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**Historical elege of James Watt**

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Preface.

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## PREFACE.

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IN 1699, Louis XIV. gave to the Academy of Sciences a new code of laws, by which several important changes were introduced into the constitution of that Society.

Of these, one of the most novel, was the admission of *Foreign Associates*. These were never to exceed eight in number, and were to be chosen without regard to any other considerations than their scientific fame, and the integrity of their lives. Hence, the honour of being admitted into that very distinguished class, has always been esteemed a reward of the most eminent philosophical attainments; and "the list of Foreign Associates," says Cuvier, "commencing with the names of Newton, Leibnitz, and Peter the Great, has never degenerated from its original splendour."\*

In 1814, the name of JAMES WATT was added to this illustrious catalogue; and, some years after

\* Eloge of Priestley.

his death, the duty of preparing an Historical Eloge, or biographical memoir, in which his scientific career, and the sense which his fellow-members entertained of his loss, should be recorded, devolved upon the Perpetual Secretary, M. Arago. That Eloge was read at the public meeting of the Academy of Sciences, on the 8th of December, 1834.

If the title of this work requires any further explanation, it may be given in the words of Fontenelle, who, more than a century ago, filled the same office which M. Arago now holds, and published the Eloges of many Academicians. "The title of Eloges," says he, "is not quite so correct as that of *Lives* would be; for they are, strictly speaking, merely Lives, such as would be written by an author who only did justice to their subjects."

The well-known abilities of M. Arago, himself a distinguished cultivator of the same sciences as the great philosopher whom he here commemorates, have been exercised with even more than their usual success, on the congenial topic thus presented to him. He has explained many most important inventions, involving numerous and minute scientific details, with so much simplicity and precision, as to render them intelligible, and therefore interesting, to every reader; while his peculiar felicity of illustration and powers of

diction, lend additional attractions to the knowledge so conveyed. To the latter characteristics of his style, no translation can do justice; and the difficulty or impossibility of transferring from the French to the English language those graces of idiom and expression, in which the former so much abounds, must serve as the excuse for imperfections, which in the following pages will doubtless be observed.

To some, it may appear, that M. Arago, in his history of the early improvers of the Steam Engine, has dwelt too much on the names of De Caus and Papin. Perhaps he may in return consider, that our notes on those who have in this country always been looked upon as the real originators of *the great machine*, have entered into further details than were required to establish their claims and set forth their merits. But as, on the one hand, the patriotic ardour for which M. Arago is celebrated, has been well employed in asserting the reputation which his country may deserve; so, on the other, we feel quite assured, that his liberality of sentiment, and desire of rendering impartial justice to all, will easily reconcile him to the nationality which he may possibly think he discerns on our part.

In the Appendix to this translation, the Historical Note by Lord Brougham on the discovery of

the composition of water, is followed by the eloquent delineation of the Character of Mr. Watt by Lord Jeffrey ; to which those who had known Mr. Watt longest and best, have concurred in ascribing the merit of an unrivalled fidelity.

