

CHAPTER VII.

THE BASILICA OF ASSISI.

Assisi, the sanctuary of the oldest mendicant order, was celebrated in the earlier centuries by the martyrdom of Rufinus, and had already received some pictorial adornments at the time of the Lombard rule. Famed in the thirteenth century as the final resting place of one whose life and miracles were audaciously compared with those of the Redeemer, it attracted the devotion of the peasants of Tuscany and Umbria who humbly made pilgrimage to the shrine of S. Francis. The example of a wealthy youth who had willingly surrendered his worldly substance to live a life of poverty and abstinence, was well calculated to strike the minds of a people, which, though coarse and superstitious, was yet alive to the prevalent vices of both laity and clergy. But the power of an order which might boast that it had revived the spirit of religion, and supported the degenerate church, was no slight cause of its further increase. Many a strong man esteemed it of equal advantage to his temporal and spiritual welfare to share the power and enjoy the blessings of the mendicants, and for that reason enrolled himself at least in the ranks of the lay brothers. Great was the enthusiasm, large the contributions to the order; and S. Francesco of Assisi arose, a monument of the zeal, the religious ardour of Umbria and Tuscany. One church was piled over another in honour of the Saint; and pictorial art made manifest to the pilgrims at the shrine his miracles in juxtaposition to the incidents of the life of the Saviour. Subjects, entrusted at first to rude artists of S. Francis' own time,