

P. M. S. Blackett

A biographical memoir

This outstanding Memoir, written by Sir Bernard Lovell for the Royal Society, describes the career of one of the most remarkable men of his generation, Lord Blackett, President of the Royal Society 1965–70, a peer among scientists, a thinker of great originality in military matters, a radical in politics and a man with a passionate concern for the underprivileged.

Sir Bernard shows how Blackett, trained as a naval officer and serving in World War I, became a scientist at Cambridge under Rutherford and achieved international fame in three fields of physics, atomic disintegrations, cosmic rays and palaeomagnetism, becoming a Nobel Laureate in 1948.

Blackett became a member of the influential Tizard Committee on air defence in 1935 and when World War II came he was soon actively involved as a scientific adviser to a number of Commands. He had a major impact on the war effort, particularly in the development of Operational Research. His conflicts with Cherwell and Churchill over bombing policy are vividly and yet faithfully portrayed by Sir Bernard. After the war his views on atomic warfare were in such sharp conflict with official policy that he was virtually excluded from government advisory work until the Labour Administration of 1964, when he became a key figure in the creation of the Ministry of Technology.

Sir Bernard Lovell, as a personal friend and colleague for 40 years, was in a unique position to observe events and he has written a Memoir of absorbing interest. The many facets of the life and work of Blackett brought out here surely indicate that he will find a place as one of the great men of the twentieth century.

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