

Percy W. Bridgman **FREE**

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# OBITUARIES

Percy W. Bridgman, suffering from Paget's disease and given only a few weeks to live, shot himself on August 20 at his summer home in Randolph, N. H. He was 79 at the time of his death. Prof. Bridgman was born in Cambridge, Mass., and spent his student days and his entire professional career, as teacher and research scientist, at Harvard University. He entered Harvard at the turn of the century, receiving his AB in 1904, his master's degree in 1905, and his doctorate in 1908. As a graduate student, and for several years thereafter, he held a series of fellowships and assistantships in the Department of Physics. In 1913 he was appointed assistant professor of physics and six years later became a full professor. He subsequently received appointments as Hollis Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy (in 1926) and as Higgins University Professor (in 1950). In the latter capacity he was able to teach and carry out research in any department or school of the University. He retired from the Harvard faculty in 1954.

Prof. Bridgman received the 1946 Nobel Prize in physics in recognition of his pioneering research on the effects of high pressures on the behavior of matter. That work, which extended over a period of half a century and was carried out with equipment and measuring techniques which he himself had to design and develop, led to vast increases in the pressures obtainable under laboratory conditions and to the publication of the results of original measurements of the compressibility of a large number of materials, of the viscosity of liquids under pressure, of thermoelectric effects, and of numerous other properties of materials which had been subjected to high pressures. He once observed that from the cosmic point of view it is important to understand the effects of pressures "... because all except a small fraction of one percent of the matter in the universe exists under pressures greater than 1000 atmospheres". Pressures produced in his laboratory eventually exceeded that figure by more than 400 times, although the normal working pressures he employed seldom reached more extreme levels than  $10^5$  atmospheres.

In addition to his prolific contributions as an experimentalist, Prof. Bridgman was known for his work on the theoretical aspects of thermodynamics and for his writings on the philosophical implications of science. He was the author of many books, including *The Logic of Modern Physics*, *Dimensional Analysis*, *The Physics of High Pressure*, *Thermodynamics of Electrical Phenomena in Metals*, *The Nature of Physical Theory*, *The Intelligent Individual and Society*, *The Nature of Thermodynamics*, *Reflections of a Physicist*, *Studies in Large Plastic Flow and Fracture*, and *The Nature of Some of Our Physical Concepts*. A seven-volume col-



Percy W. Bridgman

lection of his research papers, it has recently been announced, is to be published in the future by Harvard University.

A former president of the American Physical Society (1942), Prof. Bridgman belonged to many scientific organizations, including the National Academy of Sciences, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Society, as well as being a foreign member of the Royal Society and an honorary fellow of the British Physical Society. Prior to receiving the Nobel Prize, he was awarded the Rumford Medal of the American Academy (1917), the Cresson Medal of the Franklin Institute (1932), and Roozboom Medal of the Netherlands Royal Academy (1933), the Comstock Prize of the National Academy (1933), and the Research Corporation Award (1937). In 1951, the Society of Rheology presented its Bingham Medal to Prof. Bridgman for his contributions to rheological science.

**Joseph A. Becker**, research physicist at Bell Telephone Laboratories, died on July 10 at Overlook Hospital in Summit, N. J., after a brief illness. He was 64 years old.

Dr. Becker came to the United States from Germany as a young man and was educated at Cornell Univer-



Joseph A. Becker