APHORISMS
CONCERNING ENGLISH LITERATURE,

with the permission of the Philosophical Faculty
at the University of Upsal,

for public discussion proposed

by

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and

GUSTAVUS KYNTZELL
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in the Gustavian Auditory the 23:th of April 1842
at 5 o'clock p. m.

UPPSAL
Wahlström & Läthbom.
The ages, in which the masterpieces of imagination have been produced, have by no means been those, in which taste has been most correct. It seems, that the creative faculty and the critical faculty could not exist together in their highest perfection, till each of them had separately had its sway and unlimited influence.

The critical discernment is not sufficient to make men poets, because poetry requires not an examining, but a believing frame of mind. Those feel it most and write it best, who forget, that it is a work of art.

It is by giving faith to the creations of imagination, that a man becomes a poet. It is by treating those creations as deceptions and by resolving them, as it were, into their elements, that he becomes a critic. In the moment, in which the skill of the artist is perceived, the spell of art is broken.

In England the greatest works of imagination were produced during the reigns of Elizabeth and James the 1st; but the national taste of the period was far from commendable. Thus when Shakespeare abandons himself to the impulse of his imagination, his compositions are not only the most sublime, but also the most faultless, that the world has ever seen; but whenever he means to be particularly fine and correct, he sinks to the level of a common poet.
The decline of the English poetry after the abovementioned period was in no small degree caused by the closing of the theatres under the commonwealth and by the restoration of the house of Stuart.

The succeeding age — the age of Queen Anne — was but an age of criticism. The poetry of that age was addressed more to the judgment, than to the feelings and chiefly consisted in satire, sophistry, artificial declamation, wit and gaiety. It had adopted French manners.

From that mannerism the English literature was partially restored by Fielding and Sterne.

The present period of the English literature has exhibited the greatest proofs both of poetical composition and of critical investigation. Such authors as Scott and Byron England has never boasted of, since the age of Shakespeare, and the modern criticism has by Edmund Burke attained a degree, hitherto unparalleled.

Sir Walter Scott is the greatest novelist of the present age, Lord Byron its most eminent lyrical poet.