



XIV.

THE NEST.

In the pretty picture  
 Of the nested birds  
 Baby reads *his* "love-song"  
 Written without words—  
 Hears the nestlings calling,  
 And his heart calls, too;  
 As they need their mother,  
 So his heart needs you.

The picture illustrating this game shows clearly the position of the hands. I need only explain that at the beginning of the game the thumbs are turned downward and inward, to make the eggs in the nest. At the words "The eggs are hatched," the tips of the thumbs rise, to represent the throats and heads of two little birds. At the words "Mother dear, peep!" the thumbs move, to show that the little birds are seeking their mother.

It goes without saying that in the first instance this game is played by the mother or nurse, the baby merely looking on. As he develops, however, the instinct of imitation will prompt him to make the nest, eggs, and birds himself.

The mother who thoughtfully observes her child's life and obediently responds to its manifestations, knows that development is a gradual process, and that no great truth can be taught in a single lesson. The feeling that all life is *one* life slumbers in the child's soul. Only very gradually, however, can this slumbering feeling be transfigured into a *waking* consciousness. Slowly, through a sympathetic study of Nature and of human life, through a growing sense of the soul and meaning of all natural facts and of all human relationships, and through recreating in various forms that external world which is but the objective expression of his own inmost being, the individual attains to a consciousness of the connectedness and unity of life (*Lebenszusammenhang und Lebenseinheit*) and to a vision of the Eternal Fountain of Life.

Through the play of *The Birds' Nest*, mother, you take a few short steps upon one of the paths which lead towards this goal, viz., the path which starting from sympathy with Nature, runs through study of Nature to comprehension of the forces, laws, and inner meaning of Nature. You are incited to enter upon this path by your feeling that a prophetic sense of the inner connectedness of Nature stirs and dreams in your child's heart. You also feel that there is no single object in Nature which has more power to lift his dreaming presentiment into waking consciousness than a bird's nest.

Consider the time when the bird builds her nest: it is the early springtime, when all Nature

begins to unfold. The warmth of spring and summer gives the nestlings an opportunity to develop and grow strong, and an increasing supply of food keeps even pace with their increasing need of nourishment. By the time that the chilly autumn and frosty winter have come the nestlings are so strong that they can seek the food they need, and either bear the cold or fly away from it.

Consider, again, the places in which birds build their nests. They always choose a spot where they can find plenty of food. Near human dwellings are many flies, gnats, and spiders, so, as our picture shows us, sparrows and swallows build between the rafters of houses. In the hedge, which is so rich in insects, the hedge-sparrow and the robin make their homes. The titmouse builds in hollow trees where there are plenty of worms; the stork near some spot where frogs abound.

No less important than time and place is the style of nest-building. Thus the nest of the finch, built between the branches of the apple tree looks so much like its bark that it is scarcely possible to distinguish one from the other; and the long-tailed titmouse protects her young from danger by building a nest which looks like a bundle of moss.

To these and analogous facts with regard to the time and place of nest-building, and to that wonderful mimicry through which birds insure the safety of their nestlings, the child's attention should be often and sympathetically directed.