

CHOWDHARI PURUSHOTTAM.

By Rev. John Craig.

This brother's name is known to Christians throughout the Telugu country because he was the author of many Telugu Christian hymns and other poetical works. Canadian Baptists should take special interest in him because he was born on Sept. 5th, 1803, at a village not very



Chowdhari Purushottam.

far from Parlakimedi, his father belonging to a sub-caste known as Srusti Karnams. Telugu and Oriya were both used in the family, the father being specially proficient in Telugu. The son, when a boy, was ambitious to excel like the father. He read Hindu poetical and sacred books and committed portions to memory.

He was always devout and became an orthodox Hindu and a worshipper of Vishnu. He was married when twenty, and soon afterwards lost his father. His mother and elder brother supported him because he was learned and devout. After his father's death he became still more devout, and composed many hymns and verses in praise of Vishnu and his incarnations, Krishna and Rama. About this time becoming interested in another form of Hinduism, he desired to become an ascetic and learned from others various forms of penances for the mortification of the body.

In 1832 he remembered that his brother had given him seven years previously a Christian tract. When he had read it carefully he determined to give up his ascetic life and learn more about the Christian religion. He obtained three more tracts in neighboring villages. In his search for more light he went on one occasion to Vizagapatam and was directed to a Roman Catholic Church, but seeing images there he turned away. A missionary of the London Missionary Society was living there then, but he was very ill and died soon afterwards. Later, while in Parlakimedi as a tutor, Mr. Purushottam sent a letter by a messenger to Berhampore addressing it to the "Padre" of that place. This fell into the hands of the Roman Catholics; so he determined to go to Madras. Meanwhile an opportunity arose for a visit to Chicacole. On inquiring about Christianity he was directed to a lady, Mrs. Helen Knott, who became deeply interested in him, and gave him a copy of the Gospel according to Luke and two tracts. Through reading the Gospel and conversing with Mrs. Knott he determined to become a Christian. This lady introduced him to an officer, who on seeing his earnest-

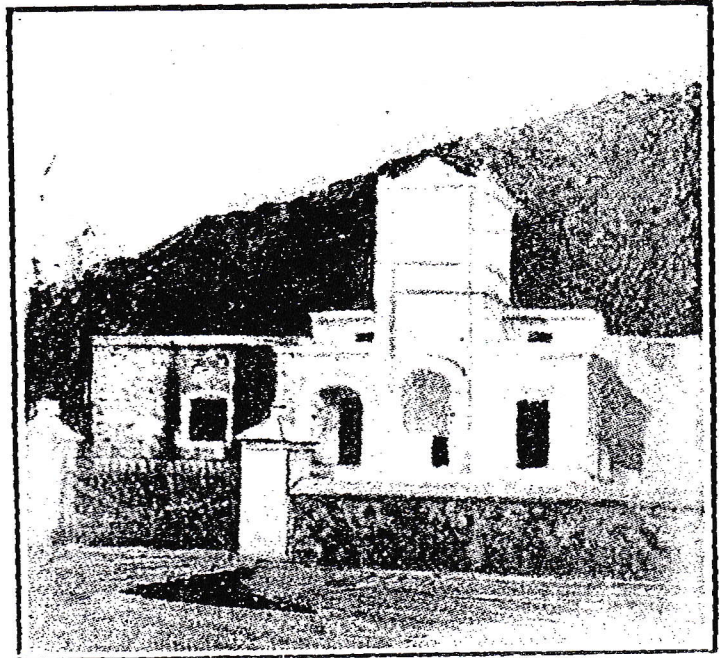
ness said, "I believe God has lighted one lamp in this dark land." Purushottam's brother and other relatives made great efforts to turn him from his purpose, but he remained firm. In May, 1833, he went to Vizagapatam to reside there. The missionary having died, Major Brett of the East India Company was overseeing the mission work. Shortly after going to Vizagapatam. Mr. Purushottam threw away his sacred thread and openly abandoned caste. About this time he wrote a tract in Telugu on "Caste," many editions of which have been published by the Tract Society of Madras. As he was anxious to be baptized, Major Brett thought of sending him to Madras, 400 miles by sea, but meanwhile Mrs. Knott heard from the Baptist Missionary at Cuttack, and Mr. Purushottam decided to go there, 300 miles by land. He was baptized on October 6th, 1833. The English judge granted the use of a large reservoir near the Government offices, and fully one thousand people witnessed the baptism. Returning to Vizagapatam, he preached the gospel there and in the villages round about, often suffering much abuse. At this time he wrote his first lyric, "I Sought the Refuge of our Jesus Christ".

