142. March 11, 1711. Letter from Johann Runckel: The amnesty has been announced throughout the whole of Bern and, as a result of his efforts, also in the Palatinate and the neighboring lands. He has paid the head tax for six persons since the four others had already settled for it. There are now four other prisoners still in custody, whose bail the government is waiting for, with Samuel Räber, who can be released only after the departure of all the others. The Prussian minister has desired that Runckel should use his influence to persuade the refugees to travel to Prussia, and, even after Runckel’s refusal, the Prussian minister has secretly attempted to persuade the Anabaptist Commission to his viewpoint. The King of Prussia expects the delegates of the Dutch and the Hamburg Mennonites to consult with him about the colonization.

 Runckel has decided to remain at Bern because of the many difficulties which the Mennonites are experiencing. He reports that there are twenty or thirty Mennonites in the Canton of Solothurn; they are so near Bernese territory that it is highly desirable that they also would decide to depart. In conclusion he reports that the three last prisoners have now been released; he asks support for his request to the States-General to remain in Bern still longer, and reports the conscientious scruples of Daniel Rychen and others of the Amish Church against making affirmation at their departure, to which the Committee should certainly give attention in the circular letter.

[page 1]

Bern[[1]](#footnote-1) the 11th of March 1711

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs,

Since my last communication, which was from the 25th of the previous month, I hope the letter from the 21st of the said month has safely arrived, as with all the earlier ones to my highly honored Sirs. Concerning the local Anabaptist matters nothing further has occurred except that the open letters [of amnesty], which were communicated then, are now being publicly read in all churches of the illustrious Canton here and otherwise publicized and posted up. They are being sent and communicated by me through circular letters to the Electoral-Princely Palatinate as well as the Palatinate of Zweibrücken, Alsace, Sundgau, along the Saar River, and to the Neuchâtel,

Montbéliard, and Pruntrut[[2]](#footnote-2) areas to the Anabaptist congregations existing there, so that the aim of the illustrious Canton here now may become sufficiently known in all these places, I hope, so that they can so profit from it to act and, as I expect, shortly some will catch sight of [the possibilities].

[page 2]

Of the poor prisoners, as can be seen from the accompanying list of the 5th of this month,[[3]](#footnote-3) again twelve were set loose after their bail was accepted as sufficient and the administrative costs for them had been paid. Accordingly, then, I paid this for four of them in the name of my highly honored Sirs because the illustrious Canton was not willing either to drop or even partly reduce the administrative charges, as I so diligently troubled myself and solicited them to do. There are at present not more than four of them imprisoned with the well-known Samuel Räber. The latter, as is already known, must sit in prison until the emigration is complete. The other three, however, as soon as their bail is arranged, will also be set free, especially since I have promised that I will also pay the administrative costs for two of them (who as little as the above four can come up with the money) so that this matter may once be completely settled.

In my last letter I had certainly made a report of ten persons, who could not pay the administrative expenses. Only after exacter investigation did I discover that two of them had already paid long ago, and that relatives of two others themselves want to pay, so that not more than six of them remain too insolvent to pay these charges, and that I must accordingly provide for these.

[page 3]

From the accompanying copies of enclosures, my highly honored Sirs

will have learned what kind of remarks I have presented to the Prussian minister, Mr. Bondeli,[[4]](#footnote-4) so as, if possible, to take away from the Prussian court the ill-conceived opinion of the wealth of the local Anabaptists, and to give an alternative report so that my highly honored Sirs might remain

unperplexed with the said court in this matter for the future. In spite of that, the said minister recently demanded, on the strength of a newly received royal reply, that since the local Anabaptists place full confidence in me, as he remarks, I might dispose them to go to the lands of his king and master. This I so decisively refused him as being the surest and most certain method to hinder their full emigration and to advance the full dispersion of these people that I wish, would, or could never do such a thing by demanding,[[5]](#footnote-5) but rather by recommending. For, as is well known to him, I have promised in a most sacred manner both these people and the illustrious Canton in the name of both my High and Mighty, most gracious Lordship[[6]](#footnote-6) and my highly honored Sirs that the same Anabaptists are not to be forced against their will, their own urge and inclination to go anywhere, but full freedom be allowed to them to go either to Prussia or, instead, to Holland and there to remain, etc.

