The brass is now set in a hinged copper frame fastened to the north pier of the chancel arch. The obverse is engraved in *Views of Reading Abbey and Churches*, vol. i. p. 54, and the obverse and reverse in Kerry's *History of St. Lawrence's Church*, p. 134, and in the *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, vol. iv. p. 8.

An Eighteenth Century Poet and his Environment.

By I. Giberne Sieveking.

How much his surroundings affect a writer; his moods, his ways of thought, his mental colouring and focus, one can never gauge with any certainty: but that there is some intangible way in which its makes its lasting impress upon his personality; tunes it to the melody of suggestive ideas, or sets the wires jarring discordantly, it is impossible to doubt. In some intimate, convincing sense the spirit of a place seems to reach the mind of the poet more especially; strikes the keynote of his thoughts, and presently the full orchestra of his mind is discoursing sweet music. In the union brought about by the close living association of place with personality a poem springs to the birth.

About the writings of Gray, Cowper, Wordsworth and Keble, there is this distinguishing characteristic; they are all supremely passionless.

There is no passion in Nature. For passion is, in its very essence, human. It is called into being by the irresistible demand rising from the depths of the soul for satisfaction, for fulfilment.

But if one drinks long at the "brook in the way"—Nature—its quiet placidity, its essential passionlessness, its spirit of aloofness from the fret, restlessness, and anxiety that possess so often the sons of men, sinks ever deeper and deeper into the inner consciousness, and there ensues a great calm.

Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" breathes throughout the spirit of this impersonal, passionless calm. And as one enters

the very churchyard that inspired it, one understands a little how the genus loci, during those seven years when the poem was growing slowly to completion within the mind of the poet, was making its impress deep on his personality. For every place, as every man or woman, has its inevitable personal note—intangible, but none the less very real, which rises up convincingly before us, and conveys its own spiritual influence we know not how, we know not why, into our day. Instinctively we recognise how the presence of some personalities clears our mental air, at the moment of our coming into touch with them; and how close a spiritual fog settles upon our spirits at the approach of others.

About the Church and churchyard of Stoke Poges there lingers the "personal note" of undisturbed calm, of the peace found "far from the maddening crowd's ignoble strife," by those whose "sober wishes never learned to stray." There have been many whose feet in other days have trodden that path, but as one stands there to-day, with the "immemorial elms" and firs, with their wide stretched branches cut clear against the sky; the grand yews, reaching far overhead with the tale of many a hundred years blazoned upon their bark for those who can read the language; one thinks pre-eminently of one man alone.

The man who told the keynote of his life in these words, "Low spirits are my true and faithful companions; they get up with me, go to bed with me, make journeys and returns as I do, nay, and pay visits . . . . but most commonly we sit alone together."

The man who, according to Edward Fitzgerald, "had not a little to say, and took his time to say it." The man of many friendships; who, as Johnson said of him, "was likely to love much where he loved at all," and who proved this true by his deep, absorbing attachment to his mother.

In the Church this is evidenced for the last time by the tablet which he put up to her memory, who was "the careful tender mother of many children, of whom one alone had the misfortune to survive her." This was the man who moved about for many a year amongst the villagers as a familiar figure, and who, all unknown to them was presently to give fame and immortality to the village.

Gray's mother did not come to live at Stoke Poges until he was twenty-five years old, but before the place became his home he was in the habit of often spending his college vacations at his aunt's house at Stoke, and so the whole neighbourhood was familiar to him before he and his mother came to live here.

In 1737 he wrote to his great friend, Horace Walpole (whose friendship, save for one rupture, remained unbroken throughout his life time): "I have at the distance of half-a-mile, through a green lane, a forest (the vulgar call it a common), all my own, at least as good as so, for I spy no human thing in it but myself. It is a little chaos of mountains and precipices. . . . . Both vale and hill are covered with most venerable beeches and other reverend vegetables, that, like most other ancient people, are always dreaming out their old stories to the winds."

To-day, the "venerable beeches and other reverend vegetables" remain in statu quo. Still the beeches stand here and there at intervals, like grey, grizzled veterans: marked, scarred and twisted into a thousand contortions.

Long reaches of meadow, red, gold, with heaped up corn; the common in which Gray used to walk through the "green lane," violet with furze, tawny with the rich red of dying sorrel; these surround the forest land still as of yore, but, nevertheless, the Burnham Beeches of Gray's time, and the Burnham Beeches of ours, have parted company.