In 1834 he worked for a few months in Madras and Bellary; and returned to the north by land, preaching in many places by the way. By the end of November he reached Vizagapatam, where he spent a few days with Capt. Richardson, a son-in-law of Mrs. Helen Knott. Then he went to his native place near Parlakimedi and preached the gospel there and in other villages. His relatives treated him as an outcaste. Early in 1835 he received word that a missionary who had just come to Vizagapatam needed his help, so he went there and worked for about a year. Then he made another effort

to get his wife, and this time she accompanied him to Chicacole, and soon afterwards she went with her husband to Cuttack and was baptized in April, 1836, by Rev. A. Sutton. Here, a few weeks later, Mr. Purushottam was ordained as an evangelist, and was sent to Berhampore to assist the missionary there. Later in the year he was invited by the judge at Chicacole to preach the gospel there. With the approval of the missionaries at Cuttack he went, and helped the Rev. S. S. Day, the first American Baptist Missionary to the Telugus, during the short time that he and Mrs. Day lived and worked at Chicacole. In 1838 he was invited to return to Berhampore, and toured all over the Ganjam District during the seven years that he spent there. In 1843 his old friend, Mrs. Knott, returned from Burma to Chicacole, and sent her bullock-coach to Berhampore with a request that he and his family would come to see her. They gladly complied with this request. About this time Mr. Purushottam fell into sin and suffered bitter grief before peace returned to his heart.

In 1845 he was invited to Chicacole, which the London Missionary Society had occupied as a station. He preached the gospel there for six years. In 1851 he lost his wife, and was left with two sons and two daughters, for whose education he wished to be transferred to Vizagapatam. There he helped Dr. Hay in Bible translation, but his chief work was preaching the gospel. On a tour which he made in January and February, 1861, he preached in Anakapalli, Yellamanchili, Tuni, Pithapur, Samalkot, Peddapuram, Cocanada and other places. In 1862 he was appointed to evangelistic work at Chittivalasa, near Bimlipatam, and on Sunday evenings he used to visit Polepilli to preach the gospel. During this

time his brother's son and some others were converted in another village where he preached. At the end of 1870 Mr. Purushottam decided to retire from mission work and go to Cuttack where his children lived. On his way there he went to Akulatampara, where he spent a month. The 41st Regiment of Native Infantry had been transferred to Cuttack in 1868. Connected with it there was a Telugu Baptist church under the care of



Anthravady Purushottam Memorial Hall
at Parlakimedi.

Pastor Das Anthravady. After Mr. Purushottam's return to Cuttack in December, 1870, these brethren had much fellowship with each other.

In 1872 they went together to Akulatampara, where two men wished to be baptized, one of them being Mr. Purushottam's brother's son and the other Bhagavan Behara, a sketch of whose life is given in this book. These men were not baptized till the next year. The preachers visited also Chicacole and Vizianagram and Chittivalasa. In December, 1875, Mr. Purushottam lost his eldest son who had supported him, and the Mission offered him his former post as pastor, and in 1877 he was given charge of the church at Berhamapore. In

June of this year he visited Akulatampara again with Pastor D. Anthravady; Rev. W. F. Armstrong was also present. Bhagavan Behara's wife and two others were baptized.

The next year he went back to Cuttack. After he lost the sight of both eyes he was pensioned by the church. He died on August 24th, 1890, aged 87. He was ordained as an evangelist in 1836, so that he had preached for 54 years, including the period after he was pensioned. About half of this time he had been in connection with the London Mission and the other half in connection with the English Baptist Mission.

