

EARLY CHRISTIAN ART.

CHAPTER I.

ART TO THE CLOSE OF THE VI. CENTURY.

In the most prosperous times of Rome the arts never attained to the perfection of the models created by the genius of Greece. Long before the golden age of the Antonines, sculpture and painting had degenerated from the high standard upheld in the great times of the Empire. From that period till the rise of Christianity they pursued an uniform path of degeneracy; yet they retained such vitality as to impose their laws on the nascent Christian school. It is not the object of these pages to trace the decline of classic art or to record its fall. A study of Christian art from its beginning in the catacombs of Rome and Naples, to its decline and fall in the first ten centuries, and the final development of its genius, as it rose to the perfection of Giotto, Ghirlandaio and Raphael, — such is the purpose to which these pages are devoted.

The unconquerable aversion of the primitive Christians to images and pictures rapidly subsided in the second and third centuries; and though it seemed yet a rash and sacrilegious act to attempt the delineation of the Eternal,