

**Orville H. Platt, "Invention and Advancement," in Proceedings and Addresses.
Celebration of the Beginning of the Second Century of the American Patent System at
Washington City, D.C., April 8, 9, 10, 1891 (Washington, 1892), 57-76.**

Excerpted text:

... Formerly we ascribed creative faculty or force to the Divine Being alone; our commonest thought of God was that He was the Infinite Creator. We said as we gazed on the forms, animate and inanimate, which surrounded us and which we believed contributed to our happiness, "Behold the expressed thought of the Creator-God!" and we were lost in wonder, love, and praise. Now, when we look upon the wondrous contrivances and inventions everywhere contributing to our life wants and adding to our life enjoyments, we are forced to exclaim; "Behold the expressed thought of the creator-man!" Inventions have given us a new and higher idea of the capacity of man. We begin to see how nearly he is related to Divinity; we have found a new meaning in the phrase, "So God created man in His own image."

Shakespeare's words-the highest and noblest uninspired estimate of man seem real to us at last- "How infinite in faculty ... In apprehension, how like a god." Let me illustrate. Men have often wondered and adored the Infinite Creator as they have dwelt upon the words- "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." But the hours are not all light; there is the night and darkness as come well to as this the day place and this light. Now, if you will think as you come to this place this evening how the thought of man has transformed black coal and viewless electricity into the agents which light your pathway, you will feel it scarcely irreverent to exclaim: "And man said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." If you will let your mind dwell steadily on the development during the century of the creative faculty in man, you will discover one prominent reason for the advancement of mankind. You will see that the creative faculty is no longer limited to a few great souls, but that it is possessed by the many. You will see that the gap between the scientific discoverer and the practical workman is slowly but surely being closed. When we survey the field of invention our eyes rest inevitably on the figure of Watt. He

stands out before us as the great leader in the inventive world. We give him highest place among those who have wrought for mankind. We put him above Alexander and Napoleon. They were destroyers; he was a creator; they devoured; he developed the world's capacity to produce. But do we realize that many greater than Watt are here? There are thousands of men in our midst whose praises are never sung, who pursue their intense work quietly and unnoticed, for whom the world erects no pedestal of fame, but each of whom knows more of the nature and power and adaptation of steam than Watt ever dreamed of. We sing the praises of Morse; we write him down among our greatest; we give him a conspicuous niche in our temple of fame; the world pays tribute to his greatness, to his creative skill; he will go down in history as the first man who by his invention made it possible to crowd into a day's time transactions which would otherwise require a month's time for their accomplishment; who enabled every man who can buy a penny paper to behold as in a moving panorama the events transpiring throughout the whole world. But many greater than Morse are with us. There are thousands of men in our country who know more of the laws of electricity, and better how to apply their knowledge of these laws in the transmission of human thought, than ever Morse imagined. Such men, such inventors, famous by right in the world's history, were after all but prospectors, locating the rich mine of human invention. They thought out, or by accident discovered, a limited possibility in the application of new forces to the supply of human wants. Then the world's thought became focused like a great burning lens on that possibility, and other men wrought the possible into the actual . . . So we see that each invention, great or small, by its own inherent force and power wonderfully stimulates and increases the inventive or creative faculty of man. Reduction to practice requires knowledge and skill equal to that of the man who conceives the idea, and the use of the invention necessitates knowledge akin to that of the inventor. The woman who uses the sewing machine must have knowledge in kind, at least, if not in degree, equal to that of Howe. The field laborer who uses the harvester must know as much of the operation, if not of the principle, of the machine as McCormick. What an advancement in average human

knowledge this signifies in the country where we live and move and have our being among inventions! And if, as Bacon said, knowledge is power, how greatly have we advanced in power