[129] Note that under our definitions, "patents", meaning the count of patents, and "the patent system" are two different things. Either one could advance while the other declined. So we have just spoken of the probable growth of noncommercial patents as not being a growth within the patent system. And in ¶ 116 we spoke of the rising quality of patented inventions as tending to spell less decline in the significance of patents than in their numbers.

[130] And now a few words of summary and warning, before we leave the subject of our graphs. If one took them uncritically, as accurate measures of invention, despite all our warnings, it might seem to follow that by now the patent system could motivate at most 3% of American inventing, and even this little only on the certainly exaggerated supposition that *all* our inventing in 1880 was called forth by patents. But such an inference would ignore all the uncertainties and noncovered factors tending both ways, which we have been acknowledging in the previous sections, in criticizing our indices to forestall critics. There was the relative decline of the humbler, less recorded and less scientific invention, the increasing element of pure science in our indices, and the fact that modern patents (when not of the nominal or invalidated types) are of higher quality and significance and probably of wider scope than average oldtime patents. It may be possible for a modern firm to take much fewer patents, and yet still be able to control a whole new line of production by a few *key* patents. And there are still other considerations mentioned previously that might correct our index both downward and upward.