

Chapter I

Introductory—The Electors of Cologne in the Eighteenth Century—Joseph Clemens, Clemens August and Max Friedrich—The Electoral Courts and Their Music—Musical Culture in Bonn at the Time of Beethoven's Birth—Appearance of the City in 1770.

ONE of the compensations for the horrors of the French Revolution was the sweeping away of many of the petty sovereignties into which Germany was divided, thereby rendering in our day a union of the German People and the rise of a German Nation possible. The first to fall were the numerous ecclesiastical-civil members of the old, loose confederation, some of which had played no ignoble nor unimportant part in the advance of civilization; but their day was past. The people of these states had in divers respects enjoyed a better lot than those who were subjects of hereditary rulers, and the old German saying: "It is good to dwell under the crook," had a basis of fact. At the least, they were not sold as mercenary troops; their blood was not shed on foreign fields to support their princes' ostentatious splendor, to enable mistresses and ill-begotten children to live in luxury and riot. But the antiquated ideas to which the ecclesiastical rulers held with bigoted tenacity had become a barrier to progress, the exceptions being too few to render their farther existence desirable. These members of the empire, greatly differing in extent, population, wealth and political influence, were ruled with few or no exceptions by men who owed their positions to election by chapters or other church corporations, whose numbers were so limited as to give full play to every sort of intrigue; but they could not assume their functions until their titles were confirmed by the Pope as head of the church, and by the Emperor as head of the confederation. Thus the subject had no voice in the matter, and it hardly need be said that his welfare and prosperity were never included among the motives and considerations on which the elections turned.

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The sees, by their charters and statutes, we think without exception, were bestowed upon men of noble birth. They were benefices and sinecures for younger sons of princely houses; estates set apart and consecrated to the use, emolument and enjoyment of German John Lacklands. In the long list of their incumbents, a name here and there appears, that calls up historic associations;—a man of letters who aided in the increase or diffusion of the cumbrous learning of his time; a warrior who exchanged his robes for a coat of mail; a politician who played a part more or less honorable or the reverse in the affairs and intrigues of the empire, and, very rarely, one whose daily walk and conversation reflected, in some measure, the life and principles of the founder of Christianity. In general, as they owed their places wholly to political and family influences, so they assumed the vows and garb of churchmen as necessary steps to the enjoyment of lives of affluence and pleasure. So late as far into the eighteenth century, travelling was slow, laborious and expensive. Hence, save for the few more wealthy and powerful, journeys, at long intervals, to a council, an imperial coronation or a diet of the empire, were the rare interruptions to the monotony of their daily existence. Not having the power to transmit their sees to their children, these ecclesiastics had the less inducement to rule with an eye to the welfare of their subjects: on the other hand, the temptation was very strong to augment their revenues for the benefit of relatives and dependents, and especially for the gratification of their own tastes and inclinations, among which the love of splendor and ostentatious display was a fruitful source of waste and extravagance.

Confined so largely to their own small capitals, with little intercourse except with their immediate neighbors, they were far more dependent upon their own resources for amusement than the hereditary princes: and what so obvious, so easily obtained and so satisfactory as music, the theatre and the dance! Thus every little court became a conservatory of these arts, and for generations most of the great names in them may be found recorded in the court calendars. One is therefore not surprised to learn how many of the more distinguished musical composers began life as singing boys in cathedral choirs of England and Germany. The secular princes, especially those of high rank, had, besides their civil administration, the stirring events of war, questions of public policy, schemes and intrigues for the advancement of family interests and the like, to engage their attention; but the ecclesiastic, leaving the civil administration, as a rule,

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in the hands of ministers, had little to occupy him officially but a tedious routine of religious forms and ceremonies; to him therefore the theatre, and music for the mass, the opera, the ball-room, and the salon, were matters of great moment—they filled a wide void and were cherished accordingly.

The three German ecclesiastical princes who possessed the greatest power and influence were the Archbishops of Mayence, Trèves and Cologne—Electors of the Empire and rulers of the fairest regions of the Rhine. Peace appears hardly to have been known between the city of Cologne and its earlier archbishops; and, in the thirteenth century, a long-continued and even bloody quarrel resulted in the victory of the city. It remained a free imperial town. The archbishops retained no civil or political power within its walls, not even the right to remain there more than three days at any one time. Thus it happened, that in the year 1257 Archbishop Engelbert selected Bonn for his residence, and formally made it the capital of the electorate, as it remained until elector and court were swept away in 1794.

