

FIGHT BETWEEN GREY WARBLERS.

The Grey Warbler is not usually considered to be a pugnacious bird; at least, I have never found it so. Only once have I seen it engaged in conflict. This was on May 20, and the battle went on more or less continuously throughout the day, which was warm and sunny. The trouble apparently arose over the arrival of a strange male in the garden, which is frequented by a pair of warblers at all times of the year save the breeding season, when they betake themselves to a neighbouring garden to build, leaving us to speculate on their activities, and my husband to bewail his luck when they return to us later in the year with a young family, or what is worse from his point of view, a young Shining Cuckoo!

I was attracted to the garden on this day by the cries of the female. She was dancing excitedly on the top of a young matipo and uttering short, shrill cries of alarm. On the ground were two warblers—I presume they were males—tumbling over and over, firmly attached to each other by their bills. While I was watching them the hen flew down and joined in the fight, and only the thought of the fright I would give them and the glare in their angry little red eyes prevented me from grabbing a handful of them. After landing a few pecks here and there the hen flew back to her perch and began preening herself indifferently—and not too indifferently either, for if one of the males eased off for a moment she immediately began a shrill twittering and fluttering, which had the effect of driving the two combatants together again. They frequently flew up into the air after the manner of butterflies, until I almost lost sight of them, then suddenly darted down again and began chasing each other through the bushes. The hen joined in this for a few minutes, and as they darted in and out so quickly, I wondered how they avoided the branches. Of me they were entirely oblivious, and I was obliged to dodge many times to avoid a collision. Indeed, once I wasn't quick enough, or perhaps I went too far, as I was scratched on the cheek, and felt the mark for several hours. The fight was absolutely silent, though I could hear the click of bills, and the female I think it was gave shrill little cries repeatedly. For no apparent reason they would suddenly cease fighting and break into song or feed about for a while. They spent most of their time on the ground, where it really looked as though one or other would be killed. Both had their bills wide open and seemed more or less exhausted. At times they would fly up into the air, bill to bill, tails outspread, and remain hovering, as the humming bird does, for a few seconds. I hadn't realised before just how tiny the bird is or what beady little red eyes start out of its head when it is excited.

Later in the day the warblers disappeared, still fighting spasmodically, through the neighbour's fence, and I do not know whether the unwanted bird was driven off or became easy prey for the neighbour's tomcat, for I hear the others in the garden now, and the cock is bursting himself with song.

—Mrs. R. H. D. Stidolph.