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POLICE SCIENCE

JOSEPH T. WALKER, Ph.D.

1908-1952

On April 29, 1952, Joseph T. Walker, Ph.D., director of the Chemical Laboratories of the Department of Public Safety, of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, died of Hodgkins Disease. Dr. Walker was born in St. Louis in 1908. He was a graduate of the University of Illinois in 1930 with distinction in chemistry. In 1937, at the age of 25, he received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Chemistry from Harvard University. He was in the "pool" for an academic appointment to teach. He was at that time invited to become State Police Chemist in Massachusetts. No existing police laboratory was staffed by a man of Dr. Walker's attainments. He thought the job deserved the best—for 19 years he gave it. He began as Expert Assistant to the Commissioner of Public Safety. In 1936, he was appointed Director of Laboratories of the Department of Public Safety, and in 1947 Director of the Chemical Laboratory of the Massachusetts State Police. From 1939 until his death, he was indispensable in the teaching of toxicology at Harvard Medical School where he became a faculty member among doctors of medicine. In April 1952, in his 44th year, after nine years of knowing that death was imminent, after repeated hospitalization, and after frequent interruptions of his work, Dr. Walker died with unimpaired good humor, with unimpaired intellectual curiosity and kindly interest in friend and stranger. He worked in the shadow of death for nearly a decade. What did he produce of public and scientific interest?

Dr. Walker's publications range from "The Spectrograph in Criminal Investigation" to "The Quantitative Estimation of Barbiturates in Blood by Ultraviolet Spectrophotometry" to "Paper Chromatography for the Identification of Common Barbiturates." The significance of his work is great. He lessened the danger of false accusation of murder by poisoning. By producing an easy method of quantitation of blood barbiturates he simplified the investigation of unexplained sudden deaths and the treatment of barbiturate poisoning.

Continually his telephone rang at noon or at midnight, "I have a

patient!" or "My child is poisoned." Not only from Massachusetts, but from all New England was his aid sought. Unselfishly, he gave his knowledge, his understanding, his time, and his life. Throughout the world his methods are used, his name is known, and all men benefit. None who knew him will forget him.

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