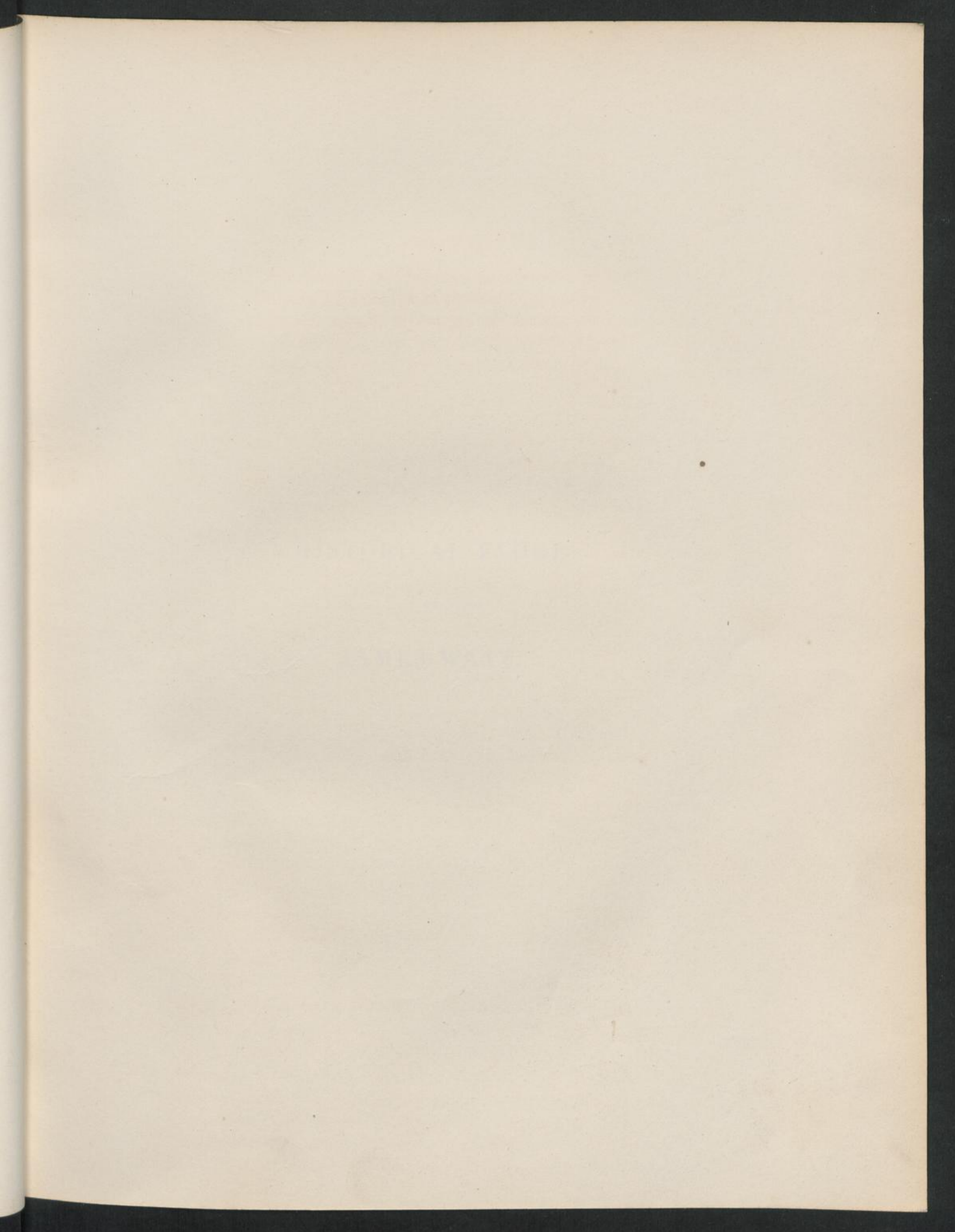
Of the speeches delivered at the meeting at which the statue in Westminster Abbey was voted, it was at first proposed only to have given some extracts. But it was found that the effect of those speeches must have been infinitely injured, by their being at all curtailed ; and as they do the highest honour not only to the memory of Mr. Watt, and the talents and feelings of the distinguished speakers, but also to the Nation whose gratitude they were intended to express, the Report of the Committee has been reprinted without abridgement or alteration.

