

SPANIARD'S DREAM REALISED

Castle in North Queensland

By H. J. Summers

ANY of us have built castles in Spain, but a pleasant-faced Spaniard has come out of his country to build himself a castle in Queensland, and he is doing it beside one of the most beautiful waterfalls in the North.

For five years he has slaved alone at his task, spending more than £20,000 on materials, and now his work is nearing completion.

His name? Joe Paronella. An amazing fellow of 47, courteous, and with none of the swagger that the world has pinned to his race.

To reach his haven we must take a spin out from Innisfail, along the chocolate-red roads that lead through South Johnstone; to Mena Creek, where the falls tumble into one of the most natural round swimming pools that one could imagine, in the midst of tropical jungle. His stucco palace is perched on an eminence at one side of the falls, so close that one could throw, say, a Seville orange from his balcony into the bubbling foam.

Paronella Park, he calls it; but it is something more. It is a most remarkable monument to a man's vision, courage, and industry.

His building is ultra-Spanish, with its ornamented balconies, look-out towers, and capped pillars. Every inch of it, even to the interior staircase railings, is made of concrete, with roughened surface. The builder has long since let count of the number of tons of cement it has taken, but will continue to buy for his needs, regardless of the cost, until the last slab is complete.

Out in the plotted garden, before the main entrance, a fountain plays high when he touches the tap. He built the fountain himself on the day before our visit. For other men that would be a feat; for Joe Paronella it was just another detail in his vast plan.

Down winding steps beside the falls he takes a visitor to his engine room and the dynamo he has had installed to generate power for all the needs of his castle and grounds. The building of the room and the stairs at the face of a sheer cliff is itself an engineering achievement, but, then, he is engineer, architect, builder, and everything else in one.

Going down to the dynamo he pauses to point out the Spanish pear plants that he has had imported and sown in a nearby bed—"Look your pretty pear—no; big, luscious fruit from Spain," he says.

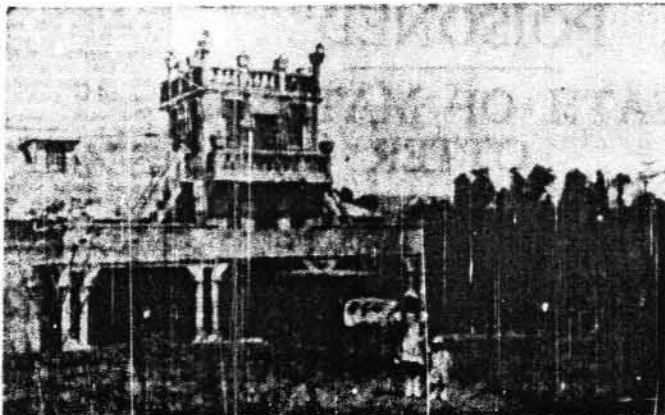
Step inside his castle and you will be astonished to see a modern picture theatre and dance hall, fitted with two talkie projectors and a paratrope. It leads from a lounge that has a soda fountain equipped with its own refrigerating plant.

While Australians Sleep

THE reason for all this? He says he will cater for the entertainment and comfort of those who come to see his park, but that is not his primary object. First of all he wishes to be the host of Paronella Park. He does not expect to get anything like his money back, but (he snaps his fingers) that does not worry him; he is doing his life's work and with his wife and small son and daughter is perfectly happy in his gorgeous retreat.

"Why do I do it, people ask. It is because I wish to do something. I make my money in sugar industry and in selling my farm. I travel and see the world twice. Never do I see anything so beautiful as places you have in Queensland.

"This (pointing to the falls) is only one. Dozens there are—dozens and dozens fast as pretty. I see the beauty of it. But what do Australians do?"



The quaint castle on which Joe Paronella has already worked for five years and spent £20,000, and which will soon be a source of attraction to tourists.

He pauses, then answers his own question: "They do nothing. Sleep, read, sleep, that is all. Their brain gets lazy and tired. They talk too much. And because I am active, because I try to do something for this country, people smile and say 'Paronella he is mad, stupid, to work so hard and spend so much money this way. Why does he not sit down and rest?' That is not my way. I am active. I want to do something. But there should be many of these kind of things."

Which all, in itself, is an eloquent sermon to Australians.

