

in cities, while in the great Arabian peninsula the country people still hold communion with the inhabitants of the towns, whom they regard as of the same origin as themselves.* In the Kirghis steppe, a portion of the plain inhabited by the ancient Scythians (the Scoloti and Sacæ), and which exceeds in extent the area of Germany, there has never been a city for thousands of years, and yet, at the time of my journey in Siberia, the number of the tents (Yurti or Kibitkes) occupied by the three nomadic hordes exceeded 400,000, which would give a population of 2,000,000.† It is hardly necessary to enter more circumstantially into the consideration of the effect produced on mental culture by such great contrasts in the greater or less isolation of a nomadic life, even where equal mental qualifications are presupposed.

In the more highly-gifted race of the Arabs, natural adaptability for mental cultivation, the geographical relations we have already indicated, and the ancient commercial intercourse of the littoral districts with the highly-civilized neighboring states, all combine to explain how the irruption into Syria and Persia, and the subsequent possession of Egypt, were so speedily able to awaken in the conquerors a love for science and a tendency to the pursuit of independent observation. It was ordained in the wonderful decrees by which the course of events is regulated, that the Christian sects of Nestorians, which exercised a very marked influence on the geographical diffusion of knowledge, should prove of use to the Arabs even before they advanced to the erudite and contentious city of Alexandria, and that, protected by the armed followers of the creed of Islam, these Nestorian doctrines of Christianity were enabled to penetrate far into Eastern Asia. The Arabs were first made acquainted with Greek literature through the Syrians, a kindred Semitic race, who had themselves acquired a knowledge of it only about a hundred and fifty years earlier through the heretical Nestorians.‡ Physicians, who had been educated in the scholastic establishments of the Greeks, and in the celebrated school of medicine founded by the Nestorian Christians at Edessa in Mesopotamia, were settled at Mecca as early as Mohammed's time, and there lived on a footing of friendly intercourse with the Prophet and Abu-Bekr.

* Gibbon, *Hist. of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol ix., chap. 50, p. 200 (Leips., 1829).

† Humboldt, *Asie Centr.*, t. ii., p. 128.

‡ Jourdain, *Recherches Critiques sur l'Age des Traductions d'Aristote*, 1819, p. 81 and 87.