



“Billion Dollar Engineer”

THE room at the top of the Departmental Building in Stout Street, Wellington, was bare except for a desk at its farther end, and there sat one of the world's great men. He was small, white-haired, and wore rimless glasses. When he spoke his voice rarely rose above a whisper, and he gave the impression of being painfully shy. He was not interested in the view of the wharves and harbour from his window, but concentrated on the papers spread out before him, referring occasionally to a large suitcase packed with technical publications on the floor by his chair. A map of Otago and the Clutha River was pinned inside its lid.

John Lucian Savage is not a great soldier, statesman, or financier. He is known in America, where he was born, as “Jack Dam,” and has sometimes been called the first billion-dollar engineer. It would be no exaggeration to say that he has designed more than half the world's big dams, with their attendant hydro-electric power plants and irrigation schemes, and the list of projects with which he has been concerned occupies 37 lines of small print in *Who's Who*. He has probably left his mark more widely and permanently upon the earth than any other living person, and

yet he is a humble man. It is only when he talks about schemes like his immense projected dam in the Yangtze Gorge—which will control that river's disastrous floods, irrigate 10,000,000 acres of land, and revolutionise the living conditions of half a continent—that his face lights with a quiet enthusiasm which shows that if he is an engineer first, he is also a humanitarian.

Most of his work has been done as chief designing engineer for the United States Bureau of Reclamation, and since his retirement in 1945 he has continued working in an advisory capacity. He is visiting New Zealand now to report on the Roxburgh hydro scheme, and to inspect other schemes, including projected developments on the Waikato.

FARM BORN

JOHN SAVAGE was born on a Wisconsin farm 70 years ago, he said last week, when talking about his career to *The Listener*. He described how he had started with the Government Reclamation Service in 1903, and then decided in 1908 to go into private business. He worked for eight years as a consulting engineer in the western States of America, designing and participating in many important structures. Private engineering practice could have been lucrative, but he preferred instead to take part in what he describ-

ed as “enterprises that have as their objective the development of human relations.” This was one reason for his return to the Reclamation Bureau, where in 1924 he was placed in charge of design.

“I was chief designing engineer for a great many years,” he said, “and in the past decade I have inspected, at the request of the State Department, hydro-electric projects in many countries, including China, India, Afghanistan, Ceylon, Switzerland, Spain, Turkey, Israel and Australia.” He has also had a hand in six dams completed in Pakistan since India was partitioned.

“And I forgot to mention Mexico—they're one of our biggest customers. And British Columbia; we worked on a big project up there too.”

His first big private job was an irrigation project for the sugar companies (continued on next page)



JOHN LUCIAN SAVAGE, or “Jack Dam,” as he has been nicknamed in the U.S., and (at top) one of the dams that Jack built—the Hoover Dam on the Colorado River