160. May 16, 1711. Letter from Runckel concerning a memorandum which he had sent earlier (see also Document 152,) and six copies of the circular drawn up by the Committee to stir the Swiss to come (translated into German). He says that Reformed relatives of Anabaptists want to use their exile as an opportunity to gain ownership of their possessions. He complains of the varied and long-extended meetings which he has with the Anabaptist Commission, the difficulties which they put in the way, and their unbending stance. But he also complains about the Mennonites themselves, who continue to remain in hiding and do not come forward. Ships are being built for the departure of the Mennonites.

[page 1]

Bern May 16, 1711

Highly respected, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs!

My last communication was from the 25th of the past month,[[1]](#footnote-1) which, I hope, has already been delivered with the enclosed memorandum. Also from it my highly honored Sirs will learn what sorts of limits are set for Anabaptist affairs here.

Since then, I have taken up my pen for the third time with the intention of finally giving my highly honored Sirs a suitable report of what has further occurred in this matter. But on the one hand, so many tasks have accrued to me concerning those Anabaptists who come here from the Palatinate, Zweibrücken, Lorraine, Alsace and Sundgau, Montbéliard, and the territory of the Bishop of Basel in order to completely remove their possessions still located in this land during the period of freedom. These tasks demand action more than writing out of papers. On the other hand, the illustrious Canton has made so much work in regard to the Bishop of Basel’s deputies who were here concerning the Münsterthal[[2]](#footnote-2) affair that the above-mentioned memorandum of all my steps, hurrying, asking, and legal inquiries, ignored by the so-called Anabaptist Commission, [page 2] was not delivered until

last Wednesday to the Sovereign Council,[[3]](#footnote-3) or as they style it, could not be delivered. For this reason, willingly or unwillingly, I had to make a halt to my correspondence so that I could render a much more thorough report of all occurrences.

From the memorandum transmitted, my highly honored Sirs will have learned the multitude of difficulties disclosed in the execution of the Anabaptist decree last issued here, and for this reason how I must have recourse to the Sovereign Council because nothing else was to be worked out with the Anabaptist Commission. Nevertheless, this latter [governing body], at the encouragement of the Small Council or Senate, allowed me to petition that I might appear before the Commission to discuss points in my memorandum[[4]](#footnote-4) and perhaps might discern how far we could agree with or understand one another, so as to relate so much the better and completely to the higher authority [that is, the Sovereign Council]. And this meeting occurred on April 28 and lasted around four hours, since it went rather heatedly at times on both sides, because I remained firm and steadfast on the real meaning of resolution set up with me and the subsequently published decree, but the Commission wants to explain it according to their idea and advantage.

The main points which were longest and most heatedly disputed were the first, second, third, fourth, eighth, and ninth.

Concerning the first, the Commission maintains their opinion, disregarding all [page 3] the reasons and grounds to which I appeal, and does not wish to know or hear of any alteration.

Concerning the second, the Commission was divided. Since the majority was on my side, it was finally passed after much debate.

Concerning the third, the Commission, disregarding all explanations and remonstrations, did not wish to allow any [other persons] back into the land [to settle up accounts] aside from the presently imprisoned Anabaptists,

and finally came up with the suggestion that this might happen through Reformed and trusted men who were acquainted with the Anabaptists. Whereupon, I declared that if it could not be otherwise, I must finally allow that to occur, yet with the proviso that the men employed are to be acceptable to me, also that this should be worked out at least without special expenses to the Anabaptists. Then, above all and foremost, we must wait to see whether the Sovereign Council wants to explain the fourth and eighth articles of my memorandum on the same basis as the Commission wishes. Or on the other hand, as I, the most congregations, and otherwise everybody, in fact, even the most uninformed farmers, will consider and understand, in case the first [course of action][[5]](#footnote-5) should occur, contrary to all my better hope and supposition, these men would have as little to do in this last case as the fifth wheel on a wagon.

From the foregoing it becomes clear that the Commission is inclined to allow as little as nothing to be restored to the persons mentioned in the fourth and eighth articles [page 4] and nothing can be gained from them, regardless of all efforts expended, work, and requests, and pleading, and remonstrating, and explanations, in this case neither from them, nor from the Sovereign Council, from whom however something better was presumed. In that case the persons mentioned in the eighth article, with a few exceptions, must depart again with empty hands. But those mentioned in the fourth article also will also leave the country with very few possessions.

Concerning the ninth article, among the others, in particular, [there was the [problem of the well] known Melchior Zahler, sent away the previous year, or even more [the problem of] his minor children and handsome resources remaining in the land. This created for us the most work, in that I employed all means humanly possible to work out matters for the father, as Daniel Rychen will testify for me.

