

THE RUSSIAN STUNDISTS.—I.*

THEIR ORIGIN, HISTORY, AND PERSECUTION.

BY PROFESSOR G. GODET—TRANSLATED BY MRS. D. L. PIERSON.

The era of religious persecution is not passed. Not only in Armenia and China do Christians suffer for their beliefs, but under a government that calls itself Christian—in holy Russia, and in the holy atmosphere of the "Holy Synod" of the Russian Church. The world at large has but an imperfect knowledge of these persecutions. If they were known more widely and more in detail, we are persuaded that the public would be so stirred that the Russian Government could no longer ignore or permit what now goes on in that empire. It is evident that the Stundists are misrepresented to the Emperor to be a political and social organization dangerous to the State, and not, as they really are, an inoffensive religious sect. It is also evident that the most horrible deeds of persecution are carefully hidden from him, and that he has but a remote idea of the sufferings which some of his most faithful subjects have undergone. The petitions that the persecuted ones have tried to send to him, thanks to the Russian police, have never been allowed to reach their destination. It is useless to think of making any external attempt in their favor. What was gained by the interventions of the Evangelical Alliance in behalf of the Baltic provinces during the reigns of the two preceding emperors? Nothing—even worse than nothing—an aggravation of the evil! Anything that looks like an interference from an outsider in the national affairs of Russia only irritates the government, and threatens to injure rather than aid the cause of the oppressed.

The Origin and Character of Stundism.—The Stundists, about 250,000 in number, are scattered throughout the south of Russia.† About 1868 the newspapers spoke for the first time of the Stundists, and of the activity of Pastor Charles Bonekemper, who was settled for a year at Rohrbach, near Odessa. It was he who gave the first decided impulse to the movement; but its beginning was still earlier. In 1823 John Bonekemper, of Wupperthal (the father of Charles Bonekemper), having been sent by the

* This article is a translation of a little pamphlet by Professor G. Godet, of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. The French pamphlet is itself in part a compilation of facts from English and other publications. Among other books on the Stundists are "The Stundists;" "A Short History of the Stundists;" "A Highway of Sorrow," by Hesba Stretton; and "Nadya, a Tale of the Steppes," by Nora.

† Recently, however (by order of the Emperor no doubt), the Minister of the Interior was informed that he might discontinue the "exceptional methods taken for protecting the Orthodox Church" in the Baltic provinces. This means, probably, the end of persecutions for the Lutherans in these provinces—but what of the Stundists?

‡ They are found largely in the provinces of Bessarabia, Kherson, Karsk, Poltava, Kharkov, Taurida, Don Cossacks, Astrakhan, and in Caucasia. A line drawn from Warsaw through Orel to Astrakhan would nearly mark the northern limit of Stundism.