

## THE COMING OF THE SILVER-EYES.

(By H. Ross, of Invercargili, a Junior Member.)

Dreary grey clouds overhang the sky. Apple, pear, and other deciduous trees, stripped of their leaves and their summer-time beauty, stand barren and forlorn at the mercy of the unfeeling grip of Old Man Winter. The elderberry and currant-bushes, their branches naked for all the world to see, sleep their sleep, confident of the coming spring.

Everything is still and quiet. But is it? A whisper of sound comes through the cold air. Louder and still louder it grows, until it swells into a volume of plaintive music. There is something appealing, something pathetic, in that sad crying of the silver-eyes, as driven from their forest home by the oncoming of frigid winter, they come in thousands to the feeding grounds in the old orchard.

On every branch and twig, on the ground, in rows along the garden fence they sit in hundreds. The old pear tree in the corner of the garden has suddenly been transformed from drab grey to green, a living green more wonderful than any it ever knows in all its summer glory.

Puss, the old grey and white cat, and killer of sparrows and innumerable mice and rats, is in his element. Forgotten for the moment, he has sprung again and yet again into the midst of the birds, and now, satisfied, he comes triumphantly through the dying raspberry canes, a limp form in his jaws. He is therefore taken and shut up until the visitors decide to depart, when once more he is liberated to wage war against the enemies of the farm.

"We're wee and very helpless. Our food is all gone. We help you all we know. So help us now; help us or we die."

Within the orchard we place shallow pans of curded milk, pieces of suet, apples, and other food that the silver-eyes love. In a little while, the bolder of the birds approach. Encouraged by this, the more timid ones venture near, and soon a ring of happy cheeping birds surround each dish.

In the night it snows, and when morning dawns we look upon a new world. As we open the door we are greeted by a chorus of hungry cheeping from the green birds hopping about in the snow. Once again we fill the dishes, and once again the visitors cluster round the feast. They are tamer now, flying round our heads, and alighting at our feet. Indeed, some of them perch on our shoulders and hands as we place the food for them.

Throughout the cold bitter weather, they swarm everywhere. Many a wet, bedraggled form do we fish out of the tins of skim-milk, placed outside to cool for the pigs. Indeed, it is so bad that we are obliged to cover the tins. In the long grass under the