

**REMARKS ON  
EDUCATION  
IN 1847**

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Remarks on Education in 1847 by Amelia Murray

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**AMELIA MURRAY**

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ON  
E D U C A T I O N  
IN 1847.

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DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION,  
TO  
THE QUEEN  
AND TO  
THE PRINCE CONSORT.



BY  
THE HON. AMELIA MURRAY.

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"Truth is power" would be less liable to misapprehension and  
misapplication than "Knowledge is power."—ANON.

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1847.

## REMARKS ON EDUCATION.

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### CHAPTER I.

“ In education never take the word for the deed.—Axiom.

THE word *obedience*, might, as suggested by a friend, be substituted for that of “ Truth”, on the Title page—for it is a great truth, that as in Natural Philosophy, all power is gained by obeying the laws of Nature, so in regard to the moral world “ we can do nothing of ourselves”—we must in all things wait upon the will of God—and if we disobey a great physical law, in the first years of life, sooner or later we shall suffer for our disobedience—“ Knowledge (with obedience) is Power.” About five-and-thirty years since a child of six years of age was the pride of his family, and the marvel of strangers, from his precocious knowledge of scientific matters—that child grew up a narrow-minded, stolid, dull man—here was “ knowledge” without “ obedience.”

Education advances with each month of existence—the only question is, when and how to make use of the means which ultimately aid its progress. For above thirty years there has been great, although unintentional, misdirection of these means, not only with regard to the working classes, but in the highest and in every class of society. Languages, as nature points out, can be most easily attained by infants; but other acquirements if made at the cost of tears during the first seven years of life, are worse than useless—they are detrimental.

No reasonable being is angry with a kitten for not making use of its eyes before it can see—and yet I have frequently known the most affectionate parents treat their darlings with less consideration than that of purring mothers for their young cats. Experienced physicians tell us, the brain is not a perfect instrument before seven years of age. Why then set it to work in an imperfect state? The cleverest children are often most averse to the mechanism of learning before they understand the use of it—but the tool which a watchmaker uses is not the watch itself. It once happened (at the beginning of all these mistakes) that an anxious

mother asked Mrs. Barbauld, at what age she should begin to teach her child to read? "I should much prefer that a child should not be able to read before five years of age," was the reply. "Why, then, have you written books for children of three?" "Because, if young mamas will be over busy, they had better teach in a good way than in a bad one." I have known clever precocious children at three years dunces at twelve, and dunces at six particularly clever at sixteen. One of the most popular authoresses of the present day could not read when she was seven.—Her mother was rather uncomfortable about it, but said, that as every body did learn to read with opportunity, she supposed her child would do so at last. By eighteen this apparently slow genius paid the heavy but inevitable debts of her father from the profits of her first work, and before thirty, had published thirty volumes! A well known, and voluminous political writer was never taught to read, and acquired that art without knowing the names of the letters. A clever sensible Scotch grandmother made him early her companion, and in due time read to him from her large Bible every morning. After a while his attention was attracted to the characters, and



he was curious to know how such marks were made to *speakh*; in one fortnight he was able to read a chapter—but when sent to school, he could not be induced to learn by rote, and was flogged for his stupidity and blockheadism. But although he could not be whipped into Latin and Greek, being left to learn after his own fashion he soon made himself master of these languages, and afterwards acquired French, German, Spanish, and Italian, with the greatest ease. I have actually seen cases where little girls before seven were made to weep over lessons in music. Alas! for the early association of tears with music!—by way too of producing harmonious results in after life.

It is a curious fact, that during these experimental thirty years, exceedingly good notions have been tortured into exceedingly bad practice. Infant schools, admirable in themselves, if made safe nurseries where children can be amused, kept happy, clean, obedient, and educated according to their years—these have been occasionally turned into forcing houses where young brains are strained and excited, till they are rather prepared for the Hospital and Lunatic Asylum than for useful exertion in life. Sunday Schools, (good and useful where

no better means can be found for training neglected children to habits of reverence and love) have been made to desecrate the Sabbath by their hours of toil and gloom, and their stifling atmosphere. It once happened that an amiable woman, who worked hard during the greater part of her own Sabbath in the vocation of Sunday-school teaching, spoke with all intentional kindness and anxious feeling to a rebellious intelligent little girl—"My dear, I hope you will never be naughty again—try to be good, child, and when you die you will go to Heaven, and there, my dear, every day will be like Sunday." "Oh! my lady, that will be *very dull*." And who can be surprised at this answer? The child came to school at nine o'clock, spelt over the Bible or the Catechism till eleven—was taken to morning service afterwards—sent home, perhaps a mile or two, possibly wet through—hurried over her frugal meal—was ordered back to go to church again at half-past two or three o'clock—then returned to school to be stuffed a second time, or it might be scolded—taught theology and learning beyond her age, or excited by the false motive of emulation to supplant her sister or her neighbour in the class, instead of being won to Christ and to religion.

through love and happiness and charity. Can such a system as this yield good results?

If Sunday Schools are to be advantageous, no child or teacher should be allowed to work in them beyond two hours in the day. One hour in the morning of every day *excepting* Sunday, properly made use of during three months only, has been found sufficient time for teaching a commonly intelligent girl of eleven years her religious duties, with reading and writing enough to enable her afterwards to write a perfectly legible though not a perfectly well spelt letter\*—and it is a fact that in the case of a Sunday school once got up for two hours in the day, during six months, in a wild country village, people were found thirty years after, capable of reading their Bible who had received no other instruction—but as these schools are usually conducted, hardly a Sabbath hour is spared during which the hard working, daily labouring father can enjoy his children's society—children over-worked—Teachers over-worked—Clergy over-worked—and this upon the holy day of rest!

The education of the middling orders has fallen less within the sphere of my observation and experience than that of the highest and the

\* See Appendix, p. 94.