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Editorial Notes

A Great Indian Centenarian :

In publishing this issue we bear in mind the hundredth birthday of one of the living recipients of India's highest award, "Bharat Ratna," (Jewel of India), Sir M. Visvesvaraya, an engineer and statesman of rare distinction and international fame. We offer him our felicitations on this unique day, the 15th of September, 1960, and pray that he may have the happiness to see many more returns of the day with continuing health and strength to carry on working as he wishes to.

The Council of the Association of Engineers decided at a meeting to publish this issue as a special issue in felicitation of Sir M. Visvesvaraya's 100th Birthday and we wrote to him asking him for a message on the occasion. We have received from him a reply expressing, unfortunately, his inability to send one due to extreme old age and slight dimness of eyesight. But the reply is given in such gentle terms that it itself forms a message which we cannot resist the temptation to publish.

The life sketch of a man who has lived so long must be of interest to all. But the life of Sir M. Visvesvaraya has been so full of activity that it is impossible for us to include in the space that we have at our disposal all that may be written about him and his activities. He was born of poor parents in an obscure village Chikballapur, in the Kolar District of Mysore. But he rose by his own merits to be at the age of 48 the Chief Engineer and at the age of 51 the Dewan of the State in which he was born, a unique distinction for an engineer and an Indian and particularly for a son of the soil in those times of foreign civil service domination.

The secret of his success was hard work, devoted service, careful planning and attention to details with foresight. Added to these was the great pains he took to popularise his schemes through conference with opponents and convert their hostility into admiration and co-operation.

Diligence while in school as a student brought him a scholarship for study in a University as a State Scholar for training in Engineering, and those higher studies he carried on so well that he topped the list of successful candidates of Bombay University in 1883. This was all the more remarkable because it took place outside his own State, far from his own home. In his own State of Mysore there were no facilities for University education at that time and so he had to carry on his studies in the Poona College of Science of Bombay University. But 29 years later it was he who arranged for the establishment of a separate University for this State, when he himself became the Dewan of Mysore.

His devotion to service was so marked that it brought him rapid promotion superceding others. Commencing service at the age of 23 as an Assistant Engineer in a Guaranteed post in the P.W.D. Bombay, he was confirmed in less than two years' time. At the age of 33 he was called upon to undertake the independent execution of a water supply and drainage scheme for Sukkur in Sind and carried out the scheme so successfully and so well that a special resolution was passed by the Municipal Board of Sind in 1895 praising his "care, ability and zeal" in carrying out the work.

By attention to detail he produced for Poona City's Water Supply, a design of a system of automatic gates at Lake Fife that brought him international fame and led to his demand as a consultant.

With great foresight he made a special study of Dams and Dam construction for which he realised there was great need in India and by the age of 47 he was able to "retire" from government service and set up as an independent consultant. So reputed was his knowledge that while he was out after retirement on a world tour to study advanced techniques abroad he was urgently recalled at the request of the Nizam of Hyderabad to help in the reconstruction of Hyderabad State which had been devastated by a Cyclone in 1908 and endangered by imminent floods of the rivers, Musi and Easi. He accepted appointment as a "Special Consulting Engineer" and within a year succeeded in bringing about the required reconstruction and in preparing a drainage scheme by a system of reservoirs to protect against future flooding.

This was followed by a special request from the Dewan of his own State, Dewan T. Ananda Rao, and he became the Chief Engineer of Mysore State in November 1909. By 1912 he had completed the well known, magnificent and beautiful Krishna Rajasagar Dam, the largest reservoir built in India up to that time and a multipurpose project full twenty years ahead of the T.V.A.

scheme. So carefully did he plan it that with a Capital investment of only Rs. 10½ crores it brings in an annual Revenue to the Government of about Rs. 1½ crores, nearly 15% of the Capital.

His administrative abilities gained such recognition that on the retirement of Dewan Ananda Rao he was selected as the Dewan and took charge on November the 11th 1912. Till 1919 when circumstances made it necessary to retire from the Dewanship he carried out with success his aim to "plan, promote and encourage developments, chiefly in education, industries, commerce and public works to enable the people to work well, earn well and live well." He introduced a new code of education which aimed at "the cultivation of the moral character, the development of the spirit of loyalty, patriotism and the acquisition of knowledge necessary for practical occupations."

Ater "retirement" again at the age of 58 he was called upon to take charge of the Bhadrabhati Iron Works which had suffered neglect and gave it such assistance that by 1929 it became an entirely Indian Managed concern of which the State could be proud. His services were in continual demand on several committees and several states required him as consulting engineer and adviser. He was respected by all political parties and at the famous all parties conference of 1922 in Bombay which was called on the initiative of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and attended by such prominent leaders as Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. Jinnah, it was on the proposal of Mr. Jinnah that Sir M. Visvesvaraya was voted to the chair, which was a remarkable indication of his impartiality.

His deep thought for an overall plan for economy in India in his book "Planned Economy for India" formed the basis of the present 5-year plans.

He still continues thinking and working. His life has extended beyond the term normally allotted to ordinary man. Having lived a life of hard, honest work, he has earned the right to "Crown" in times like these "a youth of labour with an age of ease." But still his desire is to continue to work.

His is a life which is for us to emulate. May we long have his living example before us!