

THE REPUBLIC OF THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Valery Bryusov

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THERE have appeared lately a whole series of descriptions of the dreadful catastrophe which has overtaken the Republic of the Southern Cross. They are strikingly various, and give many details of a manifestly fantastic and improbable character. Evidently the writers of these descriptions have lent a too ready ear to the narratives of the survivors from Star City (Zvezdny), the inhabitants of which, as is common knowledge, were all stricken with a psychical distemper. For that reason we consider it opportune to give an account here of all the reliable evidence which we have as yet of this tragedy of the Southern Pole.

The Republic of the Southern Cross came into being some forty years ago, as a development from three hundred steel works established in the Southern Polar regions. In a circular note sent to each and every Government of the whole world, the new state expressed its pretensions to all lands, whether mainland or island, within the limits of the Antarctic circle, as also all parts of these lands stretching beyond the line. It announced its readiness to purchase from the various other states affected the lands which they considered to be under their special protectorate. The pretensions of the new Republic did not meet with any opposition on the part of the fifteen great powers of the world. Debateable points concerning certain islands lying entirely outside the Polar circle, but closely related to the Southern Polar state were settled by special treaties. On the fulfilment of the various formalities the Republic of the Southern Cross was received into the family of world states, and its representatives were recognised by all Governments.

The chief city of the Republic, having the name of Zvezdny, was situated at the actual Pole itself. At that imaginary point where the earth's axis passes and all earthly meridians become one, stood the Town Hall, and the roof with its pointed towers looked upon the nadir of the heavens. The streets of the town extended along meridians from the Town Hall and these meridians were intersected by other streets in concentric circles. The height of all the buildings was the same, as was also their external appearance. There were no windows in the walls, as all the houses were lit by electricity and the streets were lighted by electricity. Because of the severity of the climate, an impenetrable and opaque roof had been built over the town, with powerful ventilators for a constant change of air. These localities of the globe have but one day in six months, and one long night also of six months, but the streets of Zvezdny were always lighted by a bright and even light. In the same way in all seasons of the year the temperature of the streets was kept at one and the same height.

According to the last census the population of Zvezdny had reached two and a half millions. The whole of the remaining population of the Republic, numbering fifty millions, were concentrated in the neighbourhood of the ports and factories. These other points were also marked by the settlement of millions of people in towns which in external characteristics were reminiscent of Zvezdny. Thanks to a clever application of electric power, the entrance to the local havens remained open all the year round. Overhead electric railways connected the most populated parts of the Republic, and every day tens of thousands of people and millions of kilogrammes of material passed along these roads from one town to another. The interior of the country remained uninhabited. Travellers looking out of the train window saw before them only monotonous wildernesses, white in winter, and overgrown with wretched grass during the three months of summer. Wild animals had long since been destroyed, and for human beings there was no means of sustenance. The more remarkable was the hustling life of the ports and industrial centres. In order to give some understanding of the life, it is perhaps enough to say that of late years about seven-tenths of the whole of the world's output of metal has come from the State mines of the Republic.

The constitution of the Republic, according to outward signs, appeared to be the realisation of extreme democracy. The only fully enfranchised citizens were the metal-workers, who numbered about sixty per cent of the whole population. The factories and mines were State property. The life of the miners was facilitated by all possible conveniences, and even with luxury. At their disposal, apart from magnificent accommodation and a recherché cuisine, were various educational institutions and means of amusement: libraries, museums, theatres,

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concerts, halls for all types of sport, etc. The number of working hours in the day were small in the extreme. The training and teaching of children, the giving of medical and legal aid, and the ministry of the various religious cults were all taken upon itself by the State. Ample provision for all the needs and even whims of the workmen of the State factories having been made, no wages whatever were paid; but families of citizens who had served twenty years in a factory, or who in their years of service had died or become enfeebled, received a handsome life pension on condition that they did not leave the Republic. From the workmen, by universal ballot, the representatives of the Law-making Chamber of the Republic were elected, and this Chamber had cognisance of all the questions of the political life of the country, being, however, without power to alter its fundamental laws.