At the same time, then, I made objections to the said minister that I, for my part, did not know of any quicker, better, or surer method to move these [page 4] people to go to Prussia than as was suggested in my remarks as mentioned[[7]](#footnote-7) in article 9, especially since our work and chief aim now must and can be no other than to endeavor and to exert ourselves as to how all

these people might be brought out of these lands to Holland, where

they themselves could and would be best advised by realistic ideas and explanations. After all, my highly honored Sirs’ intention also has never been to impose even the least compulsion, nor force, in the choice of a location of settlement, but rather much more to advise them as candid fathers and brothers, etc.

It appeared, in fact, as if the said minister approved my arguments, and yet I learned that he surreptitiously troubled himself nonetheless with various gentlemen of the “so-called” Anabaptist Commission and others. But to the present he has nowhere found an answer other than what he received from me.

I report all this to my highly honored Sirs in the greatest confidence so that they may so much the better take their own steps in one way or another. Without doubt the present royal Prussian minister residing in The Hague will already have given them to understand that his Majesty expects from my highly honored Sirs, as also from the Hamburg Mennonites, a deputation to Berlin, who might seek out some convenient places for the settlement of these people, who are awaited, and lay out the required tracts of land.

[page 5]

Moreover, I can and shall not conceal from my highly honored Sirs how that finally both in regard to the letter dispatched to me of the 10th of last month with a very binding request and in regard to more often directed entreaties[[8]](#footnote-8) of the poor local Anabaptists—how that the longer the time, the more apparent is the urgent need of my extended stay here. Also to be considered are the appeal made by the illustrious Canton itself and, further, the very short time I could be at home [if I went]. I have finally resolved in God’s name not to budge from here before the matters undertaken will have been brought fully to their desired end and all the poor local Mennonites will have departed. I have been able to come to this decision so much the

more easily, because, thanks and praise to God, since my last letter my very dear and valued patient[[9]](#footnote-9) remaining at home has markedly improved, so that with the help of the Almighty she will be in no more danger. My highly honored Sirs, please address the dispatched letters again directly[[10]](#footnote-10) to me here and be assured that all the tasks laid upon me are being carried out in the most exacting manner. Moreover, I will strive according to the best of my ability to support the poor local Anabaptists very powerfully, the same as ever, and to advance their interests.

The circular letter planned by my highly honored Sirs should be sent to me now, the sooner the better, that it may be [page 6] introduced so much the more quickly to these people circumspectly. Along with this I should not neglect to mention that some Mennonites live and are settled in a certain district of the land, called Bucheggberg,[[11]](#footnote-11) which is shared between this illustrious Canton and the Canton of Solothurn, where ecclesiastical matters and church law belong to this Canton, but citizenship and administration of justice belong to Solothurn. To remove these Mennonites from this district, neither I nor the local Anabaptist Commission can see any means other than to dispose them by all kinds of arguments, reasons, and pleading to move off voluntarily, to sell their property and goods, and to follow their local fellow-believers. And because the administration of justice belongs to Solothurn, and they must pay the emigration tax there, the question would be, what could these people be offered and allowed to enjoy perhaps as a sweetener to make up for the said emigration tax? Their number may perhaps run from twenty to thirty persons.

