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Indian History Sourcebook: Tales From Ancient India

Right and Might

WHILE a deer was eating wild fruit, he heard an owl call "Haak, haak" (a spear), and a cricket cry, "Wat" (surrounded), and, frightened, he fled. In his flight he ran through the trees up into the mountains and into streams. In one of the streams the deer stepped upon a small fish and crushed it almost to death. Then the fish complained to the court, and the deer, owl, cricket, and fish had a lawsuit. In the trial came out this evidence:

As the deer fled, he ran into some dry grass, and the seed fell into the eye of a wild chicken, and the pain of the seed in the eye of the chicken caused it to fly up against a nest of red ants. Alarmed, the red ants flew out to do battle, and in their haste, bit a mongoose. The mongoose ran into a vine of wild fruit and shook several pieces of it on the head of a hermit who sat thinking under a tree. "Why did you, O fruit, fall on my head?" cried the hermit. The fruit answered: "We did not wish to fall; a mongoose ran against our vine and threw us down." And the hermit asked, "O mongoose, why did you throw the fruit?" The mongoose answered: "I did not wish to throw down the fruit, but the red ants bit me, and I ran against the vine." The hermit asked, "O ants, why did you bite the mongoose?" The red ants replied: "The hen flew against our nest and angered us." The hermit asked: "O hen, why did you fly against the red ants' nest?" And the hen replied: "The seed fell into my eyes and hurt me." And the hermit asked, "O seed, why did you fall into the hen's eyes?" And the seed replied: "The deer shook me down." The hermit said unto the deer, "O deer, why did you shake down the seed?" The deer answered: "I did not wish to do it, but the owl called, frightening me, and I ran." "O owl," asked the hermit, "why did you frighten the deer?" The owl replied: "I called, but as I am accustomed to call---the cricket, too, called."

Having heard the evidence, the judge said, "The cricket must replace the crushed parts of the fish and make it well," as he, the cricket, had called and frightened the deer. The cricket was smaller and weaker than the owl or the deer, therefore had to bear the penalty.

The Man in the Moon

THERE was a blacksmith once who complained: "I am not well, and my work is too warm. I want to be a stone on the mountain. There it must be cool, for the wind blows and the trees give a shade." A wise man who had power over all things replied: "Go you, be a stone." And he was a stone, high up on the mountain-side. It happened that a stone-cutter came that way for a stone, and when he saw the one that had been the blacksmith, he knew that it was what he sought, and he began to cut it. The stone cried out: "This hurts! I no longer want to be a stone. A stone-cutter I want to be. That would be pleasant." The wise man, humoring him, said, "Be a cutter." Thus

he became a stone-cutter, and as he went seeking suitable stone, he grew tired, and his feet were sore. He whimpered, " I no longer want to cut stone. I would be the sun; that would be pleasant." The wise man commanded, " Be the sun." And he was the sun. But the sun was warmer than the blacksmith, than a stone, than a stone-cutter, and he complained, "I do not like this. I would be the moon. It looks cool." The wise man spake yet again, "Be the moon." And he was the moon. "This is warmer than being the sun," murmured he, "for the light from the sun shines on me ever. I do not want to be the moon. I would be a smith again. That, verily, is the best life." But the wise man replied, " I am weary of your changing. You wanted to be the moon; the moon you are, and it you will remain."

And in yon high heaven lives he to this day.

The Legend of the Rice

IN the days when the earth was young and all things were better than they now are, when men and women were stronger and of greater beauty, and the fruit of the trees was larger and sweeter than that which we now eat, rice, the food of the people, was of larger grain. One grain was all a man could eat; and in those early days, such, too, was the merit of the people, they never had to toil gathering the rice, for, when ripe, it fell from the stalks and rolled into the villages, even unto the granaries. And upon a year when the rice was larger and more plentiful than ever before, a widow said to her daughter "Our granaries are too small. We will pull them down and build larger." When the old granaries were pulled down and the new one not yet ready for use, the rice was ripe in the fields. Great haste was made, but the rice came rolling in where the work was going on, and the widow, angered, struck a grain and cried, "Could you not wait in the fields until we were ready? You should not bother us now when you are not wanted." The rice broke into thousands of pieces and said "From this time forth, we will wait in the fields until we are wanted," and from that time the rice has been of small grain, and the people of the earth must gather it into the granary from the fields.

The Lord Krishna and the Lapwing's Nest

IT was the battle of Kurukshetra. The white conch shells were about to sound, the elephants to march forward, and the attack of the archers to commence. The moment was brief and terrible. Banners were flying, and the charioteers preparing for the advance. Suddenly a little lapwing, who had built her nest in the turf of a hillock in the midst of the battlefield, drew the attention of the Lord Krishna by her cries of anxiety and distress for her young. "Poor little mother!" he said tenderly, "let this be thy protection!" And, lifting a great elephant-bell that had fallen near, he placed it over the lapwing's nest. And so, through the eighteen days of raging battle that followed, a lapwing and her nestlings were kept in safety in their nest, by the mercy of the lord, even in the midst of the raging field of Kurukshetra.