It must be said that this democratic exterior concealed the purely autocratic tyranny of the shareholders and directors of a former Trust. Giving up to others the places of deputies in the Chamber they inevitably brought in their own candidates as directors of the factories. In the hands of the Board of Directors was concentrated the economic life of the country. The directors received all the orders and assigned them to the various factories for fulfilment; they purchased the materials and the machines for the work; they managed the whole business of the factories. Through their hands passed immense sums of money, to be reckoned in milliards. The Law-making Chamber only certified the entries of debits and credits in the upkeep of the factories, the accounts being handed to it for that purpose, and the balance on these accounts greatly exceeded the whole budget of the Republic. The influence of the Board of Directors in the international relationships of the Republic was immense. Its decisions might ruin whole countries. The prices fixed by them determined the wages of millions of labouring masses over the whole earth. And, moreover, the influence of the Board, though indirect, was always decisive in the internal affairs of the Republic. The Law-making Chamber, in fact, appeared to be only the humble servant of the will of the Board.

For the preservation of power in its own hands the Board was obliged to regulate mercilessly the whole life of the country. Though appearing to have liberty, the life of the citizens was standardised even to the most minute details. The buildings of all the towns of the Republic were according to one and the same pattern fixed by law. The decoration of all buildings used by the workmen, though luxurious to a degree, were strictly uniform. All received exactly the same food at exactly the same time. The clothes given out from the Government stores were unchanging and in the course of tens of years were of one and the same cut. At a signal from the Town Hall, at a definite hour, it was forbidden to go out of the houses. The whole Press of the country was subject to a sharp censorship. No articles directed against the dictatorship of the Board were allowed to see light. But, as a matter of fact, the whole country was so convinced of the benefit of this dictatorship that the compositors themselves would have refused to set the type of articles criticising the Board. The factories were full of the Board's spies. At the slightest manifestation of discontent with the Board the spies hastened to arrange meetings and dissuade the doubters with passionate speeches. The fact that the life of the workmen of the Republic was the object of the envy of the entire world was of course a disarming argument. It is said that in cases of continued agitation by certain individuals the Board did not hesitate to resort to political murder. In any case, during the whole existence of the Republic, the universal ballot of the citizens never brought to power one representative who was hostile to the directors.

The population of Zvezdny was composed chiefly of workmen who had served their time. They were, so to speak, Government shareholders. The means which they received from the State allowed them to live richly. It is not astonishing, therefore, that Zvezdny was reckoned one of the gayest cities of the world. For various entrepreneurs and entertainers it was a goldmine. The celebrities of the world brought hither their talents. Here were the best operas, best concerts, best exhibitions; here were brought out the best-informed gazettes. The shops of Zvezdny amazed by the richness of their choice of goods; the restaurants by the luxury and the delicacy of their service. Resorts of evil, where all forms of debauch invented in either the ancient or the modern world were to be found, abounded. However, the governmental regulation of life was preserved in Zvezdny also. It is true that the decorations of lodgings and the fashions of dress were not compulsorily determined, but the law forbidding the exit from the house after a certain hour remained in force, a strict censorship of the Press was maintained, and many spies were kept by the Board. Order was officially maintained by the popular police, but at the same time there existed the secret police of the all-cognisant Board. Such was in its general character the system of life in the Republic of the Southern Cross and in its capital. The problem of the future historian will be to determine how much this system was responsible for the outbreak and spread of that fatal disease which brought to destruction

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the town of Zvezdny, and with it, perhaps, the whole young Republic.

The first cases of the disease of "contradiction" were observed in the Republic some twenty years ago. It had then the character of a rare and sporadic malady. Nevertheless, the local mental experts were much interested by it and gave a circumstantial account of the symptoms at the international medical congress at Lhasa, where several reports of it were read. Later, it was somehow or other forgotten, though in the mental hospitals of Zvezdny there never was any difficulty in finding examples. The disease received its name from the fact that the victims continuously contradicted their wishes by their actions, wishing one thing but saying and doing another. [The scientific name of the disease is mania contradicens.] It begins with fairly feeble symptoms, generally those of characteristic aphasia. The stricken, instead of saying "yes," say "no"; wishing to say caressing words, they splutter abuse, etc. The majority also begin to contradict themselves in their behaviour; intending to go to the left they turn to the right, thinking to raise the brim of a hat so as to see better they would pull it down over their eyes instead, and so on. As the disease develops contradiction overtakes the whole of the bodily and spiritual life of the patient, exhibiting infinite diversity conformable with the idiosyncrasies of each. In general, the speech of the patient becomes unintelligible and his actions absurd. The normality of the physiological functions of the organism is disturbed. Acknowledging the un wisdom of his behaviour the patient gets into a state of extreme excitement bordering even upon insanity. Many commit suicide, sometimes in fits of madness, sometimes in moments of spiritual brightness. Others perish from a rush of blood to the brain. In almost all cases the disease is mortal; cases of recovery are extremely rare.

