

PRECIOUS TO HIM

Precious, very precious to Him, are the thousands on the Ramachandrapuram field who have heard little of His love and power. Precious also are those who have heard of Him, and with earnest hearts are seeking Him. Precious too are those who have found the Saviour and have confessed Him in baptism. Very precious are the thousands of children who love the wonderful Jesus of whom they have heard in the schools. Precious too are those in this group whom the picture will introduce to you.

Seated in the centre of the picture is M. Sashamma. At her feet to her right is her only child, Samuel. Their story has been told before, but will bear repetition. When Seshamma was a tiny girl wife, her husband, Venkaih Garu, then a young man of 19 years, and hardly known to her, outraged all the laws of his caste and family by being baptized. He had been given a hunger for God, unusual among the Kumma (rich farmer) class. He had sought in vain among the gods of whom he had heard for any revelation or peace of mind. On his occasional visits to the market in the distant town of Co-canada he had sometimes heard some preaching, about one, Jesus Christ. One day, when he was specially hungry in spirit, a coolie girl passed near him as he was in his native village, Shellur. As she passed she sang, "Oh Refuge, my Lord Jesus, You are the only way to Heaven." The message came home to Venkaih's hungry heart, and kneeling in the street he prayed in the name of Jesus, and God gave to him an answer of peace. Eager to confess his Saviour he was soon baptized, His family cast him out making a straw effigy and burning it in his name. Wisely or otherwise he gave up all his property. When I came to the field in 1908, he had been 20 years a Christian. He had studied, and now was a sort of travelling evangelist. His wife had never come to him, but he constantly prayed for her.

What of Seshamma all these years! She was with her own people, almost as a widow. What was her husband's religion to her, but the evil thing that had separated her from all an Indian woman holds dear? Little wonder

that she was prejudiced against it. However behind her husband's new religion was her husband's prayer-hearing God. With marvelous faith he kept praying that his wife might be converted. At long last after 25 years Miss Hatch and I had the joy of seeing Seshamma following her husband to the House boat where after a meeting she and some others were baptized. Her husband went with her to the part of her father's home which she had been occupying. The door leading to the rest of the house was closed against them, not to be re-opened even when after a year God crowned their union with the coming of little Samuel. How cruel a false faith can make those who follow it! This Christian family were not allowed to use the family or other well, so water had to be carried from the canal. They were not allowed to purchase in their own village the little every-day necessities. Their little son was not allowed in the games with the other children. For the little lad's sake and that Seshamma might have some Christian teaching and fellowship we persuaded them to come in to Ramachandrapuram where we were able to give them a free house in the town. Samuel attended our Caste Girls' School where we have a very few boys in attendance.

About this time Venkaih became quite ill. When he recovered he seemed somewhat unbalanced mentally. He refused to take the mission help which Dr. Stillwell had been giving, saying he was called to come out of Egypt and to leave all that he had in order to be Christ's disciple. We tried to show him that we were called to give up all that hindered, but to use for Christ and others anything that was not a hindrance. Then he had a vision that for a year he was to leave his wife and son and wander as a Sanyas living on whatever was given to him. We looked forward to the close of the year but no new vision came, except to claim that God still called him and wish his wife and family to follow him. That this is an illusion, not a real call of God is proved to me by the fact that poor Venkaih is being very poorly provided for and that mainly by poor Christians who are ashamed to see him hungry and