

XVII.

NAMING THE FINGERS.

COUNT your baby's rosy fingers,
Name them for him, one by one ;
Teach him how to use them deftly,
Ere the dimples are all gone ;
So, still gaining skill with service,
All he does will be well done.

Everybody knows how to count on the fingers, and how to hold the hand while so doing. The position of the hand is also shown clearly in the picture. It is necessary, however, to say a few words with regard to the significance of this little play.

The traditional counting games, so well known in every nursery, seemed to me either to be silly and meaningless, or to say many things I would not willingly have children hear. On the other hand, some form of counting game appeared to me important from several points of view. These points of view I have endeavoured to make clear in my little songs and in the mottoes prefixed to them. I have also tried to preserve some echo of the traditional words.

Naming the Fingers, the first of my series of counting plays, directs the child's attention to the names of his fingers (index finger, middle



finger, ring or gold finger, little finger), and suggests how these names arose. I have not thought it necessary to give the genesis of the word thumb, which undoubtedly comes from *dam*, and has been applied to the thumb because it seems to form a dam or barrier.* Simple connections of this kind between word and thing should, whenever possible, be pointed out to children. By noticing them the mind escapes from superficiality and forms habits of comparison and reflection.

The artist has intentionally represented the fingers of the left hand as women and little girls, those of the right hand as men and boys. Is he hinting to us the harmony which should exist between the intellect and the heart? If I understand him aright, he has striven in many ways to suggest that high and noble accord, that cheerful co-operation so necessary in family life and in the larger institutions of civil society and state.

“Look at the mother who is carrying her little daughter on her arm. What is she doing?” “I think she is teaching baby the names of her fingers. She is also trying to teach her how to use them. She hopes that when baby grows older she will be like the two little girls who are busy sewing and spinning; like the two children in the garden who are planting flowers; like the

* Froebel is not reliable in his etymologies. Thumb is from a root signifying to grow large or increase, and so means the *thick* finger.—TRANSLATOR.

sturdy boy who is climbing a tree to get them some plums."

"Mother, may I climb a tree?"

"Yes, when you are stronger, and when you have learned to keep your balance."