Of the last four Electors of Cologne, the first was Joseph Clemens, a Bavarian prince, nephew of his predecessor Maximilian Heinrich. The choice of the chapter by a vote of thirteen to nine had been Cardinal Fürstenberg; but his known, or supposed, devotion to the interests of the French king had prevented the ratification of the election by either the Emperor or the Pope. A new one being ordered, resulted in favor of the Bavarian, then a youth of eighteen years. The Pope had ratified his election and appointed a bishop to perform his ecclesiastical functions *ad interim*, and the Emperor invested him with the electoral dignity December 1, 1689. Vehse says of him:

Like two of his predecessors he was the incumbent of five sees; he was Archbishop of Cologne, Bishop of Hildesheim, Liège, Ratisbon and Freisingen. His love for pomp and splendor was a passion which he gratified in the magnificence of his court. He delighted to draw thither beautiful and intellectual women. Madame de Raysbeck, and Countess Fugger, wife of his chief equerry, were his declared favorites. For seventeen years, that is, until the disastrous year 1706, when Fénelon consecrated him, he delayed assuming his vows. He held the opinion, universal in the courts of those days, that he might with a clear conscience enjoy life after the manner of secular princes. In pleasing the ladies, he was utterly regardless of expense, and for their amusement gave magnificent balls, splendid masquerades, musical and dramatic entertainments, and hunting parties.

St. Simon relates that several years of his exile were passed at Valenciennes, where, though a fugitive, he followed the same

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round of costly pleasures and amusements. He also records one of the Elector's jests which in effrontery surpasses anything related of his contemporary, Dean Swift. Some time after his consecration, he caused public notice to be given, that on the approaching first of April he would preach. At the appointed time he mounted the pulpit, bowed gravely, made the sign of the cross, shouted "Zum April!" (April fool!), and retired amid a flourish of trumpets and the rolling of drums.

Dr. Ennen labors energetically to prove that Joseph Clemens's fondness in later years for joining in all grand church ceremonies rested upon higher motives than the mere pleasure of displaying himself in his magnificent robes; and affirms that after assuming his priestly vows he led a life devoted to the church and worthy of his order; thenceforth never seeing Madame de Raysbeck, mother of his illegitimate children, except in the presence of a third person. It seems proper to say this much concerning a prince whose electorship is the point of departure for notices of music and musicians in Bonn during the eighteenth century; a prince whose fondness for the art led him at home and in exile to support both vocal and instrumental bands on a scale generous for that age; and who, moreover, made some pretensions to the title of composer himself, as we learn from a letter which under date of July 20, 1720, he wrote to a court councillor Rauch to accompany eleven of his motets. It is an amusingly frank letter, beginning with a confession that he was an *Ignorant* who knew nothing about notes and had absolutely no knowledge of *musique*, wherefore he admits that his manner of composing is "very odd," being compelled to sing anything that came into his head to a composer whose duty it was to bring the ideas to paper. Nevertheless he is quite satisfied with himself. "At all events I must have a good ear and *gusto*, for the public that has heard has always approved. But the *methodum* which I have adopted is that of the bees that draw and collect the honey from the sweetest flowers; so, also, I have taken all that I have composed from good masters whose *Musikalien* pleased me. Thus I freely confess my pilfering, which others deny and try to appropriate what they have taken from others. Let no one, therefore, get angry if he hears old arias in it, for, as they are beautiful, the old is not deprived of its praise. . . . I ascribe everything to the grace of God who enlightened me, the unknowing, to do these things." Not all "composers," royal or mean, are as honest as the old Elector!

It is fortunate for the present purpose, that the portion of the electoral archives discovered after a lapse of nearly seventy

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years and now preserved at Düsseldorf, consists so largely of documents relating to the musical establishment of the court at Bonn during the last century of its existence. They rarely afford information upon the character of the music performed, but are sufficiently complete, when supplemented by the annual Court Calendars, to determine with reasonable correctness the number, character, position and condition of its members. The few petitions and decrees hereafter to be given in full because of their connection with the Beethovens, suffice for specimens of the long series of similar documents, uniform in character and generally of too little interest to be worth transcription.

