210. October 25, 1711. In a letter to the Committee for Foreign Needs, Runckel presses his earlier request concerning expenses and asks that the Committee write a letter to the local Dutch government where the Swiss exiles have arrived. He reports that nothing has been decided concerning Hans Gerber. He hopes that Gerber’s stubbornness can be changed into true steadfastness and serve as an example for his fellow believers. He sends in addition a copy of his letter to the States (Provincial Council) of Groningen and surrounding territories in order to request their support in writing.

 Enclosure: Copy of a letter dated October 22 from Runckel to the States of Groningen[[1]](#footnote-1) in answer to their request for information. He states that the Mennonites are being driven out of Bern only because of their sentiments concerning the oath and bearing arms, but that they have lived exemplary lives and in their convictions quite agree with the Dutch Mennonites. Yet they have had to endure much from the Bernese authorities.

 The contrast in tone of these two letters, of complaint and praise, is remarkable, but perhaps not uncharacteristic of a diplomat.

[page 1]

Schaffhausen,[[2]](#footnote-2) October 25, 1711.

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sirs,

My last letters were from the 13th of the previous month and the 11th of the present, which I hope will have safely arrived, to whose contents I refer and to the request contained therein, which I most urgently again repeat.

Moreover, my highly honored Sirs will have fully learned from the enclosed copies both what the noble High and Mighty Lords of the Ommelanden[[3]](#footnote-3) between the Eems and Lauwers Rivers have been pleased to have transmitted to me concerning the Bernese Mennonites, who have arrived with them, as well as what I had the honor to answer them in return.

It would facilitate this matter and accordingly not be unserviceable, in my opinion, that these good people might come to their goal sooner and,

as a result, find shelter, if my highly honored Sirs themselves would be so good as to write in favor of their [page 2] Bernese fellow believers to the noble High and Mighty Lords of the Ommelanden between the Eems and Lauwers, in case you have not already done so, and at the same time enclose with that a copy of your confession of faith. Then they might see from it that [these people] completely agree with the Dutch Mennonites in this case, and that they, for their part, might experience not even the least unpleasantness.

Concerning the Anabaptist Hans Gerber from Aspi,[[4]](#footnote-4) captured once more, nothing remarkable has turned up since my last letter. They assured me, however, that his case will be one of the first to be taken up right after the holidays. May the Most High have mercy on him and transform his previous stubbornness into a proper Christian steadfastness, and also grant him the necessary patience in order that he might overcome the troubles awaiting him with true Christian resignation. May God, through this anticipated example, open the eyes of reason in his brethren scattered in the area to such an extent that they might now thoroughly recognize what serves to their spiritual and natural peace. They might then turn over a new leaf and not lead themselves further into temptation against God, nor against their exalted government, which has been ordained for them by God, and [page 3] may not provoke the former to wrath, nor cause themselves impatience or despair. Should it be, however, God’s will to leave them in temptation longer, may his Fatherly will come to pass, only may He grant them His strength and power so that they battle on valiantly and might bear away the victory and gain eternal life.

Thus, in anticipation of a prompt answer to my first letter dated the 13th of the past month and [your] valued decision concerning my last most

urgent request, also with a mutual commitment into God’s powerful, gracious protection and the best commendation of myself and mine to your devoted prayer, I remain continually,

My highly honored Sirs’

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

P.S.

If my highly honored Sirs wish

to do something on my behalf,

it is high time because

my matters will certainly be brought

before their High and Mighty Lords

very soon without fail. I do not suppose

that any mistrust of my reliability

and honesty is conjectured.

The accounts submitted will demonstrate that not one heller[[5]](#footnote-5)

will be thought to come short, nor also that the least amount will

be held back.

[page 4]

The outstanding debts will be paid down to the last heller,

yes, rather drawn from my own means than allow

these poor people to come one kreutzer short. That is to say,

may there be thanks to God, the most High, both by me

and by them. “It is more blessed to give

than to receive.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

[page 5]

Copy.

Very worthy, stern,

My especially highly honored Sir,

I have fully learned from your honored communication under the date of the 6th of the current month the [information] which, by the command of the noble, High and Mighty Lords of the Ommelanden between the Eems

and the Lauwers,[[7]](#footnote-7) they wished to have delivered to me about the Mennonites from the Canton of Bern, who have arrived there and desire to make a settlement in that place.

Since my duty now requires both a most obedient response to the desire of the noble High and Mighty Lords of the Ommelanden, and a witness to the truth as far as it is given to me, I shall not be lacking in fully truthful service to my highly honored Sirs [in reporting] herewith:

The said Mennonites, from no other cause than their confession of faith which agrees with the Dutch, specifically with the Frisian Mennonites, both in doctrine and in life, are obliged to go out of the illustrious Canton of Bern, as indeed can easily be seen from the accompanying official decree, through the [friendly] lofty intervention of the High and Mighty Lords of the States General as well as his royal Majesty in Prussia, not however because of any misdeed or evil conduct except that they wished to baptize [and yet exercise] their natural longing and inclination [to remain in] their native fatherland.

