

church at Basle to the south of Russia, settled in 1824 at Rohrbach, as pastor of one of the German settlements there in the reign of Catherine II. In these colonies the residents preserved the custom of the "Stunden," or "hour" meetings for prayer and Bible study long practised in Würtemberg. Bonekemper took part freely in these exercises, in which the Russians, not understanding German, were unable to join. In 1858 a peasant named Onishenko, from the village of Osnowa, near the port of Nikolayev, began to attend these meetings, and was led to Christ. He immediately set about telling others, and formed similar little prayer-meetings in the neighboring villages. Thus was Stundism born, and it made rapid progress, especially after the liberation of the serfs (1861). This emancipation caused the peasants to travel about in search of work, and thus those who had heard the Gospel spread it abroad from town to town. Freedom also inspired these peasants with a desire for an education. This was a powerful stimulus to a movement which was really but a return to the study of the Bible—the book which had been closed to the masses of the people. Itinerant preachers traveled through the villages gathering together groups of listeners eager for the truth. In 1864 appeared for the first time a pocket edition of the New Testament in Russian, and the new converts bought it with joy.

From its start the characteristic traits of the adherents of Stundism were absolute abstinence from intoxicants, assiduous study of the Scriptures, and the cultivation of a fraternal Christian spirit. They had no idea at first of withdrawing from the Orthodox Church. They even went to the priests asking counsel and light. The priests, too ignorant to give this, but not too blind to see that the movement as it gained strength and knowledge would be sure to attack the abuses and superstitions of the Church, quickly assumed a hostile attitude toward the new tendencies, and appealed to secular force to suppress the heresy. It was about 1870, when the Stundists numbered about 70,000, that the first oppressive measures were taken. As they increased the time came when this systematic implacable persecution no longer aimed at repressing them, but at exterminating them altogether.

Before recounting the leading phases of this persecution, it will not be out of the way to trace rapidly the principles of this movement, which many have thought held more to the letter than to the spirit of the Gospel. Few people have a really clear idea of the fundamental beliefs and organization of the Stundists. They are often represented to be a fanatical sect of ignorant iconoclasts, advocating a social reform which is but the embodiment of the principles of communism, and consequently a sect dangerous not only to the Church, whose errors and superstitions they attack, but also to the State which they seek to undermine. Therefore some say that Russia has a right to suppress them. It is in this light, no doubt, that the Emperor and many people both in Russia and elsewhere regard the matter. No idea is more foreign to the truth. We do not say that