



MAN AND A WATERFALL

IF you had been in Northern Queensland twenty years ago, you may have seen a man standing by a waterfall. Through his mind were passing visions of a Spanish castle, of shaded paths through jungle fern and foliage, of a softly-lit dance floor and the water power that would supply him with light. A hundred other ideas passed before his mind. This was to be his home, his ideal—this was to be Paronella Park.

The waterfalls were those of Mena Creek, twelve miles from Innisfail, North Queensland, and the man was a Spaniard, Jose Paronella.

To-day we may see the partial fulfilment of his dreams. Strengthened by unswerving determination and a mind that could at one and the same time embrace the functions of builder, engineer, draughtsman and horticulturist, Jose Paronella built this beauty spot superb. From the turret-topped balconies of his concrete castle to the hydro-electricity unit below the falls, it is the achievement of just one man.

It is hard to realise this as we approach Paronella Park. Set just off the road, we leave our car and walk down rough concrete steps and along a winding path past bright beds of flowers. Passing under a pagoda of coloured lights, we pause at a small rock pool and envy the equanimity of the eel that lives in its twelve inches of water. Thence into the castle itself, through arched entrances draped with curtains of rope-threaded bamboo.

Here we are met by Senora Paronella and her daughter Teresa, who insist on our inspecting the castle—only, of course, after we have been provided with refreshment on the patio overlooking the falls. Here we sit and look out across turreted balustrades to where the falls tumble

Idently over the brink and cascade down to the great pool fifty feet below. Stairs descend the sheer cliff from the castle, enabling sight-seers to reach two balconies, from which can be had a thrilling close view of the falls.

There are swimmers in the pool, and a small boat is available in which visitors may row into the cave-like recesses behind the wall of water. We are told that some of the more venturesome swimmers even dive from the balustrades, fifty feet above the dark green waters of the pool.

Finishing our refreshments, we are first shown the theatrette. Yes, a theatrette, showing regular motion pictures every Saturday night for the local cane farming community. In addition, with canvas chairs removed, the hall is a favourite venue for dances and parties. A unique feature is the great ball, comprised of hundreds of tiny mirrors, which is suspended from the ceiling. With spotlights of pink and blue shining on the ball from the corners of the hall, it is rotated slowly, producing a coloured snowflake effect around walls, floor and ceiling.

We are taken up a narrow flight of steps, through the movie projection room and up yet another flight to a small room in which is housed the Paronella museum. Here we find interesting specimens of local minerals, woods and precious stones, as well as coins of all lands, and the visiting cards of people from almost every nation of the world. A glimpse from this upper window gives us yet another splendid view of the falls. From this room we mount further steps on to the uppermost tower

where it is possible to see, as well as the falls, the jungle fairyland that lies behind the castle.

A path running round the side of the great house brings us to the head of the stairway which leads down, in a single flight, to the lower level on which is spread the remainder of the Paronella domain. At the bottom of the stairway is the lower tea-garden, where visitors sit at artistic concrete slab tables and look out across the great pool and up at the falls.

A little further along the jungle path is a kiosk, in the same Spanish tradition, made of the same rough concrete and with the same balustraded roof garden on an upper storey. Symmetrically laid before it are two elliptical gold fish pools and beyond, two tennis courts, surrounded by a maze of vine-entangled coconut palms. This is truly an amazing place. One feels that here is surely the perfect blending of the inventiveness of man with the beauties of nature.

But this is not all. Beyond is a tract of virgin jungle, penetrated only by inviting paths and the genius of Jose Paronella. Here where shadows and foliage mingle in a mosaic whole, we walked enchanted. Rough seats hewn from the native timber lay along the pathside. A tunnel penetrated a small hill. Above its entrances were the delightful stone work balconies once more. The Teresa Falls, small, but delicately attractive, we found around yet another bend of the path. "A fairyland on earth" was the only adequate description.

Yet I have said it was only the partial fulfilment of Jose Paronella's



dreams. Yes, complete as it all seems, it is only partial. A matter of minutes from the moment I first looked in admiration at that old Spanish castle on the Mena Creek Falls, late in August of this year, I learnt of the death of Jose Paronella, only two days before.

His ideas were as endless as the water flowing over his beloved falls and his determination was no less powerful. He had travelled the world and had hailed this spot as the most beautiful on earth. Here it was that he had built his castle.

The man is gone now, but the waterfall goes on; and on its banks stands the only memorial the man would ever desire—Paronella Park—for all to see.