In fact, on the part of the illustrious Canton of Bern nothing was known to [justify] finding fault with the quiet as well as exemplary outward life of these good people, [page 6] in order to publicly prosecute them, [except] to have reasonable doubts on account of their confession of faith. While the constitution of these lands does not permit standing mercenary troops, but in case of emergency the farmer must act as soldier, they [Bern] were unwilling to allow and tolerate such confessions of faith, which reject the use of weapons, and consequently might with time rob the country of its natural protection and defense.

The said Canton of Bern, chiefly for three political reasons, has pressed for their emigration and has dealt with them rather harshly from time to time because a few of these good people out of human weakness cling too much to their earthly fatherland and natural relationships. They [the Anabaptists] rather endure everything than to give up completely, until finally, at the request of the Mennonites in the Netherlands, the High and Mighty Lords [of the States General] and his royal Majesty of Prussia stepped in between and even got them, by the grace of God, to acknowledge

their own true best interest and brought about a free departure for them by means of the above cited decree, which at the same time is the latest judgment pronounced against these people.

The three points they were charged with were that 1. they do not recognize the government; 2. they do not swear an oath of allegiance; and   
3. in case of need for protection of the Fatherland, they are not willing to take up weapons.

As far as the first is concerned, in this case these good people calmly and clearly indicated that [the regime] blames them too much; that in the above cited [page 7] mandate of the illustrious Canton of Bern no further mention is made [of the first point] and only the last two are insisted on.

With regard to the last two points the following explanation was presented to the illustrious Canton of Bern in equal detail: Because these people hold according to the command of Christ that their yea is yea and their nay is nay, and that in case they act contrary to that, they expect to be punished as perjured persons. Also, instead of taking up arms themselves, they offer to give a certain sum of money for the maintenance of hired soldiers.[[8]](#footnote-8) All this might not bear the least fruit, nor have any result on account of the nature of the government because it is not unreasonable to fear that, in particular, this last [point] might explode in an evil, highly destructive, and detrimental consequence for the canton when in the case of emergency the other citizens would have to take up arms.[[9]](#footnote-9)

To express the essence of the matter, these people must turn their backs on their natural and native Fatherland for the sake of no other outward and known reasons than that they do not want to swear an oath or take up arms. So far as their other points of belief, which agree with those which the Dutch Mennonites certainly confess and embrace, concerning those, the best information can be obtained there [in the Netherlands].

And this is an answer which should serve duly, obediently, and with the certitude of the truth, the noble, High and Mighty Lords of the Ommelanden through the channel of my highly honored Sirs.

[page 8] To this I yet add that the illustrious Canton of Bern would never have approved the removal of these people, considering their pious, quiet, retired, and exemplary life, also their industrious attention to their business, and outstanding, good farming, if the constitution of their government and the internal relations with the other cantons and the situation and character of the land had not, as it were, compelled them.

With all of this, it is yet to be considered that these Bernese Mennonites, who have reported to your noble, High and Mighty Lords of the Ommelanden, have mostly left their Fatherland voluntarily in order to carry out their duties to God with so much more freedom and safety under the never sufficiently praised government of the Seven United Provinces.[[10]](#footnote-10) Accordingly, they will also employ the greatest industry as truly faithful subjects and conduct themselves most obediently and humbly after the example of their Dutch fellow believers.

With which [I close], etc., etc.

Schaffhausen, October 22, 1711.

1. 210 Governmental body, States of Groningen and Ommelands. Israel, pp. 248, 703. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This document is translated into Dutch in Vorsterman’s Relies (A 1392) on pp. 238-239,   
   240-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ommelanden refers to the land surrounding a place, here specifically around Groningen. Verklarend Handwoordenboek der Nederlandse taal by M. J. Koenen and J. B. Drewes (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1979.) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. There is an Aspi south of Lauperswil near Langnau, where Hans Gerber and his wife Verena Lüthi had been living at least since 1701. Before, they lived at Wingey in the same parish of Langnau. Kirchenbuch Langnau 7, 120. Hanspeter Jecker supplied this information. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. a very small coin, a farthing. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Acts 20:35. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Eems, a broad river mouth on the east of Groningen; Lauwers, a river on the border of Friesland and Groningen. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Diplomat Runckel here may be straining the Swiss Anabaptist position in the direction of what government officials would wish to hear. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This sentence in the original is obscure. Vorsterman (p. 241) translates this as: “Maer sulx alles heeft wegens de beschapenheyd der regeering niet het geringste verandering kunnen, uÿt te werken, En wel te minder on dat de selve zoo zÿ meenen met reden vreesen dat dit laeste bÿ de overige onderdanen die jn geval van nood het geweer moeten op vatten, van een kwaad en het Canton ten hoogsten schadelyk gevolg strekken mogt.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In 1648 the Spanish were compelled to recognize the independence of the Netherlands as the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands [Provinces]. De Bosatlas van Nederland, (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff Atlasproducties, 2007), p. 46. Israel, p. 596. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)