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LOSS TO JOURNALISM BUT GAIN TO THE BBC

"Profile" Of W. J. Haley. From The London "Observer"

WHEN the BBC announced that William John Haley had been appointed to the new post of Editor-in-Chief, they described him as joint managing director of the *Manchester Guardian*, and a director of Reuters. Another qualification for the editorship of the BBC they omitted: Haley is a working journalist, the Editor of the *Manchester Evening News*.

For 21 years he has been sensing, observing, and guiding public tastes and opinions throughout an area bounded by the Lake District and mid-Wales, and containing the greatest concentration of people in this country. He is as shrewd a businessman as there is in that region of hard bargainers; but first he is a journalist, and it is his journalistic skill, in the widest sense, that the BBC is to employ.

Haley has lived half his life in Manchester. He is a bilingual Jersey man, but some of his ancestors came from Yorkshire, and have bequeathed him the gifts of caution and stubborn will to discipline his Gallic heritage of romanticism and élan.

IN the last war he sailed most of the oceans as a wireless operator, and had the usual narrow escapes. Then he read *The Street of Adventure*, and decided to become a journalist. The best paper, he was told, was *The Times*, and with the ingenuous boldness of youth he offered to them his services. *The Times* gave him a near-journalistic job taking



W. J. HALEY

"May light up some dark places"

copy over the telephone, and before long he and the girl he married were in Brussels, running for that newspaper a news receiving and dispatch bureau. As a sideline, he wrote a weekly Brussels letter for the *Manchester Evening News* and was invited to join their reporting staff.

This was his real start in journalism, and Carl Fallas, a comradely and philosophic reporter who was later to write *The Wooden Pillow*, was made his mentor. Haley likes to add to the legend that he was not a good reporter. Actually, he had not time to find out. Within a week or two there was an opening in the sub-editors' room, and he was transferred. He was a brilliant success; during the next few months, a series of accidents left the chief sub-editor's chair vacant, and Haley was promoted to it.

Since then, he has travelled swiftly. He was next made news editor, an athletic job, which he performed from a room that did not contain a chair, but only a breast-high reading-desk. Within a few years, he was managing editor, which meant in that office business manager and editor. His next rewards were the secretaryship of the company and a seat on the board which controls both the evening paper and the *Manchester Guardian*.

Those who worked with Haley in this period will never forget it. He had a desk in each department and a timetable which showed where he was working at any particular hour. It was not long before he had a complete grasp of the working of every department. He even memorised the publisher's lengthy list of train times.

* * *

THE editorial staff arrived at 8.0 a.m. They left him working on at 6.0 p.m. His lunch was a glass of milk and a bun. His relaxation was a game of table tennis, which he played with a cunning left hand. Occasionally, he played chess and cricket. In these games, as in everything he did, he went all out to win. All new skills and new

(Continued on next page)

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