48. July 12, 1710. Letter from Runckel at Bern to the Dutch Committee gives a report of the state of things, explains the cause of embitterment as lack of knowledge, advises the translation of a Mennonite confession of faith and other materials into High German and printing and distribution of them to dispel the lack of knowledge. He sends a list of names of the prisoners (now missing)[[1]](#footnote-1) and proposes that the Swiss Mennonites should temporarily move away.

[page 1]

Bern July 12, 1710[[2]](#footnote-2)

Worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs!

Your letter with the enclosure but sent to me without day or month, I received properly with the previous mail from the Netherlands. I have learned of several matters from it and also from the enclosed writings.

To which, as a due response, I offer [the following report]: Although I have received no further gracious command from the High and Mighty Lords of the States General concerning the poor Mennonites who are in this Canton, yet at my own impulse I have not failed to inform myself about the condition of these poor people. Also now and then, where there was opportunity, I have recommended them in the best light. On such occasions I have discovered, thanks be to the Almighty, that in the present government there are certainly some persons who are [page 2] of a moderate disposition and consequently greatly regret the harsh procedures against these poor

people. Also, they have a very warm sympathy toward them so that they might wish them a better outcome.

At the same time, unfortunately, I have learned that for one moderately inclined there are always two or three very prejudiced and accordingly have very hard feelings. With such persons no dissuasion, no complaints, no

example would avail anything, nor can anything be presumed

for the future, unless God steps into the midst and turns their

stony hearts into flesh.

Now under such circumstances, which I could have scarcely

believed if I had not investigated myself, I cannot see what one

could do in the present Illustrious Canton in favor of these

poor people. Perhaps through some Committee members,

perhaps through requests, recommendations, or in another

manner something could be accomplished for the present;

especially as a point of honor or reputation is involved, and in

such a case they now neither will acknowledge nor want to

acknowledge by making amends publicly that a mistake has

been made.

It is indeed not that [page 3] most government officials

here do not know what the characteristics of the Mennonites

actually are, nor know what kind of distinction to make between

them and the Müntzerite and Münsterite Anabaptists.[[3]](#footnote-3) Rather

they blindly believe as gospel all which the opponents and

persecutors of the Mennonites charge them with. Yet it is to

be hoped that, if perhaps their eyes could be opened in one

or another manner, they might possibly be helped to other

thoughts. But I readily admit that up to the present I cannot

think out any means how to accomplish this otherwise—except

to employ the following means:

Translate into German and bring into print writings from here and there, published on behalf of these poor people, together with the Mennonite Confession of Faith.[[4]](#footnote-4) Distribute a good number of copies here in the city and countryside stealthily and in secret[[5]](#footnote-5) so that each [reader] could privately reflect about it and come to his own conclusions about to what extent the persecution of these poor people should be financed.

Then when I myself think this over very carefully, I find that as things stand [page 4] for the present no better method is left for these poor people than for them to withdraw for a while from the very destructive thunderstorm hovering over their heads. They should seek residence and greater freedom of conscience in God’s name elsewhere until at some time the anger and rancor have passed, and [the officials] of their own accord acknowledge the mistake that has been made. I believe, then, as matters stand that the greatest kindness that one could show to these poor people is to discover a safe residence for them elsewhere and they could completely remove from this country.

In fact, the Princess of Nassau-Dietz[[6]](#footnote-6) and the Lord Count of Neuwied have offered some such opportunities in case they could get some artisans

or skilled workers. Since a rather exact inquiry revealed that the people are mostly farmers or herdsmen, this opening was presumed closed as these lords were already oversupplied with such persons.

With the last mail I have reported to the journalist, Willem Arnold,[[7]](#footnote-7) at

Amsterdam that again more than twenty of these poor people are imprisoned here and also that [page 5] most of the others are scattered in the neighboring places and are being hunted. I asked that he should communicate this to my highly honored Sirs. I again confirm this and at the same time send along a list of the Mennonites in local prisons, which was given to me by a reliable source. I want to attempt, if it is at all possible, to talk with these poor prisoners myself and to comfort them in their bonds as much as I can.

With this besides a mutual entrusting to God’s powerful grace and protection and the commendation of me and my dear family to your devout prayers,

I always am and remain,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

[page 6: written in Dutch]

1710, 1711, 1712.

Letter from

Mr. L. Runckel at Schaffhausen,[[8]](#footnote-8)

Envoy of the High and Mighty States General

[turned at right angles]

Letter of Mr. Runckel

to the Committee dated

July 12, 1710

1. 48 A Dutch translation of this letter also appears in Hendrik Toren’s Daybook (A 1009), pp. 95-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ernst Müller has an inexact transcription of this letter. See Müller, pp. 288-290. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Followers of Thomas Müntzer of the peasants’ revolt in 1525 in Saxony and the revolutionaries of the city of Münster in North Germany in 1532-1535, both radical aberrations from Anabaptism, but useful to Anabaptist opponents as a source of accusation against them. ME III, 777-781, 785-789. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Runckel is not aware that the Dordrecht Confession of Faith had already been translated and published in German at Amsterdam in 1664. See Lowry, Documents of Brotherly Love I, p. 205 n. 9 and 10; p. 271 n. 12; Hanspeter Jecker, “Das Dordrechter Bekenntnis und die Amische Spaltung,” in Les Amish: origine et particularismes 1693-1993: The Amish: Origin and Characteristics 1693-1993, ed. by Lydie Hege and Christoph Wiebe, Ingersheim: A F H A M, 1996, p. 217. See also Documents 60 and 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A Bernese Mandate of 1692 forbade the distribution of a Dutch Anabaptist confession of faith (although the Dordrecht Confession was not explicitly forbidden, but only by implication). Appendix C in the English translation of Müller’s Geschichte der bernischen Täufer contains this mandate on   
   pp. 458-459. Cf. Roth, p. 93 n. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Nassau was an independent Duchy till 1866, then later part of Hesse. ME III, 812-813. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In the Dutch translation the name is also read as Arnold, but Müller gives it as Aarnold. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This note in Dutch covers three years, much of which time Runckel was actually in Schaffhausen. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)