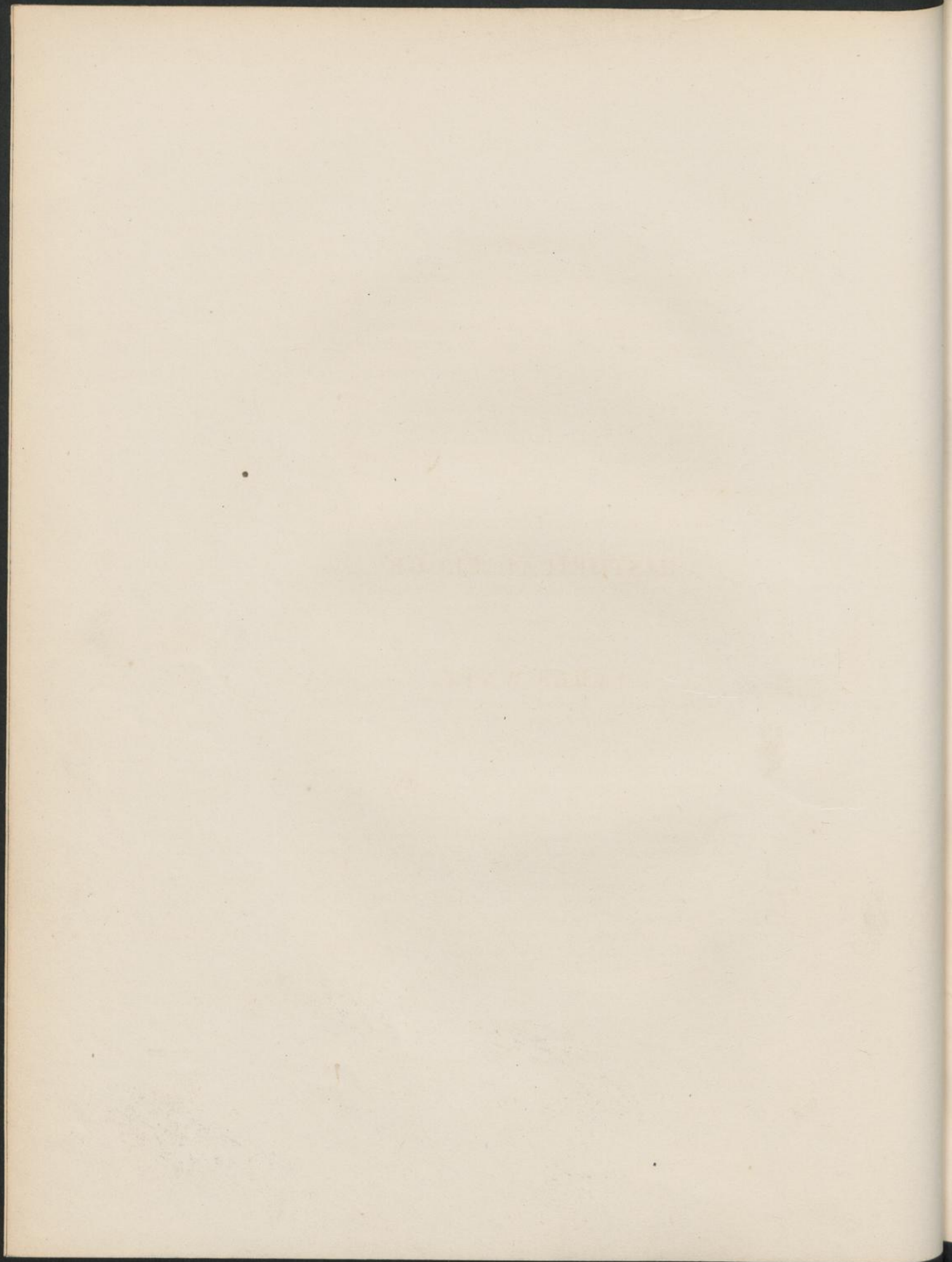
The able Dissertation on Machinery considered in relation to the welfare of the working-classes, formed originally a part of the body of the Eloge ; and was inserted immediately after that chapter which treats of the History of the Steam-Engine. But, as its introduction there seemed somewhat to interfere with the continuity of the history of Mr. Watt's life and inventions, it has now been, perhaps more appropriately, placed after the other parts of this volume in which those are more immediately noticed.

For much of the information contained in the Additional Notes, the Translator has to thank the goodness, (which M. Arago might well call unwearied), of his friend the present Mr. James Watt ; who has always viewed as a sacred trust the guardianship of that name which he inherits, and which is now perpetuated, in every quarter of the world, by benefits conferred on mankind, such as lead to the greatest and most imperishable renown.

EDINBURGH,  
12<sup>th</sup> November 1839.







HISTORICAL ELOGE

OF

JAMES WATT.

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JAMES WATSON