

LXXXII, LXXXIII
THE DEATH OF AESCHYLUS

THE Death of Aeschylus (ECHILES: the orthography of the name has baffled the scribe, who has erased three or four beginnings before contenting himself with the above; just so the inscriptions of the engravings I attribute to the same workshop are often full of boggled spellings and erasures).

The familiar story (of genuine classical, not mediæval, origin) how the poet, having retired in advancing years to Sicily, was sunning himself one day in an open place when an eagle, flying aloft with a tortoise which it had seized and desired to crack, mistook his bald head for a suitable stone, and dropping the tortoise with a good aim hit the poet's head and killed him. The tale (like that of Jonah) is told by the artist with a full and rather comic measure of the literalness and simplicity of his age and style. The landscape, partly disfigured by retouches, represents the island of Sicily (the hole in the ground on this side of the wood standing probably for the crater of Etna); in the foreground the poet is seated dozing with book on knee and head in hand; the eagle, poised carefully above him and looking down to watch the effect, drops from its claws the tortoise, which appears twice over, once at the beginning and once at the end of its fall.