The epidemic character was taken by mania contradicens during the middle months of this year in Zvezdny. Up till this time the number of cases had never exceeded two per cent of the total number of patients in the hospitals. But this proportion suddenly rose to twenty-five per cent during the month of May (autumn month, as it is called in the Republic), and it continued to increase during the succeeding months with as great rapidity. By the middle of June there were already two per cent of the whole population, that is, about fifty thousand people, officially notified as suffering from "contradiction." We have no statistical details of any later date. The hospitals overflowed. The doctors on the spot proved to be altogether insufficient. And, moreover, the doctors themselves, and the nurses in the hospitals, caught the disease also. There was very soon no one to whom to appeal for medical aid, and a correct register of patients became impossible. The evidence given by eyewitnesses, however, is in agreement on this point, that it was impossible to find a family in which someone was not suffering. The number of healthy people rapidly decreased as panic caused a wholesale exodus from the town, but the number of the stricken increased. It is probably true that in the month of August all who had remained in Zvezdny were down with this psychical malady.

It is possible to follow the first developments of the epidemic by the columns of the local newspapers, headed in ever larger type as the mania grew. Since the detection of the disease in its early stages was very difficult, the chronicle of the first days of the epidemic is full of comic episodes. A train conductor on the metropolitan railway, instead of receiving money from the passengers, himself pays them. A policeman, whose duty it was to regulate the traffic, confuses it all day long. A visitor to a gallery, walking from room to room, turns all the pictures with their faces to the wall. A newspaper page of proof, being corrected by the hand of a reader already overtaken by the disease, is printed next morning full of the most amusing absurdities. At a concert, a sick violinist suddenly interrupts the harmonious efforts of the orchestra with the most dreadful dissonances. A whole long series of such happenings gave plenty of scope for the wits of local journalists. But several instances of a different type of phenomenon caused the jokes to come to a sudden end. The first was that a doctor overtaken by the disease prescribed poison for a girl patient in his care and she perished. For three days the newspapers were taken up with this circumstance. Then two nurses walking in the town gardens were overtaken by "contradiction," and cut the throats of forty-one children. This event staggered the whole city. But on the evening of the same day two victims fired the mitrailleuse from the quarters of the town militia and killed and injured some five hundred people.

At that, all the newspapers and the society of the town cried for prompt measures against the epidemic. At a special session of the combined Board and Legal Chamber it was decided to invite doctors from other towns and from abroad, to enlarge the existing hospitals, to build new ones, and to construct everywhere isolation barracks for the sufferers, to print and distribute five hundred thousand copies of a brochure on the disease, its symptoms

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and means of cure, to organise on all the streets of the town a special patrol of doctors and their helpers for the giving of first aid to those who had not been removed from private lodgings. It was also decided to run special trains daily on all the railways for the removal of the patients, as the doctors were of opinion that change of air was one of the best remedies. Similar measures were undertaken at the same time by various associations, societies, and clubs. A "society for struggle with the epidemic" was even founded, and the members gave themselves to the work with remarkable self-devotion. But in spite of all these measures the epidemic gained ground each day, taking in its course old men and little children, working people and resting people, chaste and debauched. And soon the whole of society was enveloped in the unconquerable elemental terror of the unheard-of calamity.

