

## INTRODUCTION

**WE** find in Hesiod the story of Jason, the son of Aeson, who by the will of the immortal gods achieved the many lamentable labours imposed on him by the haughty king Pelias, and who after his grievous toils carried off the bright-eyed maiden and made her his wife. This is a form of the tale known as the Hero's Tasks, which exists among the most widely-scattered peoples. The comparative mythologists have explained it as a myth of the spring rains and the moon, but it does not fit into any of the theories of folktales prepared for its reception. Benfey held that although the impulse to invent folktales is a feature of general human nature, yet the existing folktales of Europe and Asia as a matter of fact originated in India. But this theory too is contradicted by the Jason story. Andrew Lang has compared various forms of it found among peoples not related either in language or culture—the Algonquin Indians, the Samoans, and Zulus, besides European races. It also exists in an Indian shape in the present selection of birth-stories from the Jātaka (No. 220). This instance suggests, and many more could be given, that it is too early to speak of a "science of folktales." The investigators are not yet even agreed upon a scientific method.

The great authority of Benfey has popularised the view that Indian folktales originated with the Buddhists.

His work was done before the Jātaka, the great collection of buddhist birth-stories, was known, and it is now possible to see from the stories themselves that, so far from Buddhism being a great source of folktales, the bulk of those which occur in the Jātaka are prebuddhist, and merely adaptations of Indian tales.

Benfey's main argument for the buddhistic origin of Indian folktales was the fact that traces of Buddhism appeared to be found in the *Panchatantra*, the Indian collection of tales which has become widely known in the West as the fables of Bidpai. From this he inferred that the Panchatantra was a buddhist work revised by Brahmins. But we now know that the work was of Brahmin origin, and had been revised in the versions which Benfey used by Buddhist or Jain editors. This has been proved by Dr Hertel, who has edited and translated a much earlier form of the Panchatantra, known as the *Tantrākhyāyika*, which is purely brahmanistic and without any buddhist features. The question of the history of Indian folktales has not been simplified by this discovery, but it has made it impossible to look for their origin in Buddhism.

The Jātaka, as we possess it, occurs in the second of the three great divisions of the Pāli Buddhist Scriptures, and in the Miscellaneous Collection of Discourses (*Khuddhaka Nikāya*) of this division. It consists of 547 jātakas, each containing an account of the life of Gotama Buddha during some incarnation in one of his previous existences as a Bodhisatta, or being destined to enlightenment, before he became Buddha, the Enlightened One. This number does not correspond to exactly 547 stories, because some of the tales occur more than once in a different setting, or in a variant version, and occasionally several stories are

## INTRODUCTION

3

included in one birth. Each separate story is embedded in a framework, which forms the Story of the Present. This is generally an account of some incident in the life of the historic Buddha, such as an act of disobedience or folly among the brethren of the Order, the discussion of a question of ethics, or an instance of eminent virtue. Buddha then tells a Story of the Past, an event in one of his previous existences which explains the present incident as a repetition of the former one, or as a parallel case, and shews the moral consequences.

To adapt such an ancient tale was in general a simple matter, as it was not necessary to make the actors Buddhists. The tale might be told of a past time when there was no Buddha in existence, and in which the ideas are those of ordinary Hinduism. The one feature necessary for the story is that the Bodhisatta in some character should appear. When the tale itself contained no instance of a wise person who could play the part of the Bodhisatta, modification was necessary; though this is often done by making the Bodhisatta a divinity or a sage who witnesses the events and recites the *gāthās*, the verses with which the tale concludes. Some of the stories of the past are evidently manufactured by adapting the circumstances in the story of the present, and building up a story of the past out of it. Verses occur in all the births. In the first division of the work there is one verse in each tale, in the second two, and so on in increasing number. It is these verses alone which are canonical, the prose being a commentary explaining how the verses came to be spoken. But even here there is evidence of adaptation. Some of the stories of the past contain no verses, and in order to make the whole correspond to one type verses are inserted in the frame story, and spoken by the Buddha

1—2

after or during the recitation of the story of the past. An instance will be found in Jāt. 206, p. 173.

Buddhism took over the Hindu doctrine of re-birth and karma, but moralised it. Re-birth in heaven is no longer due to performing animal sacrifices, or the infliction of self-torture, but to practising the virtues emphasised by Buddha, almsgiving, truth-speaking, forgiveness of enemies. But this teaching, which is the prominent one in the Jātaka, is not the essence of buddhism. Doing good actions can never lead to salvation. "Whoever shall do nothing but good works will receive nothing but excellent future rewards." The aim of the disciple is not to accumulate merit, but to win Insight. Yet although much of the Jātaka is merely moral instruction to the unconverted, it also expounds teaching which leads to enlightenment, such as the doctrine of impermanence, belief in the Buddha, the rejection of superstitious rites, freedom from lust, hatred, and delusion, and other bonds which the disciple must break as he advances on the Noble Path.

