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Baptism of a Hindu Holy Man.

(Rev. J. C. Blair (Broach) in 'Irish Missionary-Herald'.)

To-day I had the unspeakable joy of receiving into the Church the first-fruits of our touring in the Broach district. The character of the old man whom I baptized, his work as a Hindu Sadhu, his resolution to have his baptism take place in his own village, before the people of the village and his own disciples, his firmness and the grand testimony which he made for Christ when, as he was disowning the popular gods of this country just before his baptism, a Brahman disputed with him and appealed to him not to forsake his old faith, his noble and courageous testimony in the face of this opposition, and all the circumstances connected with him since I came to know him some four years ago, make it the most interesting baptism I have ever had to report.

His name is Sitaram Gopaldas, and his age, he says, is 75 years. In spite of his great age he is still active in body, and his mind, which is stored with Hindustani literature, is also strong and vigorous. Thirty-eight years ago he became a Sadhu or Hindu saint, and as such he has lived for the past thirty-five years in the village of Karela. He has many disciples who acknowledge him as their religious teacher, and who actually worship the old man when they come into his presence. His former history is not a long one, but it is the history of one who for many years has been searching after the true God that he might worship him only. 'During the first fifteen years of my life,' he said, 'I knew nothing of God. I only ate and played. Afterwards I came to know some Sadhus, from whom I learned of the existence of God. Then the thought came to me—"Where is the Great God?" About him I inquired of many, and did according in their words; thus for a long time I continued seeking him. Then I thought if there is one Great God I should lay hold on him and know him, and should forsake all to find him. At this time I was about thirty or thirty-five years of age. I wandered much, and sought at many shrines the Truth, but did not find it. At last, when my hope in visible gods had gone, and I failed to find what I sought in them, I turned to seek the Truth in the sacred books. These are many, but I read them and sought and sought and sought the Truth in them till the thought became established in my mind that there is only one God, and there is none beside him. He is everywhere, and knows all that is in our hearts, but where he is specially, and how to know him, I could not find out. Then I came to know you, and through you Jesus Christ, by whom we know God, for he dwells in God's presence, and takes away our sins.'

Such is the brief story of the old man from his own lips. My first acquaintance with him was during the tour of 1894-5, and at that time he thought that we were only one more sect of the many existing in the world. Two years later, in January, 1897, I again visited his village, and he formed one of my audience. At the close of the preaching he disputed our teaching about sin, and affirmed that he did not commit

sin. I remember asking him on that occasion if no wrong thoughts had ever entered his mind, and on acknowledging they had, I told him it disproved his sinlessness. Eleven months later, in the December of the same year, I was again encamped near his village, and saw him the day I preached there. It was on that occasion he promised to attend our services on the following Sabbath. What occurred on that Sabbath I have already told you. 'Your preaching is true,' he said at the close of the service; and when I asked him if he believed what I said about Jesus, he replied—'Without Christ God could not be known.' But when I further asked



him if he would teach this Truth to others, as he was a religious teacher himself, he said—'No; I believe it for myself, but unless others ask me about it I will not teach it.' Yet the Truth had sunk deeper into this old man's heart than I had thought. 'Last year,' he told me afterwards, 'I knew you had the Truth, for when I asked you "What is your belief?" you replied, "There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, dwelling always in God's presence, and who takes us to God."' I had read to him John xiv., 6, where Jesus says, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.' This is what the old man had been searching after all these years. 'And I read,' the old man continued, 'a lit-

tle of the New Testament you gave me last year, and I became certain of its truth; but what I became certain of most is that without a Mediator we cannot go to God, and that is why I want to acknowledge Jesus Christ.'

Another thirteen months have passed since last year's interview, and I am now encamped at the same village, about three miles from Karela, where Sitaram lives. On last Tuesday we preached there, and Sitaram heard us. We were always sure of a good reception in this village, and this morning when I asked the people who had assembled to hear us if they remembered about whom I had preached to them last year, one replied, 'It was about Jesus Christ.'

When the preaching was over I accompanied Sitaram to his house, a two-storied brick building (the other houses in the village are built of mud). The lower part of the house he uses as a sleeping compartment for himself and horse (for he owns a horse to visit surrounding villages). The upper part of the building he uses for receiving visitors and disciples. Here in the upper part I sat talking to him for half-an-hour or more about his becoming a Christian. Afterwards we went to the house of one of his disciples, a well-to-do widow, called Jamnabai, who fed him every day. She is a Kanbi by caste, and has the most absolute faith in Sitaram, and believes what he does is right. We talked to her of Christ, and then I prayed with her. Sitaram accompanied me to camp (which we reached about eleven o'clock), and during the conversation he told me that he was now ready to be baptized, as he was already in the Church. A long talk followed in camp, and he promised to come back again on Thursday. On Thursday morning, after we had returned from preaching in the village of Ora, Sitaram arrived, bringing us a dainty Hindu breakfast. Another talk followed about his duty of joining the Church by baptism, and on his asking the sacrament to be explained, I read and explained to him the account of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch. Sitaram again said he was ready to be baptized, and on my asking 'When?' he replied, 'Whenever you like.' I suggested next Sabbath at the Christian service in camp, but he said, 'Why here, and not in my village? I do not want it done in secret, but openly, and in my village, that the people may see and know it.' Thus spoke Sitaram, and I could not but admire his courage and bravery, for I knew what it meant perhaps better than he did himself. I gladly fell in with his suggestion, and arranged to have the Sabbath service in his village, at his house, and to baptize him there.

On Saturday we went to see him, and we read and talked with him for a long time. The doctrine of human depravity was emphasized, the consequences of sin, and Christ's substitution. Sitaram acknowledged them all. 'They are true; I believe them; they have entered my mind.' When I grew tired of talking, Moti continued the conversation. A Brahman, a disciple of Sitaram, came in and sat till the close. Sitaram had evidently grown in courage and in grace since last year, for while then he affirmed he wouldn't teach these things unless he was asked about them, now he seemed determined to teach them whether the people asked