In 1695 a decree issued at Liège by Joseph Clemens, then in that city as titular bishop, though not consecrated, adds three new names to the "Hoff-Musici," one of which, Van den Eeden, constantly reappears in the documents and calendars down to the year 1782. From a list of payments at Liège in the second quarter of 1696, we find that Henri Vandeneden (Heinrich Van den Eeden) was a bass singer, and that the aggregate of vocalists, instrumentists, with the organ-blower (*calcant*), was eighteen persons.

Returned to Bonn, Joseph Clemens resumed his plan of improving his music, and for those days of small orchestras and niggardly salaries he set it upon a rather generous foundation. A decree of April 1, 1698, put in force the next month, names 22 persons with salaries aggregating 8,890 florins.

After the death of Maximilian Heinrich the government passed into the hands of Cardinal Fürstenberg, his coadjutor, who owed the position to the intrigues of Louis XIV, and now used it by all possible means to promote French interests. The king's troops under French commanders, he admitted into the principal towns of the electorate, and, for his own protection, a French garrison of 10,000 men into Bonn. War was the consequence; an imperial army successfully invaded the province, and, advancing to the capital, subjected its unfortunate inhabitants to all the horrors of a relentless siege, that ended October 15, 1689, in the expulsion of the garrison, now reduced to some 3900 men, of whom 1500 were invalids. Yet in the war of the Spanish Succession which opened in 1701, notwithstanding the terrible lesson taught only eleven years before, the infatuated Joseph Clemens embraced the party of Louis. Emperor Leopold treated him with singular mildness, in vain. The Elector persisted. In 1702 he was therefore excluded from the civil government and fled from Bonn, the ecclesiastical authority in Cologne being empowered by the Emperor to rule in his stead. The next year, the

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great success of the French armies against the allies was celebrated by Joseph Clemens with all pomp in Namur, where he then was; but his triumph was short. John Churchill, then Earl of Marlborough, took the field as commander-in-chief of the armies of the allies. His foresight, energy and astonishing skill in action justified Addison's simile—whether sublime or only pompous—of the angel riding in the whirlwind and directing the storm. He was soon at Cologne, whence he despatched Cohorn to besiege Bonn. That great general executed his task with such skill and impetuosity, that on May 15 (1703) all was ready for storming the city, when d'Allègre, the French commander, offered to capitulate, and on the 19th was allowed to retire. "Now was Bonn for the third time wrested from the hands of the French and restored to the archbishopric, but alas, in a condition that aroused indignation, grief and compassion on all sides," says Müller.

Leopold was still kindly disposed toward Joseph Clemens, but he died May 5, 1705, and his successor, Joseph I, immediately declared him under the ban of the Empire. This deprived him of the means and opportunities, as Elector, for indulging his passion for pomp and display, while his neglect hitherto, under dispensations from the Pope, to take the vows necessary to the performance of ecclesiastical functions, was likewise fatal to that indulgence as archbishop. But this could be remedied; Fénelon, the famous Archbishop of Cambray, ordained him subdeacon August 15, 1706; the Bishop of Tournay made him deacon December 8, and priest on the 25th; on January 1, 1707, he read his first mass at Lille, and indulged his passion for parade to the full, as a pamphlet describing the incident, and silver and copper medals commemorating it, still evince. "Two years later, May 1, 1709, Joseph Clemens received from Fénelon in Ryssel (Lille) episcopal consecration and the pallium."—(Müller.) Upon the victory of Oudenarde by Marlborough, and the fall of Lille, he took refuge in Mons. The treaty of Rastadt, March, 1714, restored him to his electoral dignities and he returned to the Rhine; but Dutch troops continued to hold Bonn until December 11, 1715. On the morning of that day they evacuated the city and in the afternoon the Elector entered in a grand, solemn procession commemorated by an issue of silver medals.

During all these vicissitudes Joseph Clemens, from whatever source he derived the means, did not suffer his music to deteriorate and, returned to Bonn, no sooner was the public business regulated and restored to its former routine than he again turned his attention to its improvement.

