

Similar difficulties meet us when attempting to trace out the slow and uncertain steps by which nations were formed and attained strength. Beyond a few imperfect records of uncertain value literally nothing has descended to our times on which we can base such an inquiry. The creation of man, even taking the Scriptural account as being, as far as it goes, historically and literally trustworthy—not, that is to say, in any degree mythical or figurative—throws no light on the genesis of the human race, and leaves in profound obscurity the evolution of man. I cannot see that the earlier chapters of the Pentateuch can possibly be cited by one side or the other in the controversy. That man came into being at the fiat of the Omnipotent we know. That his falls were many, his progress slow and uncertain, his morality low, the Bible, the traditions of every living and extinct race, our knowledge of human nature, and of the few savage nations which the humanity of our so-called Christian age is rapidly destroying, all teach us. There is ample scope for conjecture; but then conjecture is not certain knowledge, and we cannot accept as Gospel the plausible and learned theories of Whateley, Lubbock, Taylor, Argyll, and others, only, however, because the records on which they have had to rely are sadly imperfect.

Sir H. Maine, by far the ablest of living English jurists, a man whose learning and ability make him an honor to his country, and to the profession in which he holds so high a position, has tried to show how isolated families might, in the dawn—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say before the dawn—of civilisation, have united to form communities, and, still later, nations. Sir Henry Maine has in the following passage, plausible enough, though not altogether satisfactory, told us what might have been, though none can tell what actually was. He tells us—and he evidently sees the objection to his theory—that :—

“It would be a very simple explanation of the origin of society, if we could base a general conclusion on the hint furnished us by the Scriptural example already adverted to, and could suppose that communities began to exist wherever a family held together instead of separating at the death of its patriarchal chief-