The "venerable beeches" can no longer dream out their old stories to the winds in undisturbed solitude, for the very spirit of the place has in these last few years been defaced, desecrated, destroyed.

Swings, barrel organs and all that belongs to the tea garden element, as we understand that method of entertainment in England, deface and desecrate it, and the peace and quietude of the place is quite destroyed. We are not a people to whom beauty really appeals, and if we happen to possess any "corner" in it, we hasten to spoil it, to vulgarise it by the tea garden or the glaring advertisement poster.

Stoke Poges village is very scattered, and it begins three or four miles (by the road) from Burnham. The Church stands quite apart by itself, except for the old manor house, of which the only remaining wing is situated a few yards beyond the eastern corner of the churchyard. Indeed, there is not much of it to be seen at all; it is closely shut in by trees, and only an ivy covered gable here and there is visible.

This manor house was the scene of Gray's "Long Story," and curiously enough this fact has given it more title to fame than has its real history, which was closely connected with the deeds and adventures of its Lords of the Manor in more stirring days. For

the manor itself dated from before the Conquest, when the land was sufficient for ten ploughs and ten villeins with three borders.

In 1340, Sir John Molins, who was Lord of the Manor here, had "all his lands, goods and chattels" seized by the King. But in 1345 he was completely restored to favour, and obtained "restitution of all his lands." In 1346, indeed, he had a "further testimony of the King's favour," by obtaining the grant "by charter of a fair yearly on the eve-day and morrow of the Feast of St. Barnabas."

Sir William Molins, his son and heir . . . . "had livery of the lands of" the inheritance.

In 1789 the "ancient mansion, needing repairs, was taken down with the exception of one wing," and as the old record goes on to say, on taking down the tapestry from the walls of Lady Cobham's Chantry was discovered over the chimney the following inscription in alternate lines of black and red :—

"FEAR THE LORDE.
LOVE THI NEIGHBOUR.
SPEKE THE TRVTH."

"OBEY THI PRINCE.
BEWAR OF PRIDE.
BEARE NO MALLIS."

Hither came that much travelled Queen Elizabeth. who, to judge by tradition, seems to have visited most of the manor houses in the country, and it was the prison house of Charles I. for a short time during his journeyings with the army.

The Church is a mixture of many periods. It is disfigured by galleries and staircases, and also by many shields stuck about on the walls of those unecclesiastical animals, the lion and the unicorn, whose pictured presentment seemed to answer the Puritan's idea of symbolism! The chancel gives one the impression of being too small for the size of the church.

To judge by its size it might formerly perhaps have been the Lady Chapel, for the space used by the organ and gallery to-day would seem to suggest that here was the original chancel.

Lipscombe says that there were formerly two chantries founded in the Parish Church, one of which was called "Ditton's Chantry."

In the chancel are the remains of a very ancient sepulchral marble dug up near the spot. On the slab is an embossed pastoral staff, and these words, which are conjectured to be :—

"Dew li faite vrai pardun, aveit a nun."

"God grant him a pardon true for name he knew."

Outside there is a grand old spreading yew tree which stands opposite the old chancel door—a door through which Gray and his mother must often in days now long gone by have entered the church. Outside the chancel wall is the little stone notice to the memory of the Poet, who was buried beside his mother near that spot.

But the real memorial which keeps the thought of him ever present to the minds of those who make a pilgrinage to that quiet, remote God's acre, is the one that Gray himself wrote in the early days of his life, before the shadows began to rise darkly, which were later to become his "true and faithful companions" to the close of his days.

Prehistoric Remains in the Thames Valley.

To the Editor of the "Berks Archæological Journal."

DEAR SIR,

Some long time since, I promised you an account of some remains discovered in the valley of the Thames.

The exigencies of a busy life, and the misplacing of the memoranda I made at the time, is the explanation (but not an excuse) for the delay. I have now found my notes, and the following is the substance of them. In the year 1896 a cutting was made, for the purpose of forming a new Lock by the Thames Conservancy Board at Grafton, north of Faringdon, on the Oxfordshire side of the river, about 27 miles by water above Oxford.

This cutting is made across a meadow, which is surrounded by the river on the east, south and west sides, and runs nearly due east and west. On May 4th, 1896, the workmen in excavating came across a human skull, which was brought to me, and on the earliest opportunity, which was July 8th following, I visited the spot.