

PLATE XIII

SCENES FROM THE BUDDHA LEGEND

THE banner reproduced on the right (Ch. xx. 008) on a scale almost full size belongs to a well-defined series of banners, all of the same style and workmanship, illustrating scenes from the story of Gautama Buddha.²⁷ The scenes are all simple in design and divided from each other by low hill ranges. Their number in our banner is only three, as shown also by the three cartouches, all left blank.

The top scene shows King Suddhodana seated on the verandah of his palace and giving instructions to the mounted messenger to be dispatched in search of Prince Gautama after his flight from the palace. The figure, short and squat, of the messenger is characteristic of the whole series; that of the horse, compact and heavy in build, suggests a type like that of the present Mongol pony. In the next scene we see the messenger engaged on his quest, carrying a red pennon and galloping to the left. The rapid movement of the horse, here bay with red spots and white mane and tail, is effectively rendered.

The scene below represents the messenger returning and reporting to the king the futility of his search. Suddhodana is seen as before seated on the palace verandah while two musicians outside beguile him with flute and pipe. Further down in the foreground are shown an enclosure, containing a lotus tank and a bamboo tree, and outside its entrance a small hexagonal structure with an oblong yellow object within. Higher up kneels a white-coated man playing on clappers. The significance of the objects in the foreground is not clear. The drawing, though rough, shows vigour, and the general effect is bold and in the more active scenes full of character.

On the left of this banner is reproduced, on half-scale, what remains of the left-hand portion of an interesting but unfortunately much-damaged large painting on silk (Ch. 0059). The colour of the original is remarkably strong and the subject unusual. It represented, when complete, the figure of Śākyamuni standing erect in the grotto of the Vulture Peak (*Gṛdhrakūṭa*), famous in the story of the Buddha, and by his side Jātaka scenes of a type not met with elsewhere among our paintings and so far unidentified. Though only the right shoulder and arm of the Buddha figure survive, there can be no doubt about its iconographic character. The rocks, dark blue and brown, which appear piled behind and above, with the vulture perched on the top, would render this quite certain.

The identification is fully confirmed by the pose of the Buddha. The arm hanging stiffly downwards at full length and slightly away from the body, with fingers also stretched straight down, is seen again in the central Buddha of the great embroidery picture of Plate xxxiv and in the figure undoubtedly representing Śākyamuni on *Gṛdhrakūṭa*, which the painting shown in Plate xiv reproduces among other Indian statues of Buddha. The representation in the embroidery picture is recalled also by the deep yellow colour of the flesh in our painting as well as by the shape and certain details in the canopy. The elongated vesica, cobalt blue in its border, and the light green and vermilion nimbus are both edged with flames and cloud scrolls in vermilion and dark blue. More true to nature than the vulture on the top is the flight of wild geese and ducks shown above.

A disciple with shaven head, probably Śāriputra, stands by the side of Śākyamuni and turns towards him. He shows an unconventional type of features drawn with much vigour. The head is long and high at the back, with well-defined 'corners' there and over the forehead. The large nose, bushy eyebrows, and long pointed chin give a strongly marked character to the head. It is set off by a circular halo of brilliant vermilion. The costume, too, is peculiar; it consists of an under-robe of vermilion and light green, black shoes upturned at the toes, and a large mantle of mottled dark green, blue, and red, which covers both shoulders and arms.

²⁷ Cf. *Serindia*, p. 947 (sub Ch. 0039).