But all was in vain, because the children, five in number, the oldest of them being twelve and the youngest five years old, with their overseers and guardians were brought here hastily from Frutigen and placed before me in

the Commission meeting. With tears and weeping they asked and entreated that they would not transport them out of the land, but would allow them to remain; also they repeated the same on the day afterwards in front of the Small Council, and everyone, as was easy to observe, was moved to sympathy. And because I could easily imagine that this was instilled in the poor children by their relatives and guardians, [page 5] I insisted earnestly that since they did not want to allow them to speak with their father himself, that the children should at the least be given to other quite impartial people for three or four days in order that they might have a shadow of a free choice about going to their father or not. But in spite of all related duties that might not be carried out, in complete disregard for this, they [the Commission] finally offered that the father content himself alone with the children, and he would allow all possessions, etc., to remain in the land, with which the relatives and guardians were mostly concerned.

Concerning the fifth and sixth articles, we reached an agreement that the said persons involved [would] share with one another according to local legal rights; and the inheritances not yet forfeited should remain open until the case comes up.

The seventh, tenth, and eleventh articles, however, are under the management of the government, and so we passed over them in agreement.

And essentially this is what happened in that meeting; I had hoped that henceforth all will prove useful. Consequently, I supposed the actual intent and final determination about the points contained in my memorandum to the illustrious Canton would be agreed upon now; but I could not bring it about, all my entreaties being disregarded.[[6]](#footnote-6) Since yesterday there was delivered to me from the government office here instead of a resolution about all the articles contained in my memorandum, for which I asked both in writing [page 6] and in person on every occasion, [a resolution] about not more than two articles, as my highly honored Sirs will see from the enclosed

copy. From this my highly honored Sirs can likewise perceive with what kind of people I have had to deal here and how I must obtain everything, indeed even the smallest concession, not otherwise than almost with force.

However, highly honored Sirs, when the present illustrious Canton and its appointed Anabaptist Commission make so much for me to do with their crooked maneuvers, the Anabaptists themselves certainly do not make me much less. Down to the present hour all my admonitions, reminders, requests, messages, wishes are ignored. I have not been able to get them to the place that they would supply the needed registers or lists, much less reveal their goods to be taken along and possessions and their locations. Of the dispatched circular letter, which for certain reason I had printed not here but in Basel, I am transmitting a half dozen copies to you, my highly honored Sirs. Of these I have already distributed some 8 days ago and some 14 days ago throughout the whole land, wherever I could suppose that some Anabaptists might be keeping themselves, and have distributed some through the imprisoned Anabaptists. To all of this no one, except two or three of those who have been in hiding has yet responded. But I must much more rather suppose that various persons would prefer to remove from the land with wife and children into Alsace than willingly report to me to be transported to Holland.

[page 7]

Nevertheless, may the confident hope remain that when they will have properly considered and reflected on my highly honored Sirs’ pastoral letter, they would rather change and have better thinking and then yield rather than desire to expose themselves further to the ever increasing danger.

As for my part, I do not yet wish to postpone this so vexing as well as burdensome business. But in the name of God Almighty I will continue to employ such means as will be humanly possible to bring it to its final conclusion, as much might be possible, with the assured hope, that those

who now may not be moved, perhaps in the future, with God’s help and at another favorable turn of affairs, would much more easily move forward.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Mr. George Ritter has not been able to bring the completion of the ships in the upper country to an end. So then we feel ourselves bound to prepare one in the upper country, the other four being here with local ship’s carpenters, so that at least nothing may be wanting on our part at the elapsed deadline. Thus at least those Anabaptists who wish to cooperate can depart.

With this, besides a mutual commitment into God’s strong

gracious protection, also the best commendation to your

fervent prayer and warmest greeting, I steadfastly remain

My especially highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

1. 160 This refers to Document 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There was a village and a valley called Münstertal in the Canton of Bern. Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon, XIV, 265. Gratz mentions a Münstertal in the jurisdiction of the Prince Bishop of Basel. Gratz, p. 44. No further information about this affair has come to light. For the disputes between Bern and the bishopric of Basel, see Robert Stähli, Die Auseinandersetzung des Fürstbischofs von Basel mit Bern um das Münstertal (Berner Jura) 1706-1711, ( Bern, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Great Council. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This memorandum is given in Document 152, where all the points are laid out in full. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The meaning of “the first” is perhaps refusing to allow Anabaptist leaders back into the land (and then the men appointed by government would be useless). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Vorsterman’s translation into Dutch (on p.182 of A 1392) gives: “En ik dienvolgens de eÿgentlyk mening en finael besluÿt over de Puncten jn mÿne Memorie vervat soude verneemen, soo heb ik dog met al mÿn aansoek het d…Niet kunnen brengen…” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Vorsterman (on p. 182) translates “desto leichter von statten gehen werde” into Dutch as “des te lichter sal voortgaen.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)