

Sir Isaac Newton - Knight Gallant of Science
(A Biography in Verse)



On a Christmas day in sleepy Woolsthorpe¹

Science descried her glimmer of hope;

A spark, later a blinding fireball

Of genius, dispelling darkness all.

Thus was born Science's prodigy son

1642

In the *persona* of Isaac Newton.

Isaac's eyes on his father ne'er rested,

The latter, from the world having earlier parted;

And so it was that Newton, the famous

To his father was a child posthumous.

His mother, Hannah², bereaved of spouse,

Sought to wed into another house;

And so, to the woes of a child of two,

That of neglect was added too.

His step-father having breathed his last,

1653

From school, Isaac was summoned fast;

Sir Isaac Newton
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Sir Isaac Newton

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To shoulder the burden of the family estate,
A calling, for which he was bare of taste.

To Free Grammar School³ he then returned 1660

At the feet of his teacher, Euclid⁴ learned.

The 5th of June of 1661 1661

Saw him become of Trinity⁵ one,

Professedly for the study of Law,

A pursuit, soon, from to withdraw.

Philosophy Descartes', Hobbes' and Boyle's⁶

Formed his mental nurture and toils;

But so was Astronomy Galilean⁷

As also Optics Keplerian.

A love of Mathematics was kindled in time 1663

By a work on Astrology of his time

Of which, perusing, he grasped naught,

As it, with mathematical "knots" was fraught.

He then essayed Trigonometry,

Found a lacuna in his Geometry;





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So back, pronto, he went to The Elements⁸,
 Delved deeper into Euclidean rudiments.
 Wallis, Descartes and William Oughtred⁹
 In succession, with zeal he read.
 And come April, the following year
 Became he a Trinity scholar. 1664
 A further year at the University¹⁰,
 Earned him a Bachelor's with dignity. 1665
 Then, descended a pall of gloom
 On England, by plague consigned to doom;
 The pestilence running its deathly course
 Isaac, home, labored *sans* repose;
 And in a space of years two flat,
 His Method of Fluxions¹¹ arrived at; 1667
 Which, the birth of Calculus being,
 Him propelled to fame undying.
 Professor Barrow¹² of The Lucasian Chair¹³,
 In Isaac discerning a bright-eyed heir,





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His genius sought to disseminate,
 The Lucasian tradition to perpetuate.
 Thus, the Chair of Barrow shorn,
 Isaac next came to adorn. 1669

The veil of darkness shrouding Light,
 Ripped Isaac with rare insight;
 Revealing Light in its colors true
 As a spectrum, for the eye to construe.
 At the threshold of years thirty, 1672
 As a luminary of The Royal Society¹⁴,
 On his searches into Color and Light
 Pinned he a thesis erudite.

“It is corpuscular!”, of Light he wrote,
 With Huygens¹⁵, striking a jarring note!
 His opponents by the number mounting,
 Bore he many a barb and a sting,
 Presently, a nervous wreck becoming, 1678
 His high *sang-froid* to pieces crumbling.





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His spirit masterful soon rose anew
 To conquer heights, scaled by few,
 Unveiling the laws of Gravitation,
 Of Linear and Uniform Circular Motion.
 These, and the law of conserved Momenta
 To the world he gave as The Principia¹⁶; 1687
 A work, to unify phenomena diverse,
 Fledgling Science, to nurture and nurse.
 All through King James'¹⁷ turbulent rule,
 By Cambridge¹⁸ he stood, staid and faithful;
 To become, in the days subsequent,
 An elected member of Parliament. 1689
 Illness nervous dogged his health,
 Weaned him from his science, his wealth! 1693
 Him intending for a lucrative stint,
 As Warden, and Master, of the Mint¹⁹. 1696 & 1699
 The reigning empress of Britain, Anne,
 Forward came to honor the man;





1705

A “Sir” to his Christian name prefixing,
In the realm of Science, a sure firstling!
A knight gallant Sir Isaac was,
By Science, missioned for her lofty cause,
Unrelentingly on the trail
Of Nature’s laws, his Holy Grail²⁰!

-Nelliah Hariharan²¹

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Notes

¹Woolsthorpe: The little hamlet in Grantham, Lincolnshire, England, where Isaac Newton was born.

²Hannah: Hannah Ayscough, Isaac Newton's mother.

³Free Grammar School: The school in Grantham, England, where Isaac Newton first studied.

⁴Euclid: The first mathematician to write a treatise on geometry. "Euclidean" refers to Euclid.

⁵Trinity: Refers to Trinity College, Cambridge, England, where Newton studied.

⁶Descartes, Hobbes and Boyle: René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes and Robert Boyle, earlier philosophers / scientists whose works deeply influenced Newton.

⁷Galilean, Keplerian: Of Galileo Galilei and Johannes Kepler, pioneer astronomers.

⁸Elements, The: The name of Euclid's work.

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⁹Wallis, William Oughtred: Earlier mathematicians whose works influenced Newton.

¹⁰University: In the poem, refers to the University of Cambridge, England.

¹¹Method of Fluxions: The name Newton applied to his mathematical methods, the forerunner of the calculus.

¹²Barrow: Professor Isaac Barrow who held the Lucasian Chair prior to Isaac Newton. He was also Newton's teacher.

¹³Lucasian Chair, The: A distinguished professorship of mathematics at the University of Cambridge.

¹⁴Royal Society, The: A distinguished scientific society in England concerned with the perpetuation of knowledge in all fields of Natural Science.

¹⁵Huygens: Christiaan Huygens, a contemporary of Isaac Newton who disagreed with his Corpuscular theory of Light.

¹⁶Principia, The: Refers to Newton's monumental work *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, written in Latin. Considered the greatest scientific text ever written.

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¹⁷King James: In the poem, refers to King James II to whose policies Newton was strongly opposed.

¹⁸Cambridge: In the poem, refers to the University of Cambridge, England.

¹⁹Mint: Refers to The Royal Mint of England, concerned with the coinage of money.

²⁰Holy Grail: In Christian mythology, a wide-mouthed shallow vessel, the object of legendary quest for King Arthur's knights.

Except for Newton's birth date, the facts for this poem were gleaned from the following web page:

<http://www-gap.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/~history/Mathematicians/Newton.html>



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