The flight from Zvezdny commenced. At first only a few fled, and these were prominent dignitaries, directors, members of the Legal Chamber and of the Board, who hastened to send their families to the southern cities of Australia and Patagonia. Following them, the accidental elements of the population fled—those foreigners gladly sojourning in the "gayest city of the southern hemisphere," theatrical artists, various business agents, women of light behaviour. When the epidemic showed no signs of abating the shopkeepers fled. They hurriedly sold off their goods and left their empty premises to the will of Fate. With them went the bankers, the owners of theatres and restaurants, the editors and the publishers. At last, even the established inhabitants were moved to go. According to Law the exit of workmen from the Republic without special sanction from the Government was forbidden on pain of loss of pension. Deserters began to increase. The employés of the town institutions fled, the militia fled, the hospital nurses fled, the chemists, the doctors. The desire to flee became in its turn a mania. Everyone fled who could.

The stations of the electric railway were crushed with immense crowds, tickets were bought for huge sums of money and only held by fighting. For a place in a dirigible, which took only ten passengers, one paid a whole fortune.... At the moment of the going out of trains new people would break into the compartments and take up places which they would not relinquish except by compulsion. Crowds stopped the trains which had been fitted up exclusively for patients, dragged the latter out of the carriages and compelled the engine-drivers to go on. From the end of May train service, except between the capital and the ports, ceased to work. From Zvezdny the trains went out overfull, passengers standing on the steps and in the corridors, even daring to cling on outside, despite the fact that with the speed of contemporary electric railways any person doing such a thing risks suffocation. The steamship companies of Australia, South America and South Africa grew inordinately rich, transporting the refugees of the Republic to other lands. The two Southern companies of dirigibles were not less prosperous, accomplishing, as they did, ten journeys a day and bringing away from Zvezdny the last belated millionaires.... On the other hand, trains arrived at Zvezdny almost empty; for no wages was it possible to persuade people to come to work at the Capital; only now and again eccentric tourists and seekers of new sensations arrived at the towns. It is reckoned that from the beginning of the exodus to the twenty-second of June, when the regular service of trains ceased, there passed out of Zvezdny by the six railroads some million and a half people, that is, almost two-thirds of the whole population.

By his enterprise, valour, and strength of will, one man earned for himself eternal fame, and that was the President of the Board, Horace Deville. At the special session of the fifth of June, Deville was elected, both by the Board and by the Legal Chamber, Dictator over the town, and was given the title of Nachalnik. He had sole control of the town treasury, of the militia, and of the municipal institutions. At that time it was decided to remove from Zvezdny to a northern port the Government of the Republic and the archives. The name of Horace Deville should be written in letters of gold among the most famous names of history. For six weeks he struggled with the growing anarchy in the town. He succeeded in gathering around him a group of helpers as unselfish as himself. He was able to enforce discipline, both in the militia and in the municipal service generally, for a considerable time, though these bodies were terrified by the general calamity and decimated by the epidemic. Hundreds of thousands owe their escape to Horace Deville, as, thanks to his energy and organising power, it was possible for them to leave. He lightened the misery of the last days of thousands of others, giving them the possibility of dying in hospitals, carefully looked after, and not simply being stoned or beaten to death by the mad crowd. And Deville preserved for mankind the chronicle of the catastrophe, for one cannot but consider as a chronicle his short but pregnant telegrams, sent several times a day from the town of Zvezdny to the temporary residence of the Government of the Republic at the Northern port. Deville's first work on becoming Nachalnik of the town was to

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attempt to restore calm to the population. He issued manifestos proclaiming that the psychical infection was most quickly caught by people who were excited, and he called upon all healthy and balanced persons to use their authority to restrain the weak and nervous. Then Deville used the Society for Struggle with the Epidemic and put under the authority of its members all public places, theatres, meeting-houses, squares, and streets. In these days there scarcely ever passed an hour but a new case of infection might be discovered. Now here, now there, one saw faces or whole groups of faces manifestly expressive of abnormality. The greater number of the patients, when they understood their condition, showed an immediate desire for help. But under the influence of the disease this wish expressed itself in various types of hostile action directed against those standing near. The stricken wished to hasten home or to a hospital, but instead of doing this they fled in fright to the outskirts of the town. The thought occurred to them to ask the passer-by to do something for them, but instead of that they seized him by the throat. In this way many were suffocated, struck down, or wounded with knife or stick. So the crowd, whenever it found itself in the presence of a man suffering from "contradiction," took to flight. At these moments the members of the Society would appear on the scene, capture the sick man, calm him, and take him to the nearest hospital; it was their work to reason with the crowd and explain that there was really no danger, that the general misfortune had simply spread a little further, and it was their duty to struggle with it to the full extent of their powers.

