ODE ON A GRECIAN URN.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

LEMPRIÈRE'S classical dictionary made Keats acquainted with the names and attributes of the inhabitants of the heavens in the ancient world, and the Shakespearean Chapman introduced him to Homer, but his acquaintance with the subtlest spirit of Greece was by a more direct means. Keats did not read Greek, and he had no scholar's knowledge of Greek art, but he had the poetic divination which scholars sometimes fail to possess, and when he strolled into the British Museum and saw the Elgin marbles, the greatest remains in continuous series of perhaps the greatest of Greek sculptures, he saw them as an artist of kindred spirit with their makers. He saw them also with the complex emotion of a modern, and read into them his own thoughts. The result is most surely read in his longer poem of *Hyperion*, which will be found at the end of this book, but the spirit evoked found its finest expression in this ode.

There are about four years in time between the sonnet just given and this ode; if the former suggests a Balboa, this suggests a Magellan who has traversed the Pacific. It is not needful to find any single piece of ancient sculpture as a model for the poem, although there is at Holland House, where Keats might have seen it, an urn with just such a scene of pastoral sacrifice as is described in the fourth stanza. But a poet does not knowingly copy; he transmutes impressions received from more than one source into a new and original whole.