

The Poets, who were also the Philosophers and Divines among the ancient Greeks, soon perceived people forward to receive instruction in the Theatres, who were unfit to attend the Schools. They availed themselves of that general inclination of the comparatively ignorant and illiterate; and humanity conveyed to their minds the most useful lessons for the conduct of life, by means of a just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, "and the changes of fortune, to which it is subject."

The kind of knowledge which may be imparted, by means of the Drama, is chiefly what Socrates and Johnson esteemed the most valuable, namely, that of right and wrong, of good and evil, propriety and impropriety: it may be referred to what we call good sense, which seems not to arise from a formal train of reasoning, but from the effect of habit, assumes in our eyes the shape of intuitive perception. This quality renders its influence peculiarly forcible on the common people; though they go to the Theatre, to laugh or to gratify curiosity, unconscious often that they will return instructed and improved. Thus the Player, whether serious or jocose, may blend instruction with pleasure; and whatever knowledge is communicated in so striking a manner, will make a lasting impression, and will readily and insensibly come to our aid on every necessary occasion.

But, to speak more particularly, I would not hesitate to affirm that, by habitual attendance at a well regulated Theatre, a man, whose education had been entirely neglected, might still, if not deficient in natural endowments, acquire such a knowledge of men and things, as would raise him above contempt. Innumerable allusions are made in plays to most of the arts of life; and whatever is said is clearly expressed. Even a silly beau is represented in the Spectator, as having learnt from Plays, that the Laws of his country would give him redress in the awkward circumstance of having been decoyed into marriage with a painted Jezebel; and thus in Cumberland's Comedy of the West Indian, an ignorant stranger might find in the scene between Belcour and Stockwell, a correct and useful picture of the English character.

Many more instances might be adduced. But let us view the subject in another light, and consider the effects of the Drama only as the beginning of knowledge, and the stimulus to improvement: thus we might look forward to most important consequences to Montreal, from the influence of a well regulated Theatre, particularly to the English part of the community. The illiterate would there acquire sagacity and improve and correct their experience; they would gradually discover the importance of education, and would be anxious to procure it for their children, if already too far advanced in years, to submit to a teacher themselves. The effects of education and learning are universally admired: let them therefore be frequently brought to view in the most pleasing and least pedantic dress, and they will not fail to gain proselytes to their cause.

But I will go still farther, and say, that were the French Canadians casually drawn to our Theatres, either by the love of novelty, or by the attraction of scenery and music, even though their knowledge of English were at first imperfect, they might there receive such a stimulus to improvement in our language, from the natural workings of curiosity, that they would soon participate in all those advantages