

## The New Caves at the **Limekilns**

[By The Chatterer.] Having heard certain vague rumors of the discovery of a cave or caves in the vicinity of the **Limekilns**, the Messrs. J. and T. Atkins, who are enthusiasts in such explorations, decided to avail themselves of an early opportunity of going to the spot and seeing for themselves if there was anything to see. That opportunity presented itself on last Monday, Anniversary day, and having received an invitation to accompany the party, I made my way to the starting point as the gaol clock rang out the hour of four over the stillness of the yet sleeping city. There I found everything in readiness, horses and vehicle, bags, ropes, twine, candles, and 'grub', and within a very short time, we were bowling quietly across the bridge which spans the river, and shortly there after climbing the hill up which the road to the **Limekilns** reaches after leaving the old Sydney road (it was called the new road in my young days) at Kelso. Out past the Yarras, and across the Winburndale Rivulet, losing count as we went of the huge stacks of wheat and hay which dotted the fenced-in plains on either side, we jogged steadily along. - It was at this spot that we surprised a scalper in his camp. He had just finished his early breakfast, by the side of the creek, and with horses freshened by their night's rest, he was just begining to move towards the City of the Plains with his dray load of scalps and hides, hares, kangaroos, wallabies, and no doubt an occasional dingo being represented on the dray by the covering which had proved at once their shelter and the cause of their destruction. He had evidently come from the land of game, and what we had seen on the dray prepared us for the sight of numbers of those animals which have been made "noxious" by Act of Parliament. Hares there were in abundance, while here and there we caught sight of kangaroos making their way back into the scrub after a night of feeding on ground which was too exposed during the day. Out past Clear Creek we went, admiring the few paddocks of luxuriant corn which lined the deep, soil of its banks, and over hills until we reached a spot far enough from home to make breakfast feel "good." From the top of a long hill a little further on we come in sight of the valley in which the red earth and whitey- grey stone indicating the character of the country were plainly observable. We did not see any **limekilns**, and were so taken tip with speculation concerning the locality of the hill, into the empty stomach of which we hoped to dip, that we did not think to look for them ; but they were somewhere near or the remains of them, no doubt ; else, why the name. A steady run from the top of the hill brought us to the front of the "Rising Sun," a neat little hostelry kept by a gentleman bearing a name which has been heard in the district for many years Mr. Thomas Tobin. Mr. and Mrs. Tobin very kindly answered all the questions we cared to put to them. Is it true that there are some caves in this locality, and can we gain entrance to them ? was one of the many questions that we put, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, followed by full information concerning the locality, character, discovery, and exploration of the caves, we individually congratulated ourselves that we were 'in' for a good day's sport. And shortly thereafter we were on our way to the mouth of "Ben Glen," (I cannot make affidavit that I have got this name correctly), in charge of a guide. Our guide was Mr. Tobin, junr., and a downright and upstraight good young fellow he proved to be. The cave (for as yet only one cave has been discovered) is in his keeping, together with the section of land surrounding, and as it was found that some of those who had been allowed the run of the cavern had broken a large number of the prettiest stalactites and carried, them away as curiosities, he had provided himself with a padlock and key, which effectually secured against intruders the door which had been made to close the entrance. The fact that a cave existed in the hill not by any means a mountain had been known, for a length of time by the owner of the land, and Mr. Tobin, who has had charge of it, but the difficulties of access thereto had prevented any "attempt to open or explore it. Just recently, however, a proper entrance has been made by blasting the rock which covered the hole leading down into the first chamber for it was simply a hole in the side of the hill, and an easy descent has been cleared and a safe archway built up, so that now the first chamber can be entered without any difficulty provided, of course, that Mr. Tobin is there with his key for the door that has been erected across; the squared opening. This first chamber is a space of about 20f. by 20ft., with a height varying from 8ft. to 8in., the roof being, if it were level, like the inside of a huge boiler lid. And here the first glimpse of the stalactites are obtained, and the fact made plain that we are in a cavern made by water operating upon limestone. Yet we also learn at a glance that there is, much more than, limestone present. On the sides and in the roof are strata of conglomerate, made up of fossil shells, bones, and even pieces of petrified wood, all pressed together and undergoing a secondary process of disintegration or further solidification, the face of the conglomerate in places being coated with a glistening covering of limerock. I suppose that geologists will laugh at the terms I may use, but what care I (so long as I can make at all plain to the ordinary reader what we saw. On the left side of the entrance the roof suddenly dips until it touches the floor, being joined thereto by crystalised rock, brown and moist on the surface, but sparkling like diamonds beneath the crust, when broken ; as we broke it, for the purpose of forcing a small entrance for the youngest and smallest, though most active explorer of the party. But although many inducements, in the shape of stalactites glistening as they pointed downwards from the roof beyond the division, but nearly touching the floor, offered to peg away with chisel and hammer and spade, to force a way into the unexplored regions beyond, we desisted, and turned our attention to the larger openings in the centre, which had already been entered. Down a flight of rude steps we went and then had to face our first real difficulty. After lighting our

