

as necessities of life. The houses were provided with open fires — which, however cheerful, did not keep them warm — or else with Franklin's stoves. To strike a fire one must have the flint and tinder-box, for matches were unknown until about 1830. Candles made the darkness visible. There was neither plumbing nor running water. Food was cooked in the ashes or over an open fire.

The farmer's tools were no less crude than his wife's. His plough had been little improved since the days of Rameses. He sowed his wheat by hand, cut it with a sickle, flailed it out upon the floor, and laboriously winnowed away the chaff.

In that same year, 1790, came a great boon and encouragement to inventors, the first Federal Patent Act, passed by Congress on the 10th of April. Every State had its own separate patent laws or regulations, as an inheritance from colonial days, but the Fathers of the Constitution had wisely provided that this function of government should be exercised by the nation.¹ The Patent Act, however, was for a time unpopular, and some

¹ The Constitution (Article I, Section 8, Clause 8) empowers Congress: "To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries."