Interview with C. E. Eveleth

On the G. E. organization chart Eveleth is put down as the official responsible for engineer designing. I tell him what I am after, Young's relation to his Department. What he does for him? He says, "Well, now let us begin with a review of my experiences. I was born in Burma - my father a missionary and teacher - was a distinguished scholar. He produced the first Burmanese English dictionary - was held highly among scholars and in Government circles. My mother was a woman of famous social gifts, wherever she went in any capital she was always sought. I inherited from her - a liking for people - a power to get on with people. They saw much of the world. Were the last visitors to Mandalay before ~~interrogation~~ [illegible]." I do not understand what, but I suppose it was the fall of Mandalay.

"Studied physics and chemistry." Emphasized this for young men, that there is no need to know anybody in order to get along. "I came to Schenectady in (verify year) attracted by what I had heard of the place. I have had many experiences. They Rice took me in and said, 'Go anywhere you want. Do anything you like. We will see what you can best do.' I said, 'Well, I want to experiment in rail-road work.'"

He believed that road electrification was something the Company should undertake. (Look this up in Hammonds manuscript.)

"Then the war came along and we wanted to contribute something. What we studied was how to get a submarine and I developed (I think he said I) an instrument by which you could get the direction from which a submarine was coming and its distance from you through signs." He says that he was on the ship - I don't know what it was -

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a destroyer, perhaps, which got the first submarine. All the story should be worked up.

Later, I think, after the war, they were having trouble in the plant with a large steam turbine and he would go into the factory to find out what was the matter. He says that they spent a thousand dollars a day for a year in this effort to make a perfect turbine. Just what his part was in this work I do not understand, probably it would appear in the history of his early developments.

Swope came to him about 1922, I think. There was a very uneasy condition in the Schenectady Works. As a matter of fact, Eveleth was on the ocean at the time. He says he was the first man ever called back by radio. Work told him that he wanted him to undertake the management of the Schenectady plant. He never had done any managing. They said they would give him three weeks to learn the business. The men had always been treated rather cavalierly, I think from what I gather. Swope and Young had advanced ideas about the treatment of men. They believed it was a settled fact, a demonstration, that high wages meant lower cost of production. Wanted to find the way by which they could be sure that by higher wages they would get their lower cost. Did not believe it could be done by treating the men as a mass - that they've got to treat each workmen as an individual. He began by a review of rates. Trying to persuade the men that a flat rate was to their best interest. In order to get at this he organized a works council, selecting ten men in each department, that is, he asked the Superintendent to select ten men in each department, told them that they might have half of them as a steady reliable kind, that he wanted them to

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But who was there on the staff fitted for such an experiment = It must be some one very trained to scientific exactness - some one who knew the shops & whom the men knew. The man they selected happened at that moment to be on the ocean - G. E. Everett now appearing on the G. E. organization chart as the official responsible for engineering designing - Mr Everett had ~~been~~ developed in the Wall an instrument for detecting the direction from which a submarine was coming - or will in ~~de~~ distance - had indeed been on the ~~destroy~~ slot which destroyed the first submarine. He had spent much time in the factory turbine experimenting so that the men knew him. ~~He~~ literally ~~to He not always [illegible] to [illegible] [illegible]~~ they called him back by radio - [illegible] of the first - man ever so called back [illegible] - to take the [illegible] [illegible] a [illegible] [illegible] He [illegible] the [illegible] of the [illegible] plant

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be sure to include all the radicals of every variety. The men were not too favorable, I think, and the Company rather doubtful. But Eveleth's idea was that all things which promised, possibly to improve a situation, were worth trying. In working up the settlement for a council, he says he individually saw a thousand men. Finally representatives were elected - one for every one hundred and fifty men which formed a body. Union papers in Schenectady and elsewhere fought the move but Eveleth would not go ahead until the men, themselves, had voted. and finally when the matter came to vote, out of seven thousand, only sixteen men voted, "No." Ten of these were on one bench, where they had bolstered each other up in opposition.

