

however, by the salutary retrenchment of faulty passages in performances generally good; no want of variety would be found; and particularly we should have no occasion to employ the productions of the wits of Charles's reign, who "pleas'd their age, and did not aim to mend." I confess, that unless I were to allow the necessity of sometimes sacrificing to novelty and fashion, by the representation of a new play, though it were not entirely unexceptionable, I might be justly accused of proposing something impossible. But I will admit that such an indulgence may sometimes be necessary, nor would I call it dangerous; for such is happily the general bias of the human mind, in favour of religion, virtue, and propriety, that plays of a good tendency are likely to stand their ground against those of a contrary nature; if the latter have nothing but the suffrage and support of the public.

I shall now briefly consider the probable influence of a well regulated English Theatre, in Montréal, upon religion and morality, on political sentiments, on knowledge, and on literary genius, there.

To mention religion, when discoursing on a Theatre, might to some appear impious; and it must be confessed, that plays have often been represented, fraught with sentiments hostile to the cause of religion and virtue. But I believe it will be found, that even the most violent opposers of the Theatre, on the ground of religion, have only contemplated the abuse of it. They have granted that a dramatic representation of the affairs of life, is by no means sinful in itself. What they complain of, is, that many of our Comedies, and even of our Tragedies, have no design to set religion and virtue in the best light, nor to render vice odious to the audience; that, on the contrary, a vicious character is often the hero of the piece, or the object of reward at the end of the play.

I should be far from wishing to defend, or excuse the abuse of what I conceive, if properly employed, might become admirable means of pleasing instruction. But I would take upon me to say, that if dramatic representation be not in itself sinful, the casual abuse of it is not a sufficient cause for abandoning it altogether;—for certainly it is a species of instructive amusement, accessible to all ranks, and useful to all ages; and which seems always to have been favoured or discouraged in the world, in proportion as liberty and good sense, or slavery and superstition, prevailed. The Pulpit, as well as the Stage, has, by worthless characters, been employed for iniquitous purposes; yet no one censures the former mode of instruction, nor, upon reflection, shall we find just reason to blame the latter. The Legislature have the controul of the Theatre and of the Managers; and they ought to encourage an institution so capable of forming good principles and manners in our youth, while they banished whatever is personal or indescant, whatever tends to inflame or corrupt the heart. It may be proper here to remark, that good examples, to have the desired effect, should be set before us by virtuous persons: hence the propriety of encouraging personal virtue in Players, and of preventing as much as possible the ridiculous circumstance of receiving a lecture on charity from a miser, on œconomy from a prodigal, on virtue from a debauchée, or on chastity from a prostitute. Instead of an English Theatre, thus regulated, being inimical to religion