candles and crossing a small chamber where stalactites could be seen forming, we had to stoop to conquer, and at last the stoop became a crawl, until we literally had to wriggle and squirm on knees and stomach, elbows and toes, in order to make advancement. For about fifty yards the distance seemed a mile we struggled over what would have been a rough bed of stalagmites if it had not been made fairly smooth and uncomfortably soft by mud. But who cares for mud when there are wonders on the other side of the passage. We got through safely, but terribly "blown" and not by any means fit to enter the presence of royalty ; and then the scene expanded to our view. A large chamber with numerous small passages branching off and down, whose roof glistened with stalactites in course of formation, some of them having, as the only Irishman of the party poetically expressed it, " glistening tear drops on the end of the nose." In some of the niches in the wall and nooks in the roof which vandal fingers could not reach, there were clusters of very pretty stalactites, but these were not numerous, although the broken " stumps" standing out over the roof showed how much damage had been done by specimen hunters. Away down and forward, with an occasional crawl into the sloping passages along the route, sticky with clay and moist as the leather sucker of a pump at work, we pushed our way ; occasionally stopping to make a sensation by lighting some magnesium wire, the effect in some cases being remarkably pretty. Beds of coral, not too white, certainly, here met our view, and rugged terraces of the shell and pebble conglomerate running in irregular courses along the sides and the roof. Still down until we came to point which three weeks ago was impassable by reason of a sheet of water which lay on the bottom, but the water has suddenly disappeared how and where is a mystery although I believe by drainage into Cheshire Creek, or some deeper receptacle on the far side of the hill. Clambering over rugged places, and squirting through " mucky" places, we pushed on until, far, ahead we came to a place where water warned us that further progress would not be enjoyable, and perhaps not safe. The stalactites were here not nearly so numerous as were anticipated or wished, but there were sights sufficiently strange, and peculiar to engage the attention for a very long time. But our lunch -was waiting at the caretaker's house and we felt, drawn back to the entrance. Hither, therefore, slowly and still exploring, we made our way, and were not at all sorry once more to see the light of the sun and breathe the dryer, if hotter, air outside . But we had only got half through our work, and after lunch we explored the surface of the hill, here also finding heaps of conglomerate chiefly fossil that would have delighted the eyes and heart of those who make geology a study. In the face of some of the rocks could be seen prints of innumerable shells, fish, &c, while here and there lay pieces of petrified wood a similar formation to that seen in the cave. But we did not stay long over these. After several ineffectual attempts to get into the stomach of this curious hill through other openings which evidently lead below, we returned to the main entrance, and entertained some visitors in the persons of Rev. Father O'Donnell, of Wattle Flat, and several ladies, who were ready to brave the darkness and the dirt the one very solid and other very soft in order to see some portion of the cave by magnesium-wire light. I cannot stay to dwell upon the bravery of at least one of the young ladies, who followed us back and forth through the mysterious chambers, but she declared that the sight was worth all the trouble and the mud ; and I think she must have been strengthened in her resolve to take the journey by the reflection that " To-morrow was washing-day !" But I have made my story sufficiently long. Although the caves are a long way from being a second Jenolan, they are well worth a visit, and if a little time is devoted to exploration I believe that other caves will be found opening from these. Very little exploration has yet been, done, and that but imperfectly. By the expenditure of a little labour and money in clearing away obstructions and removing some of the soil from the floors, a passable track along the whole course of the explored portion could be made, and this done visitors would find a trip to the **Limekilns** both pleasant and profitable. The distance from Bathurst is only sixteen miles, along a good road, and those who have a taste for nature's wonders would find at the journey's end something that would gratify their taste. The property on which the caves are situated belongs to Mr. S. Taylor, of Queen's Place, Sydney, who in the " digging days" used to reside in the locality. He has just lately had several acres of the land laid out as a vineyard and orchard, and in the course of a few years I expect to see a most picturesque spot in the valley between the hills whose silence was somewhat broken by us on Monday last.

