216. December 17, 1711. Runckel reports the receipt of twenty-five copies of a tract and five copies of a little book by Gerrit Roosen, sent from Amsterdam, which he has read with exceptional satisfaction. However, he considers a German translation of the tract greatly needed, above all for the benefit of the younger generation from the Reformed Church. Concerning the prisoners he knows nothing further. Hans Stauffer had reached Mannheim. Runckel also considers leaving the country to be advised for all the others.

[page 1]

Schaffhausen, December 17, 1711.

Very worthy, etc.

My especially highly honored Sir,[[1]](#footnote-1)

My last communication to the gentlemen of the entire Committee was on the 3rd of the present month, which I hope has safely arrived with the enclosed accounts. Since then I have had the honor to receive the very welcome communication of my highly honored Sir dated August 10, finally, by way of Bern with the enclosed twenty-five copies of the very remarkable tract issued by you as also the five copies of the booklet[[2]](#footnote-2) published by Mr. Gerrit Roosen in good condition. As I now remain greatly obliged to my highly honored Sir because of several matters, thus I have also not failed to read both tracts through very attentively and to observe several points to my not negligible edification. I wish heartily that everywhere, but in particular at Bern, they might have the same effect.

This could be hoped for, provided that my highly honored Sir would also have the very discerning booklet translated into German[[3]](#footnote-3) since Dutch [page 2] is mostly unknown or at best very little used in this country and accordingly is quite foreign. Nevertheless, I will not omit, as opportunity comes, to share several copies with good friends, who will then make them known more widely.

Aside from this, however, because the Mennonite religion suffers the

most abuse in Germany and by Germans because of a false prejudice that it originates from Müntzer’s followers or from the Münsterite fanaticism[[4]](#footnote-4) and agrees with that, it would not be unserviceable if my highly honored Sir would translate the little tract also into German and make it commonly available. By such means in the future, a stop would be put to such prejudice against the Anabaptists and an implanted hindrance for the tender youth from earliest age.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Individuals, once bigoted, will scarcely surrender their established illusions without some special grace of God, but rather, contrary to better knowledge and conscience, very stubbornly insist upon them, also not so much as to reflect on the coming generation (as a third consideration)[[6]](#footnote-6) and then to strive that they might be guarded from so destructive a prejudice with the help of God, for [page 3]

“A fresh earthen pot, once it has been filled,[[7]](#footnote-7) will keep its odor

for a long time.”

By the way, I consider my highly honored Sir’s very judicious thoughts about those happenings at Bern to be quite in harmony with the idea I myself have formed about this matter. I have on given occasions not failed to lay out unabashedly the sentiments which I cherish in this case to several gentlemen. Since they did not know how to answer me except with shrugging the shoulders, I remain with my originally conceived opinion: Specifically, here at Bern, if the matter had not already gone so far that at that juncture they could no longer consider fairness and propriety, but they had to view it as a point of honor, reputation, and authority of the government, the events of this affair would surely have turned out quite differently than has happened, with positions so extremely hardened and stiffened.

Accordingly, I also firmly believe that if the unfortunate, oppressed, and persecuted Anabaptists in the Bern area could have decided, in [line with]

the recent so favorable events, to yield to kind and well-intentioned suggestions and proposals, in order to please their native government and to withdraw from the country, until their persecutors and Herods[[8]](#footnote-8) perhaps died, or until God changed their stony hearts[[9]](#footnote-9) [page 4] into flesh or otherwise moved providentially, with the help of the Almighty the spirit of persecution would have been completely extinguished and have ceased within ten years. Since, in contrast, I seriously fear much more the contrary under the given circumstances, I can also imagine nothing other than that God would still longer put to the test either the love, patience, and endurance of the gentlemen of Bern, or the trusting patience, steadfastness, and Gelassenheit[[10]](#footnote-10) of the unfortunate Anabaptists, and that both parties would still further persevere [in their attitudes].

Since my last letter I have learned nothing of the Anabaptists recently imprisoned at Bern. The previously mentioned Hans Stauffer has since passed through here with his wife and three sons and afterwards traveled to Mannheim to Bendicht Brechtbühl[[11]](#footnote-11) in order to escape the imminent danger.

With this, besides a mutual commitment to divine protection, and best commendation of myself and mine to my highly honored Sir’s devoted prayer and also a cordial greeting to the other gentlemen of the Committee, I am continually and remain,

My highly honored Sir’s

Most devoted servant,

Johann Ludwig Runckel.

1. 216 This is addressed to just one person, probably Hermannus Schijn, author of the “remarkable tract.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Piet Visser believes the 25 copies are of Hermannus Schijn’s Zeedige Verantwoording der Mennoniten (1710) and the 5 copies are of Roosen’s Unschuld und Gegen-bericht (1702) because both writings refute a relationship with the Münster Anabaptists. Broeders in de geest (Deventer: Uitgeverij Sub Rosa, 1988), II, 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This lends weight to Visser’s idea in footnote 2 that the 25 tracts were the writing in Dutch by Schijn, although van Sittert’s statement of faith and translation of the Dordrecht Confession were available in German already in 1664 and were reprinted in 1711. See also Document 48 of July 12, 1710, where Runckel asks for a Mennonite confession of faith in German, and Document 60 of August 30, 1710, where he asks for the same thing. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also Document 48 where Runckel complains that many confuse the Swiss Mennonites with the followers of Thomas Müntzer and also those at the city of Münster. It is interesting that even at this early date in Anabaptist historiography an outsider sympathetic with the Mennonites could easily make this distinction while others did not recognize it. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. He seems to say that the use of such a booklet would keep Reformed youth from developing anti-Anabaptist prejudice. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The meaning here is obscure, perhaps “an unknown third matter” as in tertium quid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “filled” implies with something wet. Latin proverb. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Matt. 2:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ezek. 11:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. yieldedness. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a further study of Brechtbühl, see Hanspeter Jecker, “Bendicht Brechtbühl (1666-1720)—Täuferlehrer, Brückenbauer und Genzüberschreiter aus dem Emmental,” Mennonitica Helvetica 36 (2013) pp. 105-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)