With regard to the question of the relation of the Jātaka to non-buddhist Indian works, important results are reached by Franke in his article "Jātaka Mahābhārata Parallelen<sup>1</sup>." He has shewn by the detailed examination of a number of parallel tales, as well as of verses common to the Jātaka and Mahābhārata that neither work is directly dependent on the other, but that they are connected only through common sources.

A more difficult question is the relation of the beast fables to the fables of Aesop. Benfey became so firmly assured of the Greek origin of such fables in the Panchatantra that he refused to place the origin of that

<sup>1</sup> *WZKM.* (Vienna Or. Journ.) xx. 317 ff. This has been fully utilised in the notes.

## INTRODUCTION

5

work earlier than 200 B.C., on the ground that this was the earliest date at which a knowledge of Aesop's fables could have reached India. But in the Jātaka we now possess evidence for putting the existence of these fables in India much earlier. On several buddhist stupas<sup>1</sup> in India are carved representations of scenes in some of the Jātaka tales and fables. The earliest and most important of these monuments is the Stupa of Bharhut, a village 120 miles south-west of Allahabad, the remains of which were discovered by Sir A. Cunningham in 1873. Carved in relief on the railings are a number of scenes of jātaka tales and fables with their titles. Twenty-eight have been identified, several so-called Aesopic fables being among them. The date of the stupa is put on epigraphical grounds between 250—200 B.C., and we may assert the existence of jātaka tales as early as the fourth century B.C., while the tales and fables which Buddhism adopted must be much older. The first feeling of the folklorists on the publication of the Jātaka was one of disappointment. Benfey's investigations had all been on the assumption of a great buddhist source for Indian tales, and the Jātaka contained hardly anything which bore out current theories. It was suggested that the Pāli scholars had played their best trumps, or were trying to win tricks with cards which they kept up their sleeve. But the Jātaka had really left the folklorist without a card for the game. The stories instead of being "a scanty contribution to the Aesopic question" made it obsolete. They proved the existence of a great body of Indian fable independent of any Greek source. As Mr Jacobs has said, "it is idle to talk of a body of literature [Aesop] amounting to 300 numbers being derived

<sup>1</sup> For a general description of these monuments, see Grünwedel, *Buddhist Art in India*, London, 1901.

from another [the Jātaka] running also to 300, when they have only a dozen items in common.”<sup>1</sup>

The much smaller question that remains is how, after setting aside the bulk of jātaka beast fables as of Indian origin, are we to explain the parallelism in about a dozen which more or less resemble Aesop? More than this number have been compared, but many of the parallelisms, which were taken for granted as long as a common origin was assumed, have no value now that the question is open. Mr Jacobs quotes Jāt. 30, 32, 34 (with 45), 136, 143, 146, 189, 215, 294, 308, 374, 383, 426, and among them are parallels to such well-known fables as *The Ass in the Lion's Skin*, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, and *The Fox and the Crow*. It is not necessary for the present purpose to prove that even these are related in origin. The independent origin of similar tales is still a tenable theory; but it is possible to shew, on the assumption that they are connected, that a path of transmission from India to Greece was open long before communications were established by Alexander. This was from India to Persia, and from Persia to Asia Minor. It can also be shewn that tales from India actually reached Persia and the Euphrates district independently of any Greek mediation. Relations with India in the sixth century B.C. are shewn by the inscriptions of Darius the Great (521—485 B.C.), especially in one at Persepolis, which mentions Indush (the Indus district) and Gandāra among the peoples who brought him tribute. In the *Story of Ahikar*<sup>2</sup> we have a Persian or Babylonian story which Benfey identified with a well-known Indian type. It is the tale of a king's minister, who falls into disfavour, and is restored through his skill in answering certain

<sup>1</sup> See Jacobs' *History of the Aesopic Fable*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> See note on *The Nineteen Problems*.

## INTRODUCTION

7

problems that had been sent to the king. This tale occurs in several Indian forms, and in Pāli in a much inflated version as the Mahāummagga Jātaka (546). The nineteen problems that occur in it are given below. The identity of several of the problems with the Indian, as well as the structure of the tale, is strong confirmation of the identity of the stories. One of the problems is the biblical Judgment of Solomon, for which Salzberger<sup>1</sup> had already suggested a Persian origin. The date of the tale in Persia must be at least of the fifth century B.C., as fragments of an Aramaic version of it have been discovered in a Persian military colony of Jews at Elephantine, which was established there during the supremacy of the Persians over Egypt. The penetration of the Ahikar story may be anterior to the Persian conquest of Babylon. That there were trade relations very early with India may be inferred from the Semitic origin of the Indian alphabet. Jāt. 339 speaks of a voyage from India to Bāveru, which is probably Babylon (Bābilu).

