THE present article is confined to the sculpture of the Middle Ages and modern times ; classical sculpture has been already treated of under Archaeology (Class­ical), vol. ii. p. 343 *sq.,* and in the articles on the several individual artists.

In the 4th century a.d., under the rule of Constantine’s successors, the plastic arts in the Roman world reached the lowest point of degradation to which they ever fell. Coarse in workmanship, intensely feeble in design, and utterly without expression or life, the pagan sculpture of that time is merely a dull and ignorant imitation of the work of previous centuries. The old faith was dead, and the art which had sprung

from it died with it. In

the same century a large

amount of sculpture was

produced by Christian

workmen, which, though

it reached no very high

standard of merit, was at

least far superior to the

pagan work. Although

it shows no increase of

technical skill or know­

ledge of the human form,

yet the mere fact that it

was inspired and its sub­

jects supplied by a real

living faith was quite

sufficient to give it - a

vigour and a dramatic

force which raise it æs-

thetically far above the

expiring efforts of pagan­

ism. Fig. I shows a very

fine Christian relief of

the 4th century, with a

noble figure of an arch­

angel holding an orb and

a sceptre. It is a leaf from

an ivory consular dip­

tych, inscribed at the top

ΔEXOY ΠΑΡΟΝΤΑ KAI

MAΘWN ΤΗΝ ΑΙΤΙΑΝ,

“Receive these presents

and having learnt the oc­

casion ...” A number

of large marble sarco­

phagi are the chief exist­

ing specimens of this early

Christian sculpture. In

general design they are

close copies of pagan tombs, and are richly decorated outside with reliefs. The subjects of these are usually scenes from the Old and New Testaments. From the former those subjects were selected which were supposed to have some typical reference to the life of Christ : the Meeting of Abraham and Melchisedec, the Sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel among the Lions, Jonah and the Whale, are those which most frequently occur. Among the New Testament scenes no representations occur of Christ’s sufferings; @@1 the subjects chosen illustrate His power and beneficence : the Sermon on the Mount, the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, and many of His miracles are

frequently repeated. The Vatican and Lateran museums are rich in examples of this sort. One of the finest in the former collection was taken from the crypt of the old basilica of St Peter ; it contained the body of a certain Junius Bassus, and dates from the year 359. @@2 Many other similar sarcophagi were made in the provinces of Rome, especially Gaul ; and fine specimens exist in the museums of Arles, Marseilles, and Aix; those found in Britain are of very inferior workmanship.

In the 5th century other plastic works similar in style were still produced in Italy, especially reliefs in ivory (to a certain extent imitations of the later consular diptychs), which were used to decorate episcopal thrones or the bindings of MSS. of the Gospels. The so-called chair of St Peter, still preserved (though hidden from sight) in his great basilica, is the finest example of the former class ; of less purely classical style, dating from about 550, is the ivory throne of Bishop Maximianus in Ravenna cathedral (see fig. 2). Another very remarkable work of

the 5th century is the series of small panel reliefs on the doors of S. Sabina on the Aventine Hill at Rome. They are scenes from Bible history carved

in wood, and in them much of the

old classic style survives. @@3

In the 6th century, under the By­zantine influence of Justinian, a new class of decorative sculpture was pro­duced, especially at Ravenna. Sub­ject reliefs do not often occur, but large slabs of marble, forming screens, altars, pulpits, and the like, were ornamented in a very skilful and ori­ginal way with low reliefs of graceful vine-plants, with peacocks and other birds drinking out of chalices, all treated in a very able and highly decorative manner (see fig. 3 and the upper band of fig. 2). Byzan­tium, however, in the main, became the birthplace and

@@@1 A partial exception to this rule is the scene of Christ before Pilate, which sometimes occurs.

@@@2 See Dionysius, *Sac. Vat. Bas. Cryp.,* and Bunsen, *Besch. d. Stadt Rom,* 1840.

@@@3 Various dates have been assigned to these interesting reliefs by different archaeologists, but the costumes of the figures are strong evidence that they are not later than the 5th century.