

"ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD" 109

sounds gave him a complete command over the resources of melody. This, as a writer remarks, explains why he is so easy to remember: why, though he wrote so little, so much of what he wrote is familiar on men's tongues.

It is claimed that Gray borrowed his phrases and language from other poets. For instance, take this stanza —

"Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the *stubborn glebe* has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team *afield*!
How bow'd the woods beneath their *sturdy stroke*!"

Stubborn glebe is found in Gay, *afield* in Milton, and *sturdy stroke* in Spenser. But has any poet in his vocabulary the right of *eminent domain*? Is not the English language the inheritance of the people? The gold coinage of exchange when minted may pass through a thousand hands — always remaining the property of the possessor.

It is not just, therefore, to Gray to regard his "Elegy" as a mosaic made up of phrases borrowed from other poets; it requires genius in itself to give a fit robing to thought, and certainly it must be conceded that the author of the "Elegy" has dressed his poetic offspring in purple and fine linen.

Few poems have been so tampered with in the