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SPONTANEOUS FIRES.

The number of fires due to what is commonly called spontaneous combustion is probably much greater than is generally supposed. An innumerable number of substances are liable to undergo the process, and as a good deal of ignorance appears to exist in regard to the conditions which are necessary for its development, it seems worth while to offer a few hints on the subject. Many organic, and some inorganic, substances, when exposed to the air in a moist state, absorb oxygen, and so develop heat. The rusting of iron, the decay of leaves, and the putrefaction of nitrogenous matters are examples of this kind of action. In ordinary cases the mass of oxidizing matter is small, and the heat, consequently, being speedily dissipated, has but little intensity, or is even quite insensible to ordinary tests. Heat is, however, always produced; and when, as in a hot-bed, the mass is considerable, the intensity becomes notable. When large masses are concerned with sufficient supply of air, but without the possibility of free ventilation, the heat sometimes becomes so intense as to produce actual combustion. In a few well-known cases this takes place in contact with water. Thus cotton, closely packed in a moist state, on board ship or in warehouses, has been known to become ignited, and serious fires have arisen from this cause. Hay stacked while moist always becomes greatly heated, and not infrequently gets thoroughly charred, or even bursts into flame, and the same phenomenon has been observed in barns and granaries. Many fires in country places are, no doubt, due to this cause, and probably some that are ascribed to arson. Coal, which contains much pyrites, absorbs oxygen, and becomes heated rapidly when moist; and although proof is commonly impossible, it is generally believed that fires, particularly at sea, have often originated in this way. But the greatest danger arises when cotton, hemp, jute, flax, or even sawdust or charcoal, saturated

with oil or turpentine, is stored in masses. Under such conditions, the supply of air being limited, spontaneous combustion is sometimes a matter of certainty. We do not wish to exaggerate the danger of spontaneous combustion. Most fires are, probably, due to gross carelessness, particularly in the matter of lucifer matches, which are often used with amazing recklessness, or to the too close proximity of wood-work to stoves and open fires. But it seems certain that risk of the kind we have indicated is constantly incurred in ignorance, and we hold it to be a public duty to point out to all, but particularly to warehousemen and shipowners, the character and causes of the danger which besets them.

ENDOWMENT HUMBUGS.

The collapse of sundry of these swindling concerns, we chronicled a few years ago, some of them brought up with a round turn, especially in Massachusetts and Ohio, by injunctions issued by the courts on application of numerous duped certificate holders, others handed over to receivers, and the managers of still others, arrested by United States authorities for fraudulent use of the mails.

Notwithstanding all these evidences of the worthlessness or worse of the whole mushroom brood, there are still a good many people in Canada who in their dishonest avarice to get something for nothing, on the gambling principle, are easily induced by plausible adventurers to go into these grab-game schemes. Most of these adventurers, finding the climate in the States getting too hot for them, come to Canada to lengthen their purses by playing on the credulity of the ignorant and on the avarice of the intelligent. If the invasion of this country by these various concerns from over the border, where their occupation is gone, continues, we hope that the public will find some kind of protection from the authorities. There is no reason why Canada should be made a prey to schemes which are fast being outlawed in the United States.