

CHAPTER II.

ITALIAN ART FROM THE VII. TO THE
XIII. CENTURY.

The annals of Roman art immediately after the conquest of Italy by Belisarius and Narses, impose on the historian a tedious task. Yet at the risk of wearying the reader he is bound to dwell upon the formless productions of centuries, remarkable for a general decay, but in which the threads which unite the art of succeeding periods and the germs of future development may be traced. In Rome itself painting and mosaic continued to live upon traditional forms and received from the Neo-Greek artists of Ravenna but a passing influence. Christian forms of composition, grafted at first and in a few rare examples on the imitation of the antique, gradually became typical. Types were altered without being improved, and form became daily more defective. After three centuries of continuous decline, the technical process of painting began to change. A new Greek or Byzantine art then appeared in the South of Italy, displaying rudeness and defects equal to those of Rome. Sicily shone for an instant with unwonted brilliancy and displayed in a fine series of mosaics powers of a high class. This momentary revival was succeeded by a new period of darkness during which Rome again seized the lead and kept it till Tuscany took it up and distanced all rivals.

To follow the decline of painting at Rome, the catacombs again afford the most instructive examples:

The first subject, which strikes the visitor to S. Ponziano as a production of the seventh or eighth cen-