This council then drafted a constitution, simple. Was to deal with general principles, not with individual cases of dissatisfaction, if it would be avoided. These were to be handled by the Superintendent in connection with the representative of each department. He says that royalty has a case of dissatisfaction getting behind the department. He told them that they were to decide what was the general interest and that they a free forum. They began by rattling all the old skeletons of brutal foremen, etc., and almost always when these cases were sifted they were found to be old, old stories. He says that the temptation to bait on the part of the men gradually wore itself out and there came to be a born confidence that this was a serious, sincere thing. The Company was represented only by the Manager and his associates. I take it from what Case told me he often stopped in the works council. At least he is very familiar

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with the personnel and heartily in sympathy with what has been done. Gradually a suspicion bristled. When the matter of piece rates was finally decided upon the first six months the men earned one and a half times what they had been doing. Increase in the average of the first year was two and a half and in two years and a half it was from twenty to twenty-five percent. Since that there has been nothing but harmony in regard to rates - they go up according to the capacity of the man.

He says that one of the things they took up was accidents. He had never thought much about them. Swope came to him one day and told him he was running a butcher shop. He then sent in an elert man and told him to report everything through the shop that he thought dangerous. On top of that safety committees, including some eight hundred workmen were formed. They were made responsible. The accidents fell off by sixty percent. He says that he has always found it in dealing with the men that a little interest in a lot of people is better than a great deal of interest in one. All of these things, he said, reflect the attitude of Young and Swope towards industrial relations. Their idea that there are three partners in the General Electric, each having its rights. There are the people who have put in their money - the stockholders - the management - the workmen.

Eveleth is very interested in talking on the way they find out the value of a man in the General Electric. It is, of course, a problem of first importance. Why is one fellow worth so much and another so little? Who is the one that will be worth much and who can they expect little? They bring in every year from the colleges five or six hundred boys. How are they going to evaluate them? He calls

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himself the godfather of the system that they follow generally, I think. He had two thousand engineers to whom he applied his principles. He got acquainted with some twelve hundred of them - met them - and talked to them. Then he set down on a card his own evaluation, that is, the value to the G. E. An A-I man he put down at one hundred per-cent and so graded down. "Three things I wanted in an engineer - invention - what is called the engineering mind - ability to execute the job. The rarest thing in the world is a man with all of these talents." What they are after is to discern one or the other in the recruit. He rated these twelve hundred men, himself, then he asked an assistant to rate them. Less than two percent of the whole number in which there was five percent difference in evaluation. These evaluations of theirs held under action, that is, the men turned out pretty nearly as they had evaluated them. Of course, character or lack of it comes in to defeat a man's apparent ability. They watched these men - going over their lists every six months, at least. Whenever they find a particularly good man they say he must have more responsibility and they give it to him. They push him ahead as fast as he shows results. Their whole idea is, as he says, to permit no eddies - that there should be in a proper organization no such thing as a good man being thrown into an eddy or submerged. The student engineers are rated every three or four months, so that they soon tell what they have in them, that is, you find out what the man can do. You measured him and never let them stand still. Success is the success of individuals, that is, the success of the whole is the success of individuals, as in a crusader, he says, in this. The nightmare

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~~that is~~ in the continuity ~~of~~ employment. ~~Work's~~ nightmare of the workmen is ~~leaving~~ losing his job. It is our business to see that jobs are permanent. We are making many studies now, looking to the ~~studying~~ steadying of the job. We can already assure three fourths of time. I think we will be able making uniform production to finally insure full time. We must handle human elements in the same experimental way that we do physical elements. To keep twenty thousand men at work all the time is much better than keeping thirty thousand part of the time. It will take long experience. We are asking ourselves always, how much better we could have done than we did do if our policy had been changed in this way or that.

I think it was towards this problem, or on this problem that Young said to Case, "If it is right, a way can be found to do it. This thing is right, that is, steadiness of employment and we must find a way to do it." This I should take up with Case.

I find that Eveleth said nothing directly on Young anymore than that he says ~~in him and in~~ on Swope, (notice that they ~~are~~ all, not all, perhaps but most of them are quite insistent in bringing Swope in. They have great admiration for his ability.

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