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Rural Postman Completes Fancy Palace After Laboring Forty Years

By Francis Dickie

This is the story of the oddest palace probably in the world. It sounds like a fairy tale, but is instead a tale of modern truth that has hardly an equal in history. The palace and the builder are shown in the accompanying photograph. No prince nor person of royal blood, nor ordinary wealthy man erected it, but a poor postman named Ferdinand Cheval. The palace stands in France in the little borough of Hauterives, in the beautiful valley of the Galaure.

Forty-three years ago, when Ferdinand Cheval was 40 years old, he found in his consignment of mail which he distributed to the rural community around Hauterives, an illustrated book, the cover of which had been lost in transit. As no one claimed the book Cheval took it home. The volume was a magnificent-ly illustrated one, showing various castles, mosques and palaces throughout Europe and Asia. Such is the strangeness of the human brain this book awoke in the heart of the humble postman the maddest ambition; he desired to have a palace of his own. The idea grew stronger and stronger, till he gave way to it and started laying plans which resulted in time in the huge structure shown in the photo, the most fantastic in the world.

Six miles from the village where he lived along the river bed were some beautifully colored stones. Every night after he had finished his labors of postman Cheval took his wheelbarrow and walked six miles to the river, put on a load of these brightly colored stones and wheeled them home—twelve miles of walking after his day's work. Then on nearer hillsides and from the sea he gathered other pebbles, stones and shells. All this material he piled on his quarter acre of ground in the village of Hauterives, just beyond the square house in which he lived.

Cheval was forty years old when he began building the strange structure. He worked early and late at it, seldom getting more than six hours sleep a day. He is now eighty-four years old, and has just recently completed the palace. He kept a diary of work all through the years, which shows he has worked nine thousand days, each one averaging about seven hours of labor, a total of 67,500 hours. In addition to the stones he gathered, he paid out of his savings for four thousand bags of cement and lime. The stones total one thousand cubic yards. As the years slipped away and the building took shape curious people from the surrounding country came to see the palace, and in this way the builder earned a little money by showing people through it. All this money was put back into the building.

The palace is rectangular in shape. The north and south sides are forty-five feet long, the east and west eighty-five feet. The eastern facade is here shown. The whole building is a queer jumble of all the various buildings which Cheval saw in the book, with a

few extra ideas conceived by himself through the years.

An oddly shaped tower taken from some feudal castle rubs shoulders with a bit of architecture suggested by an Oriental mosque. One tower is made entirely of stones selected for their red color and brilliant shine. A Swiss chalet is formed completely of seashells. Over the entire facades on the four sides are scattered a weird assortment of rudely sculptured figures of animals, giants, eagles, ostriches and smaller birds.

Owing to the time put on his palace Cheval claims that he has not had more than six hours sleep in each day for forty years, but he is still very healthy and strong though eighty-four years old. The queerest thing in connection with his palace is that though he has completed it, he continues to live in his old square house.

Recently he conceived the idea of making the palace his wife's mausoleum, so he went ahead and built two magnificent tombs. But when he got them completed the authorities would not grant him a license to make of the place a burial ground.

As an example of what perseverance and a few hours work each day can do, the palace is a striking example. Fantastic and foolish as it seems the palace has brought pleasure to its builder. At first the rest of the villagers laughed at him, but it is different now, for Cheval's palace has put Hauterives on the map. Tourists are beginning to come from all over France to see this strange place, and the builder is reaping quite a nice little sum in fees for showing people over the building.

Music, Love, God.

"To make a home out of a household, given the raw material, to wit, wife, children, a friend or two and a house—two other things are necessary. These are a good fire and good music; and inasmuch as we can do without a fire for half the year, I may say music is the one essential. Late explorers say they have found some nations that have no God; but I have not heard of any that had no music. Music means harmony, harmony means love, love means God." Sidney Lanier.

About Music As A Disabled Soldier's Vocation

From the Hamburg War Hospital Gazette, under the date of Aug. 1, 1916, we find the following warning with regard to music as a vocation for the cripple: "It is believed in certain quarters that music offers a suitable vocation for the disabled soldier. By way of example, several successful blinded or crippled musicians are shown. (Count Zichy, the one armed pianist, visited the war hospital in person to demonstrate how he overcame his handicap.) Whoever uses these examples overlooks

the fact that these men were accomplished musicians before they were disabled. It is wrong for war cripples to assume that by taking up the study of music they can acquire an easy life vocation. On the whole, the music profession offers even to the strongest and most ambitious only small pay."

Training a great number of cripples to be musicians would be equivalent, in reality, to turning out beggars in the guise of musicians. It would be a great crime to our disabled and a step backward in the social position of our professional musicians.

