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Sir ISAAC NEWTON  
Woolsthorpe, England - London, England.  
4 Jan. 1643 - 31 March 1727

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Nature and Nature's laws lay hid by night:  
God said, "Let Newton be!" and all was light.

A. Pope : Epitaph intended for Sir Isaac Newton.  
In: Moritz, p. 167, # 1007

Cf.: O'er Nature's laws God cast the veil of night,  
Out-blaz'd a Newton's soul-and all was light.

Aaron Hill. In: Moritz, p. 167, # 1009

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Date: Sat, 7 Oct 1995 17:38:59 +0100 (MET)  
From: Andrew McNab <mcnab@afsmail.cern.ch>  
To: "Antreas P. Hatzipolakis" <xpolakis@prometheus.hol.gr>  
Subject: Re: Newton's epitaph

Pope wrote the couplet:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid by night.  
God said 'Let Newton Be!' and all was light.

to be placed on Newton's memorial in Westminster Abbey (which is a few metres away from his grave.) However the couplet was not used and a longer Latin inscription was used instead. I copied it down by hand one afternoon and will add it to Newtonia when I come up with a decent translation (my latin is rather rusty nowadays.)

It finishes with the lines

Sibi gratulentur Mortales  
Tale tantumque exstitissit  
Humani generis decus.

Let Mortals rejoice that  
there has existed such and so great  
an Ornament to the Human Race.

Given the heavy baroque style of the monument, Pope's couplet would have looked out of place.

As an aside, Hillaire (?) Belloc added a couplet to Pope's:

Nature and Nature's laws lay hid by night.  
God said 'Let Newton Be!' and all was light.

But the Devil shouting 'Ho!  
Let Einstein be!' restored the status quo.

Cheers

Andrew McNab

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