The sudden infection of persons present in the audience of theatres or meeting-houses often led to the most tragic catastrophes. Once at a performance of opera some hundreds of people stricken mad in a mass, instead of expressing their approval of the vocalists, flung themselves on the stage and scattered blows right and left. At the Grand Dramatic Theatre, an actor, whose rôle it was to commit suicide by a revolver shot, fired the revolver several times at the public. It was, of course, blank cartridge, but it so acted on the nerves of those present that it hastened the symptoms of the disease in many in whom it was latent. In the confusion which followed several scores of people were killed. But worst of all was that which happened in the Theatre of Fireworks. The detachment of militia posted there in case of fire suddenly set fire to the stage and to the veils by which the various light effects are obtained. Not less than two hundred people were burnt or crushed to death. After that occurrence Horace Deville closed all the theatres and concert-rooms in the town.

The robbers and thieves now began to constitute a grave danger for the inhabitants, and in the general disorganisation they were able to carry their depredations very far. It is said that some of them came to Zvezdny from abroad. Some simulated madness in order to escape punishment, others felt it unnecessary to make any pretence of disguising their open robberies. Gangs of thieves entered the abandoned shops, broke into private lodgings, and took off the more valuable things or demanded gold; they stopped people in the streets and stripped them of their valuables, such as watches, rings, and bracelets. And there accompanied the robberies outrage of every kind, even of the most disgusting. The Nachalnik sent companies of militia to hunt down the criminals, but they did not dare to join in open conflict. There were dreadful moments when among the militia or among the robbers would suddenly appear a case of the disease, and friend would turn his weapon against friend. At first the Nachalnik banished from the town the robbers who fell under arrest. But those who had charge of the prison trains liberated them, in order to take their places. Then the Nachalnik was obliged to condemn the criminals to death. So almost after three centuries' break capital punishment was introduced once more on the earth. In June a general scarcity of the indispensable articles of food and medicine began to make itself felt. The import by rail diminished; manufacture within the town practically ceased. Deville organised the town bakeries and the distribution of bread and meat to the people. In the town itself the same common tables were set up as had long since been established in the factories. But it was not possible to find sufficient people for kitchen and service. Some voluntary workers toiled till they were exhausted, and they gradually diminished in numbers. The town crematoriums flamed all day, but the number of corpses did not decrease but increased. They began to find bodies in the streets and left in houses. The municipal business—such as telegraph, telephone, electric light, water supply, sanitation, and the rest, were worked by fewer and fewer people. It is astonishing how much Deville succeeded in doing. He looked after everything and everyone. One conjectures that he never knew a moment's rest. And all who were saved testify unanimously that his activity was beyond praise.

Towards the middle of June shortage of labour on the railways began to be felt. There were not enough engine-drivers or conductors. On the 17th of July the first accident took place on the South-Western line, the reason being the sudden attack of the engine-driver. In the paroxysm of his disease the driver took his train over a precipice on to a glacier and almost all the passengers were killed or crippled. The news of this was brought to the

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town by the next train, and it came as a thunderbolt. A hospital train was sent off at once; it brought back the dead and the crippled, but towards the evening of that day news was circulated that a similar catastrophe had taken place on the First line. Two of the railway tracks connecting Zvezdny with the outside world were damaged. Breakdown gangs were sent from Zvezdny and from North Port to repair the lines, but it was almost impossible because of the winter temperature. There was no hope that on these lines train service would be resumed—at least, in the near future.

These catastrophes were simply patterns for new ones. The more alarmed the engine-drivers became the more liable they were to the disease and to the repetition of the mistake of their predecessors. Just because they were afraid of destroying a train they destroyed it. During the five days from the eighteenth to the twenty-second of June seven trains with passengers were wrecked. Thousands of passengers perished from injuries or starved to death unrescued in the snowy wastes. Only very few had sufficient strength to return to the city by their own efforts. The six main lines connecting Zvezdny with the outer world were rendered useless. The service of dirigibles had ceased earlier. One of them had been destroyed by the enraged mob, the pretext given being that they were used exclusively for the rich. The others, one by one, were wrecked, the disease probably attacking the crew. The population of the city was at this time about six hundred thousand. For some time they were only connected with the world by telegraph.

