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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CONTRACEPTIVES OF THE FUTURE

A Discussion held on 18 and 19 February 1976
Organized by R. V. Short, F.R.S. and D. T. Baird

A review of the natural constraints on human fertility shows that these mechanisms can no longer be expected to hold human population growth in check in the future; as a species we are therefore going to become increasingly dependent on artificial forms of contraception for the rest of our existence. Much of the contraceptive research in recent years has been aimed at improving the efficiency of existing techniques, which are already highly sophisticated and designed mainly with the developed countries in mind; but the major problems lie in the developing countries where the needs are greatest and the motivation least. More attention must therefore be given to the acceptability of contraceptives, and the development of non-medical channels for their distribution and sale.

Although the techniques at present available seem to be relatively safe and effective, there are still a number of unexplored approaches that can be developed in the years to come. Immunization of women against pregnancy seems to hold some promise, and forms of contraception that result in amenorrhoea may also prove increasingly acceptable. Unfortunately there are few promising leads in the direction of male sterilization.

Contributors to this report were experts from the Medical Research Council, the World Health Organization, the Ford Foundation, the Population Council and voluntary family planning organizations.

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