗若多羅訳

九十波逸提之七

五十七竟

佛在王舍城。爾時世尊。為乞食故。早起著衣持鉢。阿難從後入王舍城。時天大雨水。突伏藏出多有宝物。爾時世尊乞食。食已還著闍崛山。佛見是藏多有宝物。佛在前行。阿難隨後一尋徐行。阿難自念。我若近佛。口氣脚声或惱佛故。佛見是藏語阿難言。毒蛇阿難。作是語已即便直過。不往物所。阿難見已白言。惡毒蛇世尊。作是語已即便直過。不往物所。是山下有一貧人刈麥。聞是已種語。作是念。我未曾見沙門糞子毒蛇惡毒蛇。今當往看。即往見藏為水突出。見已歡喜言。沙門糞子毒蛇皆是好物。即以車與衣囊。及日取著家內。以是宝物現富貴相。謂作大舍金肆銀肆客作肆銅肆。珠肆象群馬群牛羊群車乘輦輿人民奴婢。是人先有不相可者。作大舍時妨其生業。是人妬嫉便白王言。是中先有貧窮賤人。卒見富相。起大堂舍金肆銀肆客作肆銅肆珠肆象群馬群牛羊群人民奴婢。是人必當得大宝藏。不欲語王。王即喚問。汝得室藏耶。答言不得。王念。此人不被拷治。云何說矣。即勅有司。盡奪財物縛著標頭。若得室藏不語王者。皆如是治。作是教已。即奪財物縛著標頭。誰得室藏不語王者。皆如是治。是人作是言。毒蛇阿難。惡毒蛇世尊。汝必作是言。誰得室藏。不語王者皆有此分。是一心念佛作是言。毒蛇阿難。惡毒蛇世尊。時人白王是人標頭作如是語。毒蛇阿難。惡毒蛇世尊。王即喚問。縛汝標頭實作是語毒蛇阿難惡毒蛇世尊不。是人答言。大王。施我無畏者我當說矣。答言。与汝無

畏。即言。有是寶藏。我先貧賤。山下刈麥。有二比丘共來上山。一在前行。一在後行。前行比丘見是藏時。作是言。毒蛇阿難。語已直去不到物所。亦不取物。後行比丘亦見。復作是言。惡毒蛇世尊。語已直去不到物所。亦不取物。我聞是二語。即作是念我未曾見沙門積子毒蛇惡毒蛇。尋便往看。見是寶藏為水所突。見已觀喜。即以車與衣囊取著家中。現富貴相。起大堂舍金肆銀肆客作肆銅肆珠肆象肆馬肆牛羊肆車乘輦輿人民奴婢今我墮罪便憶是語。此惡毒蛇今於我身能作何等。必噉我命。為是寶故。王盡奪我所有財物。垂當奪命。王作是念。必當是佛與阿難。王言汝去於命無畏賞汝金錢五百。於是急中。說於佛語及阿難所言故。從死得脫。時是衆中大臣大官大聲唱言甚希有事。憶佛語故便得脫死。諸比丘聞是事。向佛廣說。佛言。取重物得如是罪。及過是罪皆由取寶物故。佛但訶責而未結戒。

根本說一切有部毘奈耶卷 第四十

三藏法師義淨奉 制 訳

提寶學処第五十九

爾時薄伽梵。在王舍城鷲峰山。於日初分執持衣鉢。下鷲峰山入城乞食。將尊者阿難陀以為侍者。于時遇天大雨水蕩崖崩。見劫初人所安伏藏光色晃耀。世尊告阿難陀曰。汝忝觀此。是大黑蛇是大害毒。阿難陀曰。是可畏毒。作是語時。去斯不遠有一貧人。常採根果以自活命。聞稱毒声便生是念。我試往觀。所云害毒其狀如何。勿令於夜蜚害於我。既至其所見是伏藏光彩外發。于時貧人見已欣喜竊生是念。願此毒蛇恒蜚於我。父母妻子所有眷屬。亦不辭痛。遂將葉蓋。細細持歸漸興宅舍。以供衣食。共諸親族隨意受用。便大富盛。時未生怨殺父自立。便令使者遍觀國邑誰有多財。時彼使人見得伏藏者。舍宅昌熾衣食豐盈。奴婢牛羊有異常日。便問之曰。汝於昔時貧無衣食。何故今日忽然富盛。豈非竊得王家伏藏耶。即便執捉送至王所。王便問曰。汝今卒富得我伏藏耶。彼便拒諱。王曰。此違我命准法當死。所有眷屬並收繫

獄。此忖斷命。時彼獄官即將其人欲往刑戮。於其路中作如是語。阿難陀此是大黑蛇是大害毒。阿難陀曰。是可畏毒。然王國法。將刑之人所有語言必須反奏。見是語已即白主知。王曰喚將來。既至王所。王自問曰。如汝所言有何義理。彼人具陳昔事。王於爾時於世尊所創發信心。問彼人曰。咄男子汝信佛語。答言大王我實深信。時王聞已淚落霑衣。報彼人曰。此物與汝眷屬皆放。時彼男子既得脫已喜不自勝。作如是念。我之所有富盛家業皆由世尊之所致也。我今宜忖禮世尊足。請佛僧衆就舍而食。広説乃至食已聞法。即於座上見四諦法獲預流果。広如余説。此是緣起尙未制戒。

旧雜譬喻經卷上 第二十四節

大正新修大藏經第四卷五一五頁

佛與比丘俱行。避入草中。阿難問佛。何因捨道行草中。佛言。前有賊。後三梵志當為賊所得。三人後來。見道辺有聚金。便止共取。令一人還聚中市飯。一人取毒著飯中殺二人。我當獨得金。二人復生意見來便共殺之。已便食毒飯俱死。三各生惡意。展轉相殺如色也。