

Crumbs of Comfort for Discouraged Teachers.

BY JULIA H. JOHNSTON.

We may as well own up to the discouragements now and then, may we not, comrades in primary work? We love our classes; we count it among the highest joys and privileges of life to teach them, and we wish to keep on for uncounted years to come with the absorbing work; and yet for most of us, probably, the sun clouds over once in a while; the doubts, fears, and difficulties we fought once beset us again; while new perplexities arise, new developments of human nature in the little ones confront us, lack of sympathy in the home makes us faint-hearted, and—behold! we are discouraged.

It may be that the greater number of pupils in the primary room, and the peculiar conditions that obtain there, the especial need of having circumstances, surroundings, appliances, the very atmosphere, and the spirit of teachers and helpers "just right," give more occasion for discouragement to enter than in other departments. At all events in they come, a varied host of them, from all directions, within and without, and they must be met and mastered. How shall we gather strength for this, and how shall we be comforted concerning this actual and inevitable phase of our work?

We "know whom we have believed," and that there is invincible might in Him who is willing to "undertake for us;" we know that "our portion is the children's bread;" yet, in addition to this high consolation, there are crumbs of comfort from the Master's table which we do well to gather, for the fragments "taste of the loaf," and nothing so precious should be lost.

While it may be true that "God does not use a discouraged soul," nevertheless he does not cast off such a one, but repeats the command, "Be of good courage," and then provides abundant means for the strengthening.

First of all, take this crumb: It is not surprising that we are discouraged, and that everything does not conspire always for our convenience and ease in working, for we are mortal, and this is earth, not heaven. Moreover, as one puts it, "We are in the beaten track with all the saints when we are beset by temptation." Discouragements are temptations, no doubt. They often enter through weakness and weariness of the flesh. But "there hath no temptation taken you but such as is moderate" (see marginal reading for "common"). It is not, then, excessive, and we really can bear it. That is a comfort. The root meaning of "tempt" is "to stretch," but never

think that for any child of God the stretching is to rend, to tear, or to bruise. It is rather to test and to strengthen and to give elasticity. We must be proved, and if we never bear a weight, there can be no stretching of our strength. It is not pleasant and easy, but it is wholesome and profitable, and we can endure it after all as others have done. We, too, shall win through as they have.

Here is another crumb from the same part of the loaf: We have been discouraged ourselves many a time before, and have known what it was to put it behind us, and to put fresh courage on. There is usually a new start, a more earnest and hopeful endeavor, and a more cheerful expectation, after the season of down-heartedness has been followed by a lifting up of the heart.

Still another crumb of comfort, seasoned by both experience and hope, is this: It is better farther on. Suppose we have failed to-day. Sad as it is, there will be, we may hope, another chance. Suppose the conditions in class were most unfavorable this time. Next time all may be well. We may feel that it is impossible to help the sudden heart-sinking that comes with a disappointment in a lesson, or the discovery of weakness in ourselves, but we need not, must not, insist that it can never be any better. It can. And God helping us, we may be better too. We must "commit our way" (margin, "roll our way") upon God, and when it is rolled it is out of our hands, unless we snatch it back again after we let go, which is as wrong as it is useless and foolish.

Would any of us, if the actual choice were offered, deliberately choose to be so different from our fellow-workers that we could not understand and sympathize with them? It would be so if we were wholly exempt from this now common discipline. One person untouched by discouragement would be singular indeed in life's experience. In this, as in other vicissitudes and besetments, it is worth while to suffer that we may share with others in burden-bearing and burden-lifting. Is it not, then, a little consolation that after all, we would not be without this tie that holds us to our fellows?

"Speak ye comfortably" is a command often forgotten. Let us heed it better than of old. If we have ever felt in our discouragement a keen hunger for a crumb of comfort from another, let us give such crumbs ourselves, as occasion serves. Everyone must have at least one basket of fragments of helpful experience to pass on. Has not the dear Lord blessed them? Let nothing be lost which might aid another.