7. January 22, 1710. A translation into Dutch of a letter by Johann Ludwig Runckel[[1]](#footnote-1) to J. Beets at Hoorn about the condition of the Mennonites in Switzerland. The original of this letter is not known.[[2]](#footnote-2) This is the first recorded letter by Runckel to the Mennonites in the Netherlands.

[folio 2 recto]

J. Beets[[3]](#footnote-3) Bern, January 22, 1710

Very learned Sir, your letter of October 26 of last year has reached me in proper time. However, I have not been able to serve you sooner, since to this date I was in Lyons and Geneva and other places in French-speaking country. Upon arriving here yesterday, I immediately sought information (as much as this short time allowed). With compassion I comprehend that those who are called Mennonites are being persecuted as severely as has not been the case for many years, and, that, since one called Willading[[4]](#footnote-4) has become sheriff or mayor, who is an ungodly man and the enemy of all pious people. In the meantime there are also a few good men in the Council who did not want to approve this persecution. However, the unspiritual clergy have stirred up the sheriff powerfully, and one of the ungodly ministers has not been ashamed to say to him that some should have their heads cut off, so that the others would change their minds.

Meanwhile the Council has written to the city of Zurich to inquire how they had gotten rid of the Mennonites; whereupon they replied that they had had a few executed. Thereafter, as many as could be found were thrown in prison, some of them violently transported to France to go to war, others sold to the galleys, and others were expelled from the country and driven out. Some of the latter have returned, which has given their persecutors all the more opportunity to exercise their wrath on them. For they have afterwards persecuted them all the more and searched them out in every possible way, and thrown them into harsh prisons, and given money

to those who turned them in, with the result that a significant number has ended up in prison.

Actually, I have not been able to find how many, nor which persons are involved, because of the short time, but I think I can let you know more as soon as possible. Although it is strictly forbidden for anyone to come to them in prison, I nevertheless hope, through the assistance of good friends, even to be able to speak to them. Meanwhile they are very resigned under this heavy oppression, encouraging one another. Their friends even have increased greatly in number through this persecution. Only two of the best teachers were captured within a month; earlier they escaped capture, until two prisoners, imprisoned by reason of theft and other misdeeds, [folio 2 verso] agreed to take them into custody if they themselves were set free, in which evil intention they succeeded inasmuch as they delivered up these two good men, for which they were even given 200 dollars in cash as recompense or unjust wages. But that anyone has died in prison, I have to date not been able to ascertain.

The main cause of this persecution has to do with infant baptism, and because they do not want to go to Reformed preaching, as well as the swearing of an oath, and finally because they support nonresistance. They say that some of those who are now in prison will be sent to Pennsylvania. Thus far, a brief answer to your letter, shortly more. If you have anything more to report to me on this matter, please be so good as to address the letter to Schaffhausen, at the Messrs. Hurter, Ott, and Peyer. I sincerely want to serve you in this matter, although I do not expect to stay here longer than about fourteen days, thinking to go to Schaffhausen, twenty miles from here, and remaining there for some time, so that I can anticipate an answer from you there. May God in Christ be with us, etc.

1. 7 For Runckel see ME IV, 378; ML III, 566. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A translation of most of this letter into German appears in Müller, pp. 257-258, which probably was made from the Dutch version. Müller seems to attribute this to Jacob Huizinga (Stamboek). Ernst Müller, Geschichte der bernischen Täufer nach den Urkunden dargestellt (Frauenfeld, 1895. Reprint, Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1972). For an interesting contemporary review of this book, see Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz 10 (31. August 1895), pp. 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See “Gerrit Beets” in ME I, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Johann Friedrich Willading (1641-1718). Ruth, The Earth Is the Lord’s, p. 151. Willading became a member of the Anabaptist Commission in 1700 and was a mayor of Bern from 1708 until his death. For more information see Hanspeter Jecker, “Der Grosse Berner Täufer-Exodus von 1711,” p. 130 n. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)