With regard to the musician crippled in the war the situation is different. Here, as in all trades, the most important thing for the director of vocational education is to refit the disabled man for his former occupation. Should a musician be unable to resume his own instrument, it would be easier to teach him to play another instrument than to train him for an entirely different career.

High School Orchestras

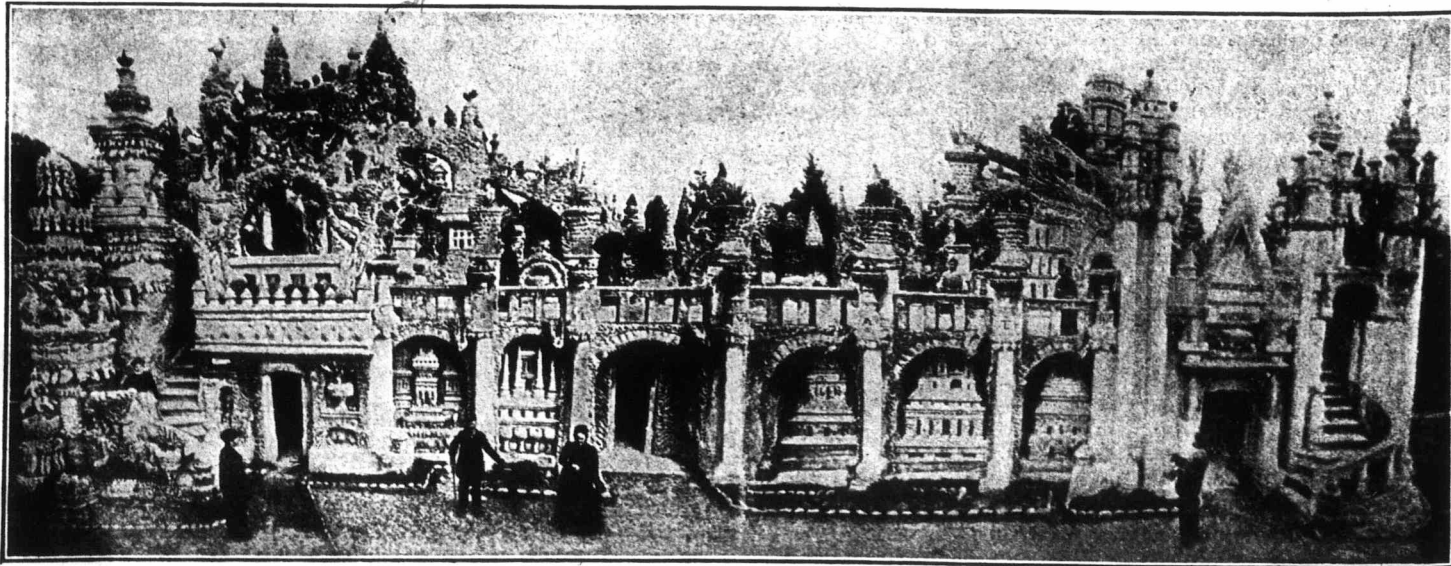
"When the musical aptitude of pupils is properly fostered by means of music courses which will bring out all latent musical ability, we may well look to the high schools for our future guidance in matters musical."

Such is the optimistic outlook for the future as seen by Mr. George H. Gartlan, Director of Music in the New York City schools, in a recent article on the musical situation in the educational system. He believes that the possibilities in the development of musical talents among the students during their high school course have as yet barely been tapped.

Summing up the former status of music in the high school curriculum and contrasting it with that of the present and immediate future, Mr. Gartlan says:

"Until a few years ago music in the high school meant one period per week devoted to sight singing and choral practice for all classes of pupils alike—with or without musical aptitude. After hours the talented student who received his musical training outside of school hours was expected to devote a great deal of his time to choral and orchestral practice which redounded to the schools' credit, but for which he received no credit. By a process of education the high standards set and maintained are now giving, our orchestras are the nucleus about which the musical talent in the school can gather, and they offer their members the same opportunity for individual prominence as is given the athletic stars."

Mr. Gartlan looks to the establishment of classes in all the instruments of the orchestra, so that from these and the school ensembles may later be recruited the players for the many municipal and other symphony orchestras which now so largely draw their membership from foreign sources. If the school orchestras, after studying the various compositions could then have the benefit of hearing them interpreted by a professional organization of high standing their training would be valuably supplemented. This is already being done for the high school orchestras in New York with the aid of the New York Symphony Society and the Philharmonic Society.



Eastern Facade of Postman's Dream Palace