

We have an analogy to this in India in the _Thugs_, a religious body quite recently suppressed by the English, who executed numbers of them. They showed their regard for religion and veneration for the goddess Kali by assassinating at every opportunity their own friends and fellow-travellers, so that they might obtain their possessions, and they were seriously convinced that thereby they had accomplished something that was praiseworthy and would contribute to their eternal welfare. The power of religious dogma, that has been inculcated early, is so great that it destroys conscience, and finally all compassion and sense of humanity. But if you wish to see with your own eyes, and close at hand, what early inoculation of belief does, look at the English. Look at this nation, favoured by nature before all others, endowed before all others with reason, intelligence, power of judgment, and firmness of character; look at these people degraded, nay, made despicable among all others by their stupid ecclesiastical superstition, which among their other capacities appears like a fixed idea, a monomania. For this they have to thank the clergy in whose hands education is, and who take care to inculcate all the articles, of belief at the earliest age in such a way as to result in a kind of partial paralysis of the brain; this then shows itself throughout their whole life in a silly bigotry, making even extremely intelligent and capable people among them degrade themselves so that they become quite an enigma to us. If we consider how essential to such a masterpiece is inoculation of belief in the tender age of childhood, the system of missions appears no longer merely as the height of human importunity, arrogance, and impertinence, but also of absurdity; in so far as it does not confine itself to people who are

still in the stage of _childhood_, such as the Hottentots, Kaffirs, South Sea Islanders, and others like them, among whom it has been really successful. While, on the other hand, in India the Brahmans receive the doctrines of missionaries either with a smile of condescending approval or refuse them with a shrug of their shoulders; and among these people in general, notwithstanding the most favourable circumstances, the missionaries' attempts at conversion are usually wrecked. An authentic report in vol. xxi. of the _Asiatic Journal_ of 1826 shows that after so many years of missionary activity in the whole of India (of which the English possessions alone amount to one hundred and fifteen million inhabitants) there are not more than three hundred living converts to be found; and at the same time it is admitted that the Christian converts are distinguished for their extreme immorality. There are only three hundred venal and bribed souls out of so many millions. I cannot see that it has gone better with Christianity in India since then, although the missionaries are now trying, contrary to agreement, to work on the children's minds in schools exclusively devoted to secular English instruction, in order to smuggle in Christianity, against which, however, the Hindoos are most jealously on their guard. For, as has been said, childhood is the time, and not manhood, to sow the seeds of belief, especially where an earlier belief has taken root. An acquired conviction, however, that is assumed by matured converts serves, generally, as only the mask for some kind of personal interest. And it is the feeling that this could hardly be otherwise that makes a man, who changes his religion at maturity, despised by most people everywhere; a fact which reveals that they do not regard religion as a matter of

reasoned conviction but merely as a belief inoculated in early childhood, before it has been put to any test. That they are right in looking at religion in this way is to be gathered from the fact that it is not only the blind, credulous masses, but also the clergy of every religion, who, as such, have studied its sources, arguments, dogmas and differences, who cling faithfully and zealously as a body to the religion of their fatherland; consequently it is the rarest thing in the world for a priest to change from one religion or creed to another. For instance, we see that the Catholic clergy are absolutely convinced of the truth of all the principles of their Church, and that the Protestants are also of theirs, and that both defend the principles of their confession with like zeal. And yet the conviction is the outcome merely of the country in which each is born: the truth of the Catholic dogma is perfectly clear to the clergy of South Germany, the Protestant to the clergy of North Germany. If, therefore, these convictions rest on objective reasons, these reasons must be climatic and thrive like plants, some only here, some only there. The masses everywhere, however, accept on trust and faith the convictions of those who are _locally convinced_.