

The more fires there are the easier it is to crush out the competition of smaller rivals. Finally, a big conflagration is an excuse for putting up the rates all over the country.

Again our writer goes to to make a charge against not only the law relating to arson as it exists in the United States, but also against the way in which it is administered. He goes on to say: "Effective investigation of the causes of fires by public officials hardly exists in any State in the American Union, and arson in consequence is one of the safest of crimes. And finally, even when the criminal is caught it is all but impossible to convict him. In some States, indeed, it appears to be an open question whether a man has not a legal right to burn his own property if he chooses; and, in all States the rules of evidence are such that unless the incendiary has actually been seen to light the fire and unless the match with which he did it can be produced in court, there is next to no chance of bringing him to justice.

"It is just a sample of what obtains all over the United States that, while in New York, by the testimony of its own Fire Commissioner, there are at least 4,000 cases of arson a year, there have been fewer than twenty convictions in the past decade."

As we have remarked above it was not by ordinary means that a state of things above described has been brought about. The records of the police courts prove that there are organized gangs of fire-raisers who are regularly employed by those interested to set fire to buildings as they may be directed, and who by means of their organization do so with comparative impunity.

We have not dealt with this subject in any spirit of invidious comparison, but because moral disease, like physical, is catching. There is so much in our conditions of life similar to those which prevail over the border that into whatever dangerous habits our neighbours fall, we are liable to follow their example. We have no figures at hand to shew whether or not we may have already done so, but it can do no harm by way of warning to point out to what dangerous lengths what may seem to be a small evil at first may grow, when circumstances are favourable for its development.