On the 24th of June the Metropolitan railway ceased to run. On the 26th the telephone service was discontinued. On the 27th all chemists' shops, except the large central store, were closed. On the 1st of July the inhabitants were ordered to come from the outer parts of the town into the central districts, so that order might better be maintained, food distributed, and medical aid afforded. Suburban dwellers abandoned their own quarters and settled in those which had lately been abandoned by fugitives. The sense of property vanished. No one was sorry to leave his own, no one felt it strange to take up his abode in other people's houses. Nevertheless, burglars and robbers did not disappear, though perhaps now one would rather call them demented beings than criminals. They continued to steal, and great hoards of gold have been discovered in the empty houses where they hid them, and precious stones beside the decaying body of the robber himself.

It is astonishing that in the midst of universal destruction life tended to keep its former course. There still were shopkeepers who opened their shops and sold for incredible sums the luxuries, flowers, books, guns, and other goods which they had preserved.... Purchasers threw down their unnecessary gold ungrudgingly, and miserly merchants hid it, God knows why. There still existed secret resorts, with cards, women, and wine, whither unfortunates sought refuge and tried to forget dreadful reality. There the whole mingled with the diseased, and there is no chronicle of the scenes which took place. Two or three newspapers still tried to preserve the significance of the written word in the midst of desolation. Copies of these newspapers are being sold now at ten or twenty times their original value, and will undoubtedly become bibliographical rareties of the first degree. In their columns is reflected the horrors of the unfortunate town, described in the midst of the reigning madness and set by half-mad compositors. There were reporters who took note of the happenings of the town, journalists who debated hotly the condition of affairs, and even feuilletonists who endeavoured to enliven these tragic days. But the telegrams received from other countries, telling as they did of real healthy life, caused the souls of the readers in Zvezdny to fall into despair.

There were desperate attempts to escape. At the beginning of July an immense crowd of women and children, led by a certain John Dew, decided to set out on foot for the nearest inhabited place, Londontown; Deville understood the madness of this attempt, but could not stop the people, and himself supplied them with warm clothing and provisions. This whole crowd of about two thousand people were lost in the snow and in the continuous Polar night. A certain Whiting started to preach a more heroic remedy: this was, to kill all who were suffering from the disease, and he held that after that the epidemic would cease. He found a considerable number of adherents, though in those dark days the wildest, most inhuman, proposal which in any way promised deliverance would have obtained attention. Whiting and his friends broke into every house in the town and destroyed whatever sick they found. They massacred the patients in the hospitals, they even killed those suspected to be unwell. Robbers and madmen joined themselves to these bands of ideal murderers. The whole town became their arena. In these difficult days Horace Deville organised his fellow-workers into a military force, encouraged them with his spirit, and set out to fight the followers of Whiting. This affair lasted several days. Hundreds of men fell on one side or the other, till at last Whiting himself was taken. He appeared to be in the last stages of mania

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contradicens and had to be taken to the hospital, where he soon perished, instead of to the scaffold.

On the eighth of July one of the worst things happened. The controller of the Central Power Station smashed all the machinery. The electric light failed, and the whole city was plunged in absolute darkness. As there was no other means of lighting and warming the city, the people were left in a helpless plight. Deville had, however, foreseen such an eventuality and had accumulated a considerable quantity of torches and fuel. Bonfires were lighted in all the streets. Torches were distributed in thousands. But these miserable lights could not illumine the gigantic perspectives of the city of Zvezdny, the tens of kilometres of straight line highways, the gloomy height of thirteen-storey buildings. With the darkness the last discipline of the city was lost. Terror and madness finally possessed all souls. The healthy could not be distinguished from the sick. There commenced a dreadful orgy of the despairing.

