

After various unsuccessful attempts by Missionaries from the Greek Church, at last under the reign of Vladimir the Great, Christianity according to the Greek ritual, became the religion of the Russian monarchy. In the thirteenth century, the Russians sank beneath the victorious march of the Tartar cavalry; and for two hundred years were enslaved by Tartar tyranny.

In 1689, a few months after William, Prince of Orange, had accepted the English Crown, thereby terminating the long continued strife between the parties who sought to reduce the English liberties beneath the sway of absolute despotism, and those who sought to extend and guard them by additional constitutional guarantees—a few months after this important epoch, a new era dawned for Russia in the accession of Peter to the throne of Muscovy. This distinguished Monarch, animated by the desire of placing his country upon a level with the great civilized nations of the world, displayed an energy and comprehensiveness of view, coupled with a tenacity of purpose which terminated in the most astonishing results. The story of his life reads more like the fabulous creations of oriental romance, than the truthful history of a real prince of the seventeenth century. After tremendous conflicts with Sweden, whose troops long invincible were led by that warlike madman, Charles XII.—Often defeated, yet never losing hope, fortune at last recompensed Peter's perseverance with brilliant success—the fatal battle of Pultowa broke the power of Sweden, and gave to the Russian hero lands and ports on the Baltic Sea; acquisitions long coveted, and once acquired, with the speed of magic turned to the best account. St. Petersburg rose upon the banks of the Neva as if by enchantment. The monarch who had wrought with his own hands in the dock yards of Amsterdam, and Portsmouth,