CHAPTER VI

THE MINOR MASTERS OF THE BELLINIESQUE TRADITION: DIANA, MOSETTO, MARCO BELLO, DUIA, JACOPO DA VALENZA, VINCENZO DALLE DESTRE.

There is a certain group of Venetian painters who were active well into the 16th century but who, especially at the beginning of their career, were adherents of the Bellinesque tradition. It is generally from Giambellino that they take their inspiration though sometimes it is difficult to say with which of the Bellini they were most familiar, while in some cases the Bellinesque principles seem to have reached them through the interpretation of others. Moreover, the manner in which they were affected by Bellini's art often varies in the work of the minor and non-individual masters, with whom we shall deal somewhat briefly.

Of the numerous artists belonging to this category I unite in this chapter five of the least mediocre; the poorer members of this group will be discussed at the end of the volume along with the popular votive painters.

The best of the five is without doubt Benedetto Diana (1), regarding whom Paoletti and Ludwig have found a certain number of documents. The real family name of the painter was Rusconi. The name Diana appears sometimes in Friuli. Benedetto's father was a goldsmith called Apollonio. Benedetto is mentioned for the first time in 1482 when he enters the Scuola Grande di Sta. Maria della Carità. In 1485 his wife and his mother together draw up a testament. In 1505 he collaborates with Bastiani in the execution of three banners for the Piazza San

Marco; in 1506 he competes in an open competition for the painting of a standard for the Scuola della Carità and, strangely enough, succeeds even with Carpaccio in the list of competitors. In 1512 he became “Gastaldo” of the school of painting. He died on the 9th of February 1525. As in 1486 he painted a picture of a somewhat official character, it is hardly likely that he was born much after 1460.

The work to which I refer was at one time in the Zecca where it was seen by Sansovino, Ridolfi and Zanetti; it was transferred to the Royal Palace and not long ago was removed to the Ca d'Oro (fig. 22S). The date of 1486 can be deduced from the fact that the two adorers, who from the coats of arms must be Gerolamo Pesaro and Francesco Trevisari, were the directors of the Zecca (mint) that year. Behind these two kneeling figures stand their patron saints while in the centre the Virgin is seated on a high and richly ornamented throne of a rather fantastic shape. To the left of the foreground we see some rocks; the background, however, is so filled up with buildings that very little landscape is visible. The elongated forms of the saints and the hard broken drapery seem to justify Ludwig’s supposition that Lazzaro Bastiani must have been Diana’s master. The Madonna, on the other hand, is of a somewhat Belliniesque type, though it appears rather antiquated for Giovanni and yet not quite like Gentile. It shows more resemblance to some of Jacopo’s pictures of the Virgin, though it is more evolved in style. The attribution to Diana, which has never been doubted, can be traced back to Sansovino (pl. 115B).

Very similar in style is the picture of the almsgiving which he painted for the Albergo of the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista but which is now in the Accademia (565); it is mentioned by Ridolfi, Boschini and Zanetti.

There is considerable difference of opinion about the subject which the ancient authors, followed by Cavalcaselle and von Hadeln, call Almsgiving by the Brethren of the Confraternity, while the catalogues of the gallery and the other modern authors describe it as a Miracle of the Cross: a child who has fallen into a courtyard is miraculously saved. The painting so obviously represents the latter incident that it seems possible that a picture of the other subject may have existed also, or perhaps the presence