

CHILDREN'S PAGES

PA, MA, AND THE BABIES.

(By WEKA.)

The following story proposes to tell of the successful rearing of a healthy brood of five by a pair of the most companionable birds in the New Zealand bush. Few lovers of our native bird life whose good fortune it is to reside in districts where there is a semblance of indigenous forest but are aware of that little gem upon the landscape, the tomtit, or as named by the Maori, miromiro. There are two species of this purely insect and grub eating unit of our native fauna, and known to ornithologists as *Myiomoira Toitoi* in the North Island, and *Myiomoira Macrocephala* in the South Island. The cock bird shows only two colours in his raiment, black and white in the North Island, and black and yellow in the South Island, there being no blending of these but a distinct line between the markings. The colouring of the hen bird is, however, much more subdued, being similar in both Islands, and the chief features being a light buff on the breast and underparts and dark grey elsewhere. Who has not lived adjacent to the bush and penetrated its depths but a little distance without soon finding company in this charming little fellow, who seems to know that the choice worm is soon to be exposed to his searching glance by the disturbance of the forest floor? During the winter of 1927, the writer had got as near as possible on speaking terms with several miromiros, but always of the male persuasion. Spring followed in due course, and on one drizzly day in October he was introduced by one of his black and white friends to what eventually proved to be the latter's fiancé. A week passed and the then lovers spent a considerable portion of that week-end flying in and about the walls of the writer's residence. On the following Saturday (29th October) the wide overlapping eaves were being examined most minutely by our two lovers now apparently mated, particularly where the prevailing winds did not touch, and along towards noon, to the writer's surprise and delight, the first layer of her future home, consisting of a string of coarse spider web, was laid by Mrs. Tommy on a supporting beam under a sheltered eave not more than seven feet from the ground, and with the writer standing in full view not three yards away. It was an ideal situation, and one that could not by any possible chance be reached by any member of that arch enemy of our feathered friends, the cat. During the remainder of that day and all next