The moral sense of the people declined with astonishing rapidity. Culture slipped from off these people like a delicate bark, and revealed man, wild and naked, the man-beast as he was. All sense of right was lost, force alone was acknowledged. For women, the only law became that of desire and of indulgence. The most virtuous matrons behaved as the most abandoned, with no continence or faith, and used the vile language of the tavern. Young girls ran about the streets demented and unchaste. Drunkards made feasts in ruined cellars, not in any way distressed that amongst the bottles lay unburied corpses. All this was constantly aggravated by the breaking out of the disease afresh. Sad was the position of children, abandoned by their parents to the will of Fate. They died of hunger, of injury after assault, and they were murdered both purposely and by accident. It is even affirmed that cannibalism took place.

In this last period of tragedy Horace Deville could not, of course, afford help to the whole population. But he did arrange in the Town Hall shelter for those who still preserved their reason. The entrances to the building were barricaded and sentries were kept continuously on guard. There was food and water for three thousand people for forty days. Deville, however, had only eighteen hundred people, and though there must have been other people with sound minds in the town, they could not have known what Deville was doing, and these remained in hiding in the houses. Many resolved to remain indoors till the end, and bodies have been found of many who must have died of hunger in their solitude. It is remarkable that among those who took refuge in the Town Hall there were very few new cases of the disease. Deville was able to keep discipline in his small community. He kept till the last a journal of all that happened, and that journal, together with the telegrams, makes the most reliable source of evidence of the catastrophe. The journal was found in a secret cupboard of the Town Hall, where the most precious documents were kept. The last entry refers to the 20th of July. Deville writes that a demented crowd is assailing the building, and that he is obliged to fire with revolvers upon the people. "What I hope for," he adds, "I know not. No help can be expected before the spring. We have not the food to live till the spring. But I shall fulfil my duty to the end." These were the last words of Deville. Noble words!

It must be added that on the 21st of July the crowd took the Town Hall by storm and its defenders were all killed or scattered. The body of Deville has not yet been found, and there is no reliable evidence as to what took place in the town after the 21st. It must be conjectured, from the state in which the town was found, that anarchy reached its last limits. The gloomy streets, lit up by the glare of bonfires of furniture and books, can be imagined. They obtained fire by striking iron on flint. Crowds of drunkards and madmen danced wildly about the bonfires. Men and women drank together and passed the common cup from lip to lip. The worst scenes of sensuality were witnessed. Some sort of dark atavistic sense enlivened the souls of these townsmen, and half-naked, unwashed, unkempt, they danced the dances of their remote ancestors, the contemporaries of the cave-bears, and they sang the same wild songs as did the hordes when they fell with stone axes upon the mammoth. With songs, with incoherent exclamations, with idiotic laughter, mingled the cries of those who had lost the power to express in words their own delirious dreams, mingled also the moans of those in the convulsions of death. Sometimes dancing gave way to fighting—for a barrel of wine, for a woman, or simply without reason, in a fit of madness brought about by contradictory emotion. There was nowhere to flee; the same dreadful scenes were everywhere, the same orgies everywhere, the same fights, the same brutal gaiety or brutal rage—or else, absolute darkness, which seemed more dreadful, even more intolerable to the staggered imagination.

Zvezdny became an immense black box, in which were some thousands of man-resembling beings, abandoned in the foul air from hundreds of thousands of dead bodies, where amongst the living was not one who understood his own position. This was the city of the senseless, the gigantic madhouse, the greatest and most

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disgusting Bedlam which the world has ever seen. And the madmen destroyed one another, stabbed or strangled one another, died of madness, died of terror, died of hunger, and of all the diseases which reigned in the infected air.

It goes without saying that the Government of the Republic did not remain indifferent to the great calamity which had overtaken the capital. But it very soon became clear that no help whatever could be given. No doctors, nurses, officers, or workmen of any kind would agree to go to Zvezdny. After the breakdown of the railroad service and of the airships it was, of course, impossible to get there, the climatic conditions being too great an obstacle. Moreover, the attention of the Government was soon absorbed by cases of the disease appearing in other towns of the Republic. In some of these it threatened to take on the same epidemic character, and a social panic set in that was akin to what happened in Zvezdny itself. A wholesale exodus from the more populated parts of the Republic commenced. The work in all the mines came to a standstill, and the entire industrial life of the country faded away. But thanks, however, to strong measures taken in time, the progress of the disease was arrested in these towns, and nowhere did it reach the proportions witnessed in the capital.