THE RULE OF ELECTOR CLEMENS AUGUST 7

Joseph Clemens died November 12, 1723, having previously secured the succession to his nephew Clemens August, last of the five Electors of Cologne of the Bavarian line. The new incumbent, third son of Maximilian Emanuel, Elector of Bavaria and his second wife, a daughter of the celebrated John Sobieski of Poland, was born August 17, 1700, at Brussels, where his father resided at the time as Governor General. From his fourth to his fifteenth year he had been held in captivity by the Austrians at Klagenfurt and Gratz; then, having been destined for the church, he spent several years at study in Rome. As a child in 1715 he had been appointed coadjutor to the Bishop of Regensburg; in 1719 he was elected to the two sees of Paderborn and Münster made vacant by the death of his brother Moritz, was chosen coadjutor to his uncle of Cologne in 1722, made his solemn entry into Bonn as elector May 15, 1724, was the same year also elected Bishop of Hildesheim, in 1725 Provost of the Cathedral at Liège, 1728 Bishop of Osnabrück, and, finally, in 1732 reached the dignity of Grand Master of the Teutonic Order.

His rule is distinguished in the annals of the electorate for little else than the building, repairing, renewing and embellishing of palaces, hunting-seats, churches, convents, and other edifices. At Bonn he erected the huge pile the foundation of which had been laid by his uncle, now the seat of the university. The handsome City Hall was also his work; the villa at Poppelsdorf was enlarged by him into a small palace, Clemensruhe, now the University Museum of Natural History. In Brühl, the Augustusburg, now a Prussian royal palace, dates from his reign, and Münster, Mergentheim, Arnsherg and other places show similar monuments of his prodigality in the indulgence of his taste for splendor. "Monstrous were the sums," says Dr. Ennen, "squandered by him in the purchase of splendid ornaments, magnificent equipages, furniture costly for its variety, and of curious works of art; upon festivities, sleighing-parties, masquerades, operas, dramas and ballets; upon charlatans, swindlers, female vocalists, actors and dancers. His theatre and opera alone cost him 50,000 thalers annually and the magnificence of his masked balls, twice a week in winter, is proof sufficient that no small sums were lavished upon them."

The aggregate of the revenues derived from the several states of which Clemens August was the head nowhere appears; but the civil income of the electorate alone had, in his later years, risen from the million of florins of his predecessor to about the same number of thalers—an increase of some 40 per centum;

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added to this were large sums derived from the church, and subsidies from Austria, France and the sea-coast states amounting to at least 14,000,000 francs; indeed, during the Elector's last ten years the French subsidies alone made an aggregate of at least 7,300,000 francs; in 1728 Holland paid on account of the Clemens Canal 76,000 thalers. At the centennial opening of the strong-box of the Teutonic Order he obtained the fat accumulations of a hundred years; and 25 years later he opened it again. Yet, though during his rule peace was hardly interrupted in his part of Europe, he plunged ever deeper and more inextricably into debt, leaving one of large proportions as his legacy to his successor. He was a bad ruler, but a kindly, amiable and popular man. How should he know or feel the value of money or the necessity of prudence? His childhood had been spent in captivity, his student years in Rome, where, precisely at that period, poetry and music were cultivated, if not in very noble and manly forms, at least with a Medicean splendor. The society of the Arcadians was in full activity. True, both Clemens August and his brother were under the age which enabled them to be enrolled as "Shepherds," and consequently their names appear neither in Crescembini nor in Quadrio; but it is not to be supposed that two young princes, already bishops by election and certain of still higher dignities in the future, were excluded from the palaces of Ruspoli and Ottoboni, from those brilliant literary, artistic and luxurious circles in which, only half a dozen years before, their young countryman, the musician Handel, had found so cordial a welcome. Those were very expensive tastes, as the citation from Ennen shows, which the future elector brought with him from Rome. Italian palaces, Italian villas, churches, gardens, music, songstresses, mistresses, an Italian holy staircase on the Kreuzberg (leading to nothing); Italian pictures, mosaics and, what not? All these things cost money—but must he not have them?

This elector is perhaps the only archbishop on record to whose epitaph may truthfully be added: "He danced out of this world into some other";—which happened in this wise: Having, in the winter of 1760-61, by some unexpected stroke of good fortune, succeeded in obtaining from the usually prudent and careful bankers of Holland a loan of 80,000 thalers, he embraced the opportunity of making a long-desired visit to his family in Munich. Owing to a sudden attack of illness he was once on the point of turning back soon after leaving Bonn. He persevered, however, reached Coblenz and crossed over to the palace of the Elector of Trèves at Ehrenbreitstein, where he arrived at 4 P.M.

