

SANTA CLAUS

WILL SOON BE HERE

And We Are Going to

Break the Record Selling
Goods Before He Comes.

We Have Just Gotten in Some *

New Goods for
Christmas Trade

Our Stock is New

And complete in every department, and if
you are going to need anything before Xmas

We Can Save You Money

Come to see us and we will make you happy.

Respectfully,

Lancaster Mercantile Company

FEARFUL LOSS OF LIFE IN CITY OF CHICAGO.

Nearly Six Hundred Human Beings De-
stroyed in a Theatre Fire.

Chicago, Dec. 30.—About 550 people were killed in ten minutes this afternoon during a fire in the Iroquois theatre, the newest, the largest, and as far as human power could make it, the safest theatre in Chicago. Estimates of the dead and injured vary. The police account of the dead is 536. The estimate of the newspapers is 560. Besides this there are 55 people missing at midnight, the majority of whom are probably among the dead in the morgues and various undertaking establishments. Eighty-six of the dead have been positively identified and 92 others are known to be injured.

A few of these people were burned to death by fire, many were suffocated by gas, and scores were trampled to death in the panic that followed the mad plunge of the frightened audience for exits. It was many hours before the number of dead was known and will be many days before all of them will be identified. Their clothing is torn to rags or burned to cinders and their faces have been crushed into an unrecognizable pulp by heels of the crowd that trampled them down as they fled for safety.

The fire broke out during the second act of the play "Mr. Bluebeard," which was the first dramatic production placed in the theatre since its erection. The company which was very large, escaped to the streets in safety, nearly all of them, however, being compelled to flee into the snowy streets with no clothing but their stage costumes.

The accounts of the origin of the fire are conflicting and none of them certain, but the best reason given is that an electric wire near the lower part of a piece of drop scenery suddenly broke and was grounded. As soon as the fire was discovered Eddie Foy, the chief comedian of the company, shouted to lower the curtain, and this was immediately done. It descended about half way and then stuck. The fire thus was given practically a flue through which a strong draft was setting, aided by the doors which had been thrown open in the front of the theatre. With a roar and a bound the flames shot through the opening over the heads of the people in the first floor and reaching those in the first balcony caught them and burned them to death where they sat. Immediately following this rush of flames there came an explosion which lifted the entire roof of the theatre from its walls, shattering the great skylight into fragments.

As soon as the flames first appeared beyond the curtain a man in the rear of the hall shouted "Fire, fire," and the entire audience rose as one person and made for the doors. It is believed that the explosion was caused by flames coming into contact with the gas reservoirs of the theatre, causing them to burst.

The firemen found numbers of people sitting in their seats, their faces directed towards the stage as if the performance was still going on. It was the opinion of the firemen that these people had been suffocated at once by the flow of gas which came from behind the asbestos curtain.

As near as can be estimated at the present time about 1300 people were in the theatre. Three hundred of these were on the first floor, the balance being in the two upper balconies and back of them. Outside of the people burned and suffocated by gas, it was in the doorways on the first and second balconies that the greatest loss of life occurred. When the firemen entered the building the dead were found stretched in a pile reaching from the head of the stairway at least eight feet from the door back to a point about five feet in the rear of the door. This mass of dead bodies in the centre of the doorway reached to within two feet of the top of the passage way. All of the corpses at this point were women and children. Women on top of these masses of dead bodies had been overtaken by death as they were crawling on hands and knees over the bodies of those who had died before. Others lay with arms stretched out in the direction toward which lay life and safety, holding in their hands fragments of garments not their own. They were evidently torn from others whom they had endeavored to pull down and trample underfoot as they fought for their own lives. As the police and firemen removed layer after layer of dead in these doorways, the sight became too much even for them, hardened as they are to such scenes, to endure. The bodies were in such an extricable mass, and so tightly were they jammed between the sides of the door and the walls, that it was impossible to lift them one by one and carry them out. The only possible thing to do was to seize a limb or some other portion of the body and pull with main strength. Men worked at the task with tears running down their cheeks, and the sobs of the rescuers could be heard even in the hall below where this awful scene was being enacted. A number of the men were compelled to abandon their task and give it over to others whose nerves had not as yet been shaken by the awful experience. As one by one, the bodies were dragged out of the watersoaked, blackened mass of corpses, the spectacle became more and more heartrending. There were women

Continued on 8th page.