Meanwhile I think it is highly advisable that my highly honored Sirs be pleased to produce an especially powerful and impressive letter of exhortation to these people in German and send it to me so that I might pass it on safely through a trustworthy man. In the interim I will attempt to use it to talk with some perceptive local Mennonites and dispose them to move away where possible. As long as they remain in the territory of Solothurn, [page 7] they certainly seem not to be subject to any danger. However, since they can scarcely avoid Bernese territory, by which each of them is almost entirely surrounded, it is especially to be feared that they might gradually end in the hands of the local hunters[[12]](#footnote-12) and as a result in the prison, and from there further on the French galleys or through France into Canada. To avoid all this, the best and surest method would be that such persons should get up and get out now with these others and thus escape the danger hovering over their heads. I will enter into further discussion with the gentlemen of the Commission and see whether there is any other method to be found both to remove this thorn from the side of the illustrious Canton here and to bring these good people out of danger.

At the moment, the gentleman president of the Commission has informed me that the Commission is meeting this afternoon and the three yet imprisoned Anabaptists would be set loose in the reported manner.

With this, besides a mutual commitment of my highly honored Sirs to the almighty, gracious protection of God and entrusting myself and mine to your devout prayer, I remain constantly,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

P.S.[[13]](#footnote-13) I would appreciate it very much, if my highly honored Sirs could

work out a decision with the High and Mighty Lords of our most gracious government, by the authority of which I would be graciously commanded to remain here and assist the poor Anabaptists with advice and action until their full removal. Then on the one hand my mind would be so much more at ease, and on the other hand I could act with so much more authority and force.

[page 8]

P.S. Also, highly honored Sirs,

As much as I am able to perceive from Daniel Rychen, who was with me a few days ago, as from the other Mennonites of the Upper or Amish congregations,[[14]](#footnote-14) they have scruples as to whether they should promise their existing government at their departure that neither they nor their successors in their faith would ever again set foot in this land. This is indeed for two principal reasons: namely, a grievous war might drive them from the place of their settlement and compel and force them again to return here to their native fatherland; or the illustrious government here themselves might call them back again; in case of this they might not come back again because of the force of the above promise, etc.

I am doing as much as I can to remove these scruples. I hope, however, my highly honored Sirs, that by means of your circular letter I will be able to help them finally in the best manner. Accordingly, I should inform you of this so that you may have it in mind as you compose your circular letter.[[15]](#footnote-15) I am [the same] as in the [foregoing] letter.

1. 142 This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relaes (A 1392) on pp. 153-156. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Vorsterman’s Relaes, p. 153, gives this as Bruntutise. The French name is Porrentruy. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. He may be referring to Document 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Document 137 mentions this. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Vorsterman, p. 154, line 28, “aandringender wÿse.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This appears to be a slightly different term for the States General of Holland, which is usually “High and Mighty Lords.” “The illustrious Canton” is of course, Bern, and “my highly honored Sirs” means the Mennonite Committee in Holland. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Article 9 of Document 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Vorsterman, p. 155, line 9, says “de menigmal herhaalde bede.” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. He is referring to his wife who, he says in Document 138, dated February 21, had just given birth to a son in Schaffhausen. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. drittura, “directly” (Italian) with an alternative form, dirittura. He may be referring to letters sent to Schaffhausen, since in a recent letter he said he was going there, but then did not go, and so now needs copies of letters sent there. Vorsterman, p. 155, lines 18, 19, simply omits the word drittura and says, “Dienvolgende gelieven uwEE hunne bieven wederom op aan mÿ te senden….” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bucheggberg (in Swiss German Buëchiberg) was a territory of refuge for Bernese Anabaptists for a long time. Information from Hanspeter Jecker. Cf. Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See discussion of terms, Jäger and Fänger, in Lowry, Documents of Brotherly Love I, p. 35 n. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This first postscript is in the hand called Runckel 2; the other postscript and the rest of the letter are in Runckel 1. We know now that neither of the hands could be of Runckel’s wife because she was not at Bern, but in Schaffhausen at this time. From the present Document 142 and from Document 138 we know she was at Schaffhausen where she had so recently given birth to Runckel’s son. See note to Document 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Müller, p. 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Vorsterman, p. 156, lines 35-37, translates this sentence as follows: “waerom ik uwE hier van kennisse heb willen geeven, op dat uwE jn gemelde Circulairen brief daer op gelievete doelen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)