Mr Jacobs gives several parallels to Indian fables from *Midrash Rabba*<sup>2</sup>, a rabbinical commentary on the Pentateuch and Five Rolls. This work is a compilation much later than the date of the entry of Greeks into India, but it contains fables which possess Indian features not found in the corresponding Greek fables, and it shews communication with India outside Greek influence. According to Winter and Wünsche this Midrash is in part Babylonian, the older parts being Palestinian. The fables occurring in it are used as illustrations, and have the appearance of having been orally acquired. On Gen. xxvi. 26 is told the fable of the Egyptian partridge, which extracts a bone

<sup>1</sup> *Die Salomo-Sage*, p. 4, Berlin, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> German translation by A. Wünsche, *Bibliotheca Rabbinica*, Leipzig, 1880—85.

from the throat of a lion, as in Jāt. 308, not a wolf, as in Aesop (Halm 276, 276<sup>b</sup>). On Esther iii. 6, a bird, which builds its nest on the sea-shore that was threatened by the waves, tries to bale out the water with its beak, and is rebuked by another bird. Cf. Jāt. 146, which is without a parallel in Aesop. On Esth. iii. 1 is told the story of a man who had a she-ass, its foal, and a sow. To the latter he gives unstinted food, but to the others in proportion. The foal inquires of its mother why the idle sow should be so fed. The ass replies, the hour will soon come when you will see the sow's fate, and understand that it was well fed not out of favour, but for a disgraceful end. When the feast comes, the fatted sow is killed, and the moral explained to the foal. So in Jāt. 30, where an ox and its younger brother take the place of the ass and foal. But in Aesop (Halm 113) a heifer pities a working ox. At the feast it is taken to be slaughtered, and the ox smiles and points the moral.

By Aesop we mean the Greek fables of various dates which have become collected under that name. Although the traditions as to the historical existence of Aesop are of no value, it is significant that Phrygia occurs most frequently as the home of Aesop. The name is probably Phrygian. Aesepos is the name of a river of Phrygia and Mysia, and also of a Trojan at the siege of Troy. The "priority" or rather independence of Greek fable may be considered certain, but if in the case of a few it is necessary to infer a connexion with the East, then we have a natural explanation in the relations of the Greeks of Asia Minor with their eastern neighbours and with Persia. Greek relations with Persia need no detailed proof. The Persian tale of Herodotus referred to on Jāt. 67 (p. 70) shews how such stories could easily pass to Greece.



## INTRODUCTION

9

The works shewing the closest relationship with the Jātaka are naturally buddhist compositions, such as the Pāli *Cariyā-Piṭaka*, the Sanskrit *Jātakamālā*, Schiefner's collection of Tibetan tales, and Chinese translations from buddhist Sanskrit sources. The most extensive connexion with non-buddhistic collections is, apart from the Mahābhārata, the Panchatantra, three of the frame stories of which occur in the Jātaka, as well as a variant of a fourth (141, 206, 208, 349), and a number of single tales. A detailed comparison shews much the same result as in Franke's investigation of the Mahābhārata tales, that is, no direct borrowing on either side, but common inheritance from an earlier source. It was firmly held by Benfey that the *Vetālapañcaviṃśatikā*, "twenty-five tales of a vampire," was of buddhist origin. It is true that a version of it has found its way to the buddhist Mongols, where it is known as *Ssidi Kūr*, but it is difficult to imagine such a thesaurus of intrigue originating in a buddhist community. The only traces of it in the Jātaka are 145, of which the *Vet.* No. 21 shews a greatly elaborated version, Jāt. 527 (*Vet.* 16), and possibly a much moralised version of No. 2 in Jāt. 200.

We are dealing with a much simpler problem than the oral transmission of folktales, when we find Jātaka stories in mediaeval and modern European literature, such as that of the robbers and the treasure in Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* (Jāt. 48), or of the ploughshares eaten by mice (Jāt. 218), and the tortoise and geese (Jāt. 215) among La Fontaine's fables. These tales can be proved to have spread over Europe through literary channels. The Panchatantra was translated into Pahlavi from an imperfect Indian MS. for the Sassanid king Khosrau Anōshervān, who reigned from 531 to 579 A.D. This translation has

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-41851-6 - Jātaka Tales: Selected and Edited with Introduction and Notes

H. T. Francis and E. J. Thomas

Excerpt

[More information](#)

disappeared, but the closest representatives of it exist in Syriac and Arabic versions, known as *Kalilah and Dimnah*, and in English as the *Fables of Bidpai*. From these, and especially from the Arabic, Latin translations were made in the middle ages. Their history properly belongs to the genealogy of the Panchatantra. A list of them is given in Lancereau's French translation of the Panchatantra (Paris, 1871).

The present selection has been made with the purpose of bringing together the Jātaka stories of most interest, both intrinsically, and also from the point of view of the folklorist. The translation adopted, with slight revision to remove inconsistencies, is taken from the complete edition translated under the editorship of Prof. E. B. Cowell, Cambridge, 1895—1907.

The thanks of the editors are due to Sir J. H. Marshall, C.I.E., Director-General of Archaeology in India, who has had photographs expressly taken for the illustrations of the Jātakas on the carvings of the Bharhut Stupa, as well as to Professor E. J. Rapson, who has given much help and advice in their preparation and selection.

E. J. T.

*February* 1916.