

it obtained also that of *assertion*. As fast as the painter advanced in skill he gained also in credibility, and that which he perfectly represented was perfectly believed, or could be disbelieved only by an actual effort of the beholder to escape from the fascinating deception. What had been faintly declared, might be painlessly denied; but it was difficult to discredit things forcibly alleged; and representations, which had been innocent in discrepancy, became guilty in consistency.

§ 9. For instance, when in the thirteenth century, the Nativity was habitually represented by such a symbol as that on this page, Fig. 1, there was not the smallest possibility that such a picture could disturb, in the mind of the reader of the New Testament, the simple meaning of

the words¹ “wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger.” That this manger was typified by a trefoil arch* would no more prevent his distinct under-

standing of the narrative, than the grotesque heads introduced above it would interfere with his firm comprehension of the words “ox” or “ass”; while if there were anything in the action of the principal



Fig. 1