A Trip to the **Limekilns**.

(By 'One of Us.')

At the present time marble is the topic of conversation, both in town and country, and hearing so much about it we were anxious to see for ourselves the place

where it was obtained, so availed ourselves of the opportunity one fine day last week to visit the **Limekilns**. The drive from Bathurst was all that could be desired — indeed we were a gay little party as we drove along under the warm rays of old Sol, admiring the hills and valleys, made beautiful by the warm breath of spring. In due time we reached the 'Rising Sun' Hotel, kept by Mr. Thomas Tobin, and were soon enjoying a delightful repast, for the mountain air had given us a very good appetite. Mr. Tobin very kindly answered our numerous questions re the marble quarry, locality, etc., and showed us some beautiful specimens, which were polished by one of his sons — Mr. James Tobin — (I cannot vouch that all the specimens were done by this son, for I discovered after that they were all adepts in the art, even the youngest, a bright little lad, was engaged at the time polishing a piece of dark gray marble). But to return to the specimens; they were very beautiful, some red, some gray, of lighter and darker shades, while some were a mixture of all shades of red and gray, and one piece of black was strikingly pretty. We were also shown some pendants for watch-chains, made from a piece of rough stone by the Messrs. Tobin which reflects great credit on their polishing abilities. Then we were joined by some members of Mr. Tobin's household who kindly undertook to "show us round" the different places where the marble is to be obtained. Most of the places are within an easy distance of the hotel, and then we proceeded along the Palmers' Oaky road to the place where Mr. Burns took the marble from last week and which the Colonial Architect pronounced "high class." Huge masses of marble jutting out met our eyes on all sides, and from these we broke off several pieces with which to try our hands at polishing in our leisure hours. After a good look around we wended our footsteps once more to the 'Rising Sun' hoping that on our next visit we would see the marble quarry in "full swing." I must not forget to mention about the "Marble Dog," and no doubt my readers will ask "Whatever is that?" So I must explain. A few days before our trip to the **Limekilns**, Mr. James Tobin who has charge of the "Ben Glen" Caves discovered what appears to be a petrified dog of the greyhound species. It is very natural-looking, but is minus the legs and tail. Looking at it from a distance one would imagine it was alive. The tip of the nose, ear, eye, and bones in the side are quite plain; in fact it is quite a curiosity, and visitors to the **Limekilns** will do well not to miss seeing the "Marble Dog." We spent some time at the "Ben Glen" Caves, and Mr. Tobin pointed the fossil in the rock which was pointed out by the Rev. Father Curran who with other gentleman visited "Ben Glen." A great deal of money has been expended on the vineyard and orchard with the coming season there should be an abundance of fruit. Once more we turned our faces to the "Rising Sun" but this time it was to prepare for our departure to the "City of the Plains" and we left the **Limekilns** carrying with us pl memories of our trip, and the kind Mr. Thoms Tobin and his family to we wish "health wealth and prosperity."