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February 5, 1761. At dinner an hour later he was unable to eat; but at the ball, which followed, he could not resist the fascination of the Baroness von Waldendorf—sister of His Transparency of Trèves—and danced with her “eight or nine turns.” Of course he could not refuse a similar compliment to several other ladies. The physical exertion of dancing, joined to the excitement of the occasion and following a dreary winter-day’s journey, was too much for the enfeebled constitution of a man of sixty years. He fainted in the ballroom, was carried to his chamber and died next day.

It seems to have been the etiquette, that when an elector breathed his last, the musical chapel expired with him. At all events, no other explanation appears of the fact that so many of the petitions for membership, which are still preserved, should be signed by men who had already been named in the Court Calendars. It is also to be remarked that some of the petitioners receive appointments “without salary.” These seem to have been appointments of the kind, which in later years were distinguished in the records and in the calendars by the term “accessist,” and which, according to the best lights afforded by the archives, may be considered as having been provisional, until the incumbent had proved his skill and capacity, or until a vacancy occurred through the death or resignation of some old member. There are indications that the “accessists,” though without fixed salary, received some small remuneration for their services; but this is by no means certain. It would seem that both vocalists and instrumentists who received salaries out of the state revenues were limited to a fixed number; that the amount of funds devoted to this object was also strictly limited and the costs incurred by the engagement of superior artists with extra salaries, or by an increase of the number, were defrayed from the Elector’s privy purse; that the position of “accessist” was sought by young musicians as a stepping-stone to some future vacancy which, when acquired, insured a gradually increasing income during the years of service and a small pension when superannuated; that the etiquette of the court demanded, even in cases when the Elector expressly called some distinguished artist to Bonn, that the appointment should be apparently only in gracious answer to an humble petition, and that, with few exceptions, both singers and members of the orchestra were employed in the church, the theatre and the concert-room.

Clemens August made his formal entry into Bonn, May 15, 1724. A number of petitions are passed over, but one granted

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“without salary” on February 18, 1727, from Van den Eeden must be given in its entirety:

Supplique tres humble a S. A. S. E. de Cologne
 pour Gille Vandeneet.

BONN, d. 18 Feb., 1727.

Prince Serenissime,
 Monsigneur.

Vandeneet vient avec tout le respect qui luy est possible se mettre aux pieds de V. A. S. E. luy représenter qu’ayant eu l’honneur d’avoir estre second organiste de feu S. A. S. E. d’heureuse memoire, elle daigne luy vouloir faire la même grace ne demendant aucun gage si long tems qu’il plaira a V. A. S. E. promettant la servir avec soin et diligence. Quoi faisant etc. etc.

On the same date Van den Eeden received his appointment as second court organist. June 8, 1728, a decree is issued granting him a salary of 100 florins. To a third petition the next year, signed Van den Eeden, the answer is an increase of his salary to 200 thalers, and thus a future instructor of Ludwig van Beethoven becomes established in Bonn. The records need not concern us now until we reach the following, which forms part of the history of the grandfather of the subject of this biography:

March, 1733,

DECRETUM

For Ludovicum van Beethoven as Electoral Court Musician.

Cl. A. Whereas His Serene Highness Elector of Cologne, Duke Clemens August in Upper and Lower Bavaria, etc. Our Gracious Lord having, on the humble petition of Ludovico van Beethoven, graciously declared and received him as Court Musician, and assigned him an annual salary of 400 florins Rhenish, the present decree under the gracious hand of His Serene Electoral Highness and the seal of the Privy Chancellor, is granted to him, and the Electoral Councillor and Paymaster Risack is herewith commanded to pay the said Beethoven the 400 fl. *quartaliter* from the beginning of this year and to make a proper accounting thereof. B. . . . March, 1733.

Thirteen years later we find this:

Allowance of an additional 100 Thalers annually to the Chamber Musician van Beethoven.

Inasmuch as His Serene Highness Elector of Cologne, Duke Clement August of Upper and Lower Bavaria, our most Gracious Lord has increased the salary of his Chamber Musician van Beethoven by the addition of 100 thalers annually which became due through the death of Joseph Kayser, instrument maker, the Court Chamber Councillor and Paymaster Risach is hereby informed and graciously commanded to