The Peacock and the Tortoise

ONCE upon a time a peacock and a tortoise became great friends. The peacock lived on a tree on the banks of the stream in which the tortoise had his home; and daily the peacock after he had a drink of water danced near the stream and displayed his gay plumage for the amusement of his friend. One unfortunate day, a bird-catcher who was on the prowl caught the peacock and was about taking him

away to the market. The unhappy bird begged of his captor to allow him to bid his friend the tortoise good-bye, as it would be the last time he would see him. The bird-catcher allowed him his prayer and took him to the tortoise, who was greatly moved to see his friend a captive. The tortoise asked the bird-catcher to let the peacock go; but he laughed at the request, saying that was his means of livelihood. The tortoise then said, "If I make you a handsome present, will you let my friend go?" "Certainly," answered the bird-catcher, that is all I want." Whereupon the tortoise dived into the water and in a few seconds came up with a handsome pearl, which, to the great astonishment of the bird-catcher, he handed to him. This was beyond his expectabons, and he let the peacock go immediately. A short time after, the avaricious man came back and told the tortoise that he thought he had not paid enough for the release of his friend, and threatened that, unless a match to that pearl was obtained for him, he would again catch the peacock. The tortoise, who had already advised his friend to betake himself to a distant jungle on being set free, was greatly enraged at the greed of this man. "Well," said the tortoise, "if you insist on having another pearl like it, give it to me and I will fish you out an exact match for it." The cupidity of the bird-catcher prevented his reasoning that "one in the hand was equal to two in the bed of the stream," and he speedily gave the pearl to the wily tortoise, who swam out with it saying, "I am no fool to take one and give two!" and forthwith disappeared, leaving the bird-catcher to be sorry ever after for his covetousness.

Let's See On Which Side The Camel Sits

ONCE a greengrocer and a potter jointly hired a camel and each filled one side of the pannier with his goods. The camel as he went along the road took a mouthful every now and then, as he had a chance, from the green-grocer's bag of vegetables. This provoked a laugh from the potter, who thought he had the best of the bargain. But the time came for the camel to sit, and he naturally sat on the heavier side, bearing down on the pots, and also to have his mouth free to operate on the bag of greens. This caused the pots to break in the bag, and then the greengrocer had all the laugh to himself.

The Washerman and The Donkey

A STORY is told of an over-credulous washerman who was childless. This preyed upon his mind very much and was a permanent cause of unhappiness. One day, in the course of his work, he went to the house of the town *kazi* (or magistrate). He heard the kazi reproaching one of his pupils in this wise: "Not long ago you were a jackass; I made a man of you," etc. The washer-man did not wait to hear the rest. He hastened home with all speed and told his wife that he had made a discovery which they were to lose no time in utilizing. "The kazi, my dear," said the washerman, "can make a man of a donkey. Why should we fret any longer for a child? Let us take our donkey to him and beg of him to transform him." The washerman and his wife, with their donkey, were shortly after this conversation on their way to the kazi.

Their mission being explained with many supplications, the kazi, quick-sighted, and with an eye to business, accepted the charge, and promised to effect the metamorphosis in a year. The washerman on his part promised to give his services free for that period. A year passed in waiting and in happy hopes. On the appointed day the washerman and his companion presented themselves before the kazi. The

kazi took them aside and pointed out a strong young man among his pupils. "There," he whispered to the washerman, "is your donkey. You see the change: now persuade him and take him home." The washerman and his wife flew to their newly created son, and with many endearing terms prepared to embrace him and made other affectionate advances. Amazed at this unaccountable conduct of these low people, the lad resisted at first, but as they persisted, he grew furious. After receiving many a cuff from the lad, a happy idea struck the washerman's wife: turning to her husband she said, "Go you and fetch his peg, rope, and grain-bag; perhaps they may remind him of what he was once." The washerman in hot haste went home and fetched them. But it seemed to make matters worse. The washerman held up each of these articles to the young man's view, and said, in the most persuasive tone he could command, "Come home, my son. Do you forget the day you were my donkey? This was the peg to which I would tether you, this your tether rope, and this your food-bag; come to your home!" By this time a jeering crowd had gathered round the young man, and this so infuriated him that he turned to and gave the washerman the soundest thrashing he had ever received in his life. The poor dupe of a washerman---the story says---went home thoroughly convinced that what fate had ordained it was useless to fight against, looking upon his punishment as a just return for his presumption.

The Seven Weavers and The Field of Flax

SEVEN weavers once started on a moonlight journey. They had not gone very far from their home when they lost the road. After trying to find their way, they came to a field of flax, which they took to be a river, as the field was in flower, and they fancied the blue color of the flower to be that of water. They stripped themselves and began swimming. After hard labor, they got across. To make certain that no one was drowned, they took the precaution of counting themselves before resuming their journey; but they discovered that one of them was missing, as each forgot to count himself. Grieved at the loss of one of their company, they had not the heart to pursue their journey, but returned home.

Some Hindu Proverbs

SELF PRAISE is no praise.

The young crow is wiser than its mother.

What is play to one is death to another.

In a treeless country, the castor-oil plant is a big tree

A scalded cat dreads cold water.

The washerman never tears his father's clothes.

A fool went to fish, but lost his fishing-basket.

A thief is a thief, whether he steals a diamond or a cucumber.

God takes care of a blind cow.

One who cannot dance blames the floor.

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