

In the Departure of S. John for the desert, and the Meeting of Christ with the Baptist, the figures are designed with neglectful ease, in proportions far too curt and pinguid to please the eye; and the absence of breadth and mass in light and shadows which alone produce a perfect semblance of relief, as well as coarse features and festooned draperies, place Francia Bigio in unfavourable contrast with his rival.¹

When both men subsequently competed (1521) at the Medici palace in Poggio a Cajano, the same comparison might have been made; and although Francia Bigio showed that he possessed the power of animating his personages, and distributing them with propriety, he not only proclaimed a decline from the standard erected by himself at the Servi, but he fell into greater coarseness and heaviness than was consistent with his duty. His triumph of Cicero, with all its apparatus of obelisks, rostra and temples, is coloured without much harmony or transparence; and the supernatural proportions of his people are common and square. But, in spite of this he surpasses Pontormo, and shines by the side of the later Allori; and the general division of the decoration which he planned is not altogether amiss.²

Francia Bigio's endeavour at last was, it is clear, to make a livelihood by rapidity of hand. On Vasari's own showing, his first wish had been to lay a strong foundation by the constant study of nude and anatomy,³ but finally he accepted on principle every order that was given to him; having come to the conclusion that he had not the stuff for rivalling men of superior genius. Still, to the last he kept at a respectable level, especially in small

¹ These two subjects at the Scalzo were begun in 1518, and finished in March 1519. The ornament in the court, of arabesques, festoons and cherubs' heads, where they are not repainted, seem to us to be by Francia Bigio.

² Andrea del Sarto did his fresco in 1521 as is shown by the

inscription, and Vasari says he and Francia Bigio painted together (IX. 101). Pontormo's work dates 1532; Allori's 1582. The waggon roof, with white relief ornament, on gold ground, and the Medici arms are Francia Bigio's.

³ Vas. IX. 101.