In conversation he mentions that the Governor and Mrs Wilson visited the place during their recent tour, and his Excellency wrote him a personal note of appreciation and praise after his return to Brisbane. The letter is

produced and put carefully away again in a special box.

From the back of his castle an incredibly long flight of steps leads down to the twelve-acre gardens upon which he has expended such energy. To the right, at the water's edge, boats are moored near natural headlands, which have been transformed into railed look-outs. These give a splendid view of the falls and the clear green pool—a view to convince even the greatest sentimentalist that the old swimming hole of his school days was, after all, lacking in some respects.

Under the Falls

THERE is a special thrill awaiting those who know how to paddle a boat and wish to venture under the roaring falls. It is out-

Tropical Setting on a Waterfall

easy if you hug the bank. The falls drop over a receding slab of rock, for all the world like a grotto, and if you leave the shower of spray near the edge you will find yourself in a cavern with water dripping from the fern and lichen-covered roof, and a lacy torrent screening out the sun.

Heads must be bobbed to miss the overhanging rock at the other side, and the boat comes out again in sight of miniature rainbows that the sun makes on the mist. It is a wonderful experience.

There are benches and chairs for picnickers along the creek bank. All are fixtures and made of concrete, so that the floods which race down Mena Creek every year will not tear them away. This Spaniard has made his castle to last.

Above flood-level the grounds are scattered with rustic seats—some of the very rare examples of woodwork in the whole place. A few yards away are bathing boxes and a pavilion (more concrete and Spanish architecture). The pavilion leads out to a cleared space which is intended to be a sports ground. It will include tennis courts, a skating rink and a boches green; and, for the benefit of those who are hazy on the subject, boches is a form of Spanish bowls.

The park has been made an arboretum with the planting of bunyas, cypress, black bean, kauri, "wheel of fame," Indian teak, and other climbing timbers. The natural tropical forest, with its clinging jasper vine, has been cleared out by hand at the cost of some thousands of pounds without the use of a firestick.

At the back of his property—which, incidentally, is held under Government lease—there is a collection of birds. They are not very many as yet, but the aviary is notable for the presence of a parrot that has gone on strike. He was a great favourite and a good talker until he misbehaved one day. When he was punished by being sent to the bird section he refused to talk and has never since uttered a sound. Evidently a bird of his word!

Tunnel Through a Hill

Of all Paronella's wonderful work the most astounding example is his cutting of a tunnel through a hill to save people the trouble of climbing round it to reach the miniature waterfall which he has in a corner of his garden, and which he has named after his little daughter Teresa (or Terasta, as they have it in the musical language of Spain).

The tunnel, which has a richly ornamental entrance, is so dark that one cannot distinguish the walls, but by the light of a match it is possible to discern the apertures where he proposes to instal museum objects. The tunnel, like the grounds, will be lit by electricity, and when the scheme is completed an independent telephone system will be installed to connect points throughout the park. Guests will then be able to give telephonic orders for any refreshments they may require.

From the Terrace Falls by-paths lead along the banks of the tiny garden stream, through a mass of tropical foliage, across miniature bridges to another look-out, and finally back to the towering castle.

Spa Water on Tap

PARONELLA produces a bottle of spa water obtained from a spring, which jets from the massive rock beside Mena Creek Falls. He says he has tasted famous mineral waters of Spain, France, and Italy, and this is superior to them all. He is having it analysed to determine its medicinal value, and once that is established he will explore its commercial possibilities. Here is the rare combination of business man and dreamer.

This quiet Spaniard, who is spending a fortune on hard work, deserves all possible encouragement in his patient enterprise. Five years of toil from daylight to dark he behind him; one more year and his work will be complete. All who have seen his marvellous handiwork and marked his sincerity will wish they surly will—

but they surly will—he has nailed the fallacy that his countrymen are indolent. What is more, he has quite definitely put Innisfail on the tourist map of Queensland, for Paronella Park is going to be one of the grand sights of the Sunshine Route. If he planned to do something for his adopted country he has certainly succeeded.

And with it all he is a charming fellow and will make an admirable host—but, then, isn't that just another old Spanish custom?



Mena Creek Falls, which tumble into a natural swimming pool set in a tropical jungle, and near Joe Paronella's Spanish Castle.