The anxiety with which the whole world followed the misfortunes of the young Republic is well known. At first no one dreamed that the trouble could grow to what it did, and the dominant feeling was that of curiosity. The chief newspapers of the world (and in that number our own Northern European Evening News) sent their own special correspondents to Zvezdny—to write up the epidemic. Many of these brave knights of the pen became victims of their own professional obligations. When the news became more alarming, various foreign governments and private societies offered their services to the Republic. Some sent troops, others doctors, others money; but the catastrophe developed with such rapidity that this goodwill could not obtain fulfilment. After the breakdown of the railway service the only information received from Zvezdny was that of the telegrams sent by the Nachalnik. These telegrams were forwarded to the ends of the earth and printed in millions of copies. After the wreck of the electrical apparatus the telegraph service lasted still a few days longer, thanks to the accumulators of the power-house. There is no accurate information as to why the telegraph service ceased altogether; perhaps the apparatus was destroyed. The last telegram of Horace Deville was that of the 27th of June. From that date, for almost six weeks, humanity remained without news of the capital of the Republic.

During July several attempts were made to reach Zvezdny by air. Several new airships and aeroplanes were received by the Republic. But for a long time all efforts to reach the city failed. At last, however, the aeronaut, Thomas Billy, succeeded in flying to the unhappy town. He picked up from the roof of the town two people in an extreme state of hunger and mental collapse. Looking through the ventilators Billy saw that the streets were plunged in absolute darkness; but he heard wild cries, and understood that there were still living human beings in the town. Billy, however, did not dare to let himself down into the town itself. Towards the end of August one line of the electric railway was put in order as far as the station Lissis, a hundred and five kilometres from the town. A detachment of well-armed men passed into the town, bearing food and medical first-aid, entering by the north-western gates. They, however, could not penetrate further than the first blocks of buildings, because of the dreadful atmosphere. They had to do their work step by step, clearing the bodies from the streets, disinfecting the air as they went. The only people whom they met were completely irresponsible. They resembled wild animals in their ferocity and had to be captured and held by force. About the middle of September train service with Zvezdny was once more established and trains went regularly.

At the time of writing the greater part of the town has already been cleared. Electric light and heating are once more in working order. The only part of the town which has not been dealt with is the American quarter, but it is thought that there are no living beings there. About ten thousand people have been saved, but the greater number are apparently incurable. Those who have to any degree recovered evince a strong disinclination to speak of the life they have gone through. What is more, their stories are full of contradiction and often not confirmed by documentary evidence. Various newspapers of the last days of July have been found. The latest to date, that of the 22nd of July, gives the news of the death of Horace Deville and the invitation of shelter in the Town Hall. There are, indeed, some other pages marked August, but the words printed thereon make it clear that the author (who was probably setting in type his own delirium) was quite irresponsible. The diary of Horace Deville was discovered, with its regular chronicle of events from the 28th of June to the 20th of July. The frenzies of the last days in the town are luridly witnessed by the things discovered in streets and houses. Mutilated bodies

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everywhere the bodies of the starved, of the suffocated, of those murdered by the insane, and some even half-eaten. Bodies were found in the most unexpected places: in the tunnels of the Metropolitan railway, in sewers, in various sheds, in boilers. The demented had sought refuge from the surrounding terrors in all possible places. The interiors of most houses had been wrecked, and the booty which robbers had found it impossible to dispose of had been hidden in secret rooms and cellars.

It will certainly be several months before Zvezdny will become habitable once more. Now it is almost empty. The town, which could accommodate three million people, has but thirty thousand workmen, who are cleansing the streets and houses. A good number of the former inhabitants who had previously fled have returned, however, to seek the bodies of their relatives and to glean the remains of their lost fortunes. Several tourists, attracted by the amazing spectacle of the empty town, have also arrived. Two business men have opened hotels and are doing pretty well. A small café-chantant is to be opened shortly, the troupe for which has already been engaged.

The Northern-European Evening News has for its part sent out a new correspondent, Mr. Andrew Ewald, and hopes to obtain circumstantial news of all the fresh discoveries which may be made in the unfortunate capital of the Republic of the Southern Cross.