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ISAAC NEWTON ADVENTURER IN THOUGHT

A. RUPERT HALL


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General Editor's Preface

Our society depends upon science, and yet to many of us what scientists do is a mystery. The sciences are not just collections of facts, but are ordered by theory, and this is where Einstein's famous phrase about science being a free creation of the human mind comes in. Science is a fully human activity; the personalities of those who practise it are important in its progress and often interesting to us. Looking at the lives of scientists is a way of bringing science to life.

By the time of his death in 1727 Newton stood as the representative figure of modern science. His name was something to conjure with, evoking ideas of the absent-minded professor, the solitary genius, and the power of mathematical and experimental science to answer questions about the world. He became a key figure in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and his work correspondingly aroused unease among Romantics who saw his science as inhuman and reductive.

A mythical Newton, a new Adam born on Christmas Day and nourished by an apple from the tree of knowledge, came to obscure the real man who had worked in dynamics, astronomy and optics, and less successfully in chemistry, to synthesize the work of great predecessors such as Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and Boyle. Rupert Hall comes to this biography after editing the correspondence of both Newton himself and also Henry Oldenburg, the first secretary of the

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