

era. At about this period, having become somewhat numerous, they began to direct their course westward, and gradually spread over the plains of Turkestan and the territory between the Black and Caspian Seas, and came into contact with the then powerful Arabs or Saracens with whom they soon entered into alliance and friendly relations. Being found superior in all the soldierly qualities to the Arabs, the armies of the Saracen caliphs came gradually to be composed almost entirely of them. At this date also they were largely employed by the emperor Heraclius to recruit his armies, and it was by their instrumentality that he undertook and successfully carried out the conquest of Persia, then at the very height of its power, and whose hitherto victorious arms had extended the Persian boundaries to their widest extent (A.D. 628). By this disaster the defeated nation lost all its conquests and its power, and became a prey to the wrangling of petty chiefs and to the repeated conquests of the Turk and the Arab, a condition from which it has never recovered.

While the superior military qualities of the Turks enabled them gradually to wrest the political power from the Arabs, the latter were able, by their greater devotion to religion, to exercise a no less potent influence (though of a different nature) over the Turks. The Saracens at this date had thoroughly and devotedly espoused the Mahometan religion, which had been divulged by their prophet and leader, Mahomet or Mohammed. This celebrated chieftain was born at Mecca, in Arabia, in the year A.D. 569. He belonged to an Arabian tribe called Koraish, and his family possessed the hereditary right to the custody of the Caaba, or one of the places of worship, under their previous idolatrous system, at Mecca. They had, however, fallen into reduced circumstances; and Mahomet was trained for a life of traffic and merchandise. Marrying a rich widow, whose confidence and affections he had won by the faithful discharge of his duties as her factor, he greatly improved his condition. His education, however, was scanty, which proved a considerable impediment to his ambition. But