

CHAPTER XIX.

ANDREA ORCAGNA.

Not the least important or numerous class of artists in the fourteenth century were the goldsmiths, whose costly and beautiful works adorned alike the altars of churches, the treasure chambers of princes, and the plate chests of wealthy citizens. It is unfortunately in the nature of things that gold and silver carving or chasing should be difficult to preserve. An extensive system of credit made the Florentines bankers to the majority of European princes; but at Florence, as in every other part of the continent, the quantity of the precious metals in circulation was frequently out of proportion with the demand. It is characteristic, indeed, of all great enterprises in the fourteenth, as in later centuries, that they were undertaken with totally inadequate means; and the pawning of jewellery and plate was one of the commonest resources of princes. An unsuccessful campaign, a battle lost, or an expedition in prospect, were frequently decisive as to the existence of valuable gold and silver work; and whilst the knight, when inclined or forced to pay, exchanged the commodity which he required for a link wrenched from a costly chain, the sovereign or duke, the chiefs of a republic, melted cups and candelabra, statues and images, to satisfy their wants. Thus it is that so few specimens of the goldsmith's art have been preserved, and that nothing remains to represent the genius of the Florentine goldsmith Cione than the silver altar-table