

CHAPTER IV.

NICCOLA AND GIOVANNI PISANI.

Whilst the sister arts of building, sculpture, and painting revived at Rome during the thirteenth century, Pisa distanced every rival in plastic delineation. Previous to that time she had distinguished herself by an active trading spirit and by the creation of a navy which claimed and wielded a natural supremacy. Her gallies were the dread of the Saracens, whom she assisted to expel from Sicily, and she had alternately subdued, or favoured the small trading cities of the west and south coasts of Italy. Commerce yielded natural fruits in power, wealth, and influence, and these entitled Pisa to hold the foremost rank in the regeneration of art. Niccola, usually called Pisano, or the Pisan, was the chief of a school which restored to sculpture some of its past greatness. He was the forerunner of an array of men, who accomplished much for Italy, and who deserve the place which a grateful posterity assigns to them. But he is entitled to further consideration as one who gave an unexpected impulse to an art which had sunk into the deepest decay. It is less for the purpose of giving a full and precise account of Italian sculptors than with the intention of elucidating the course of the Pisan revival that the following sketch is attempted.

Previous to Niccola Pisano, sculptors existed in most parts of Italy, and humbly illustrated, amongst others, the cities of the centre and the North. Florence had not as yet taken the lead in painting, and was not to envelop sculpture in her influence till later. But in Pisa, Pistoia,