

**Roupen**  
**Tchilinguirian**  
**Sevag**

*A SELECTION OF SHORT  
STORIES, POEMS, AND  
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES*

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

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TCHILINGUIRIAN  
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*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

## **Roupen Tchilinguirian Sevag** *1885-1915*

Most of the outstanding poets of western Armenian literature were born during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Tekeyan, Varoujan, Siamanto, to name only a few, were born in 1875 or later. Roupen Tchilinguirian Sevag also belongs to that period.

He was born on February 15, 1885, in a small town near Constantinople, and was educated locally and later at the Berberian School. It was not until 1908 that he contributed regularly to the best-known periodicals of the day. His first volume, **Garmir Kirk**, inspired by the Adana massacres, appeared in 1910.

Love, patriotism, nature, man, and society occupy an important place in Sevag's poetry. He loves nature, with which he wishes to become one, but he also loves man whose suffering he shares. He would like to eliminate the moral and physical ills that make life on earth a sad experience. There are times when, like his contemporary, Siamanto, he is carried away by a spirit of revolt against the oppression of his people.

Sevag philosophizes as he discusses the diseases of the patients he has treated. His inability to cure fatal illness or to alleviate the pain they cause, leads him to wonder about euthanasia, god, religion, science, and the destiny of man.

Armenian literature has been enriched by some fine pages by Sevag, but it was not destined to inherit the best that Sevag might have produced had he lived to develop his talents to the fullest.

Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)

*“I have neither the passion for money, nor the passion for glory, nor the passion for fame. Life would have been a very stupid thing if its purpose were only a race for the sake of avarice and glory.*

*Would this life, that is full of suffering and pain, be worth living at all for these limited things.*

*Everything is in vain in this world, everything is transitory; glory, greatness are false, this deceptive happiness too is false – happiness that is born of suffering and dies with suffering. This universe is one of solitude, loneliness and vanity.*

*In these deceptive shadows, if there is something solid and real, that is (in my opinion) **Progress** and **Goodness**. Life is worth living only for these two principles, as far as I am concerned. **The ignorant, the wicked don't live**, whereas the Wise live an infinity, and the good, an immortality. And if I chose medicine as my career, it's only for the realization of those principles. Indeed, in which career does man have greater facility and inclination to knowingly progress than in medicine, and which profession grants life – the greatest good – to the sick, if not medicine? With these considerations, I decided to become a doctor, a physician-author, a psychologist-doctor (if you will).”*

Roupen Sevag  
October 4, 1905

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

Roupen Sevag  
By  
Antranik Zaroukian

This is a translation of a message given in Armenian, by Antranik Zaroukian, in 1985 during the 100 anniversary commemoration of the birth of Roupen Tchilinguirian Sevag, in France.

A French poet once said that with some talent anyone can write poetry, but the real poet is the heart; and yet anyone who writes with a heart is not a poet. Everyone has a heart and we can all write about beautiful things we experience. And yet putting down our purest thoughts and feelings does not make us poets. **To be able to write poetry one has to be born a poet.** There are two groups of poets. There are those who are born to fly and those who are born to walk. Some times those who are born to walk give the impression that they can fly, but when closely observed we can see that their feet are meant for walking. And there are those whom we see walking and yet we see in them the power to fly. Roupen Sevag was born to fly. Roupen Sevag died at a very young age. In the short thirty years he lived he gave us great literary works. He did not write only poetry. He wrote prose and short stories. In fact he perfected his short stories and these could be equaled to the writings Krikor Zohrab and Zabelle Essayan. After his death we discovered another treasure of Sevag. His love letters written to the woman he loved, German born Yanni Apell, Sevag was 23 at the time. Once these poems get translated and published we will discover the true greatness of Sevag and appreciate his talents.

Besides writing, Sevag took an active part in various issues affecting society in the Armenian nation in particular. He was not known to be a member of any political party, and yet all party members and influential Armenians regularly visited him. His house was a gathering center. People enjoyed



Sevag's eloquence and thoughts. There seemed to be a special aura of sincerity in Sevag. He had the ability to analyze situations, predict the developments of events and foretell the future. When war broke out he was among the first of Armenian intellectuals to alert Armenians to things terrible to come. He was not a prophet and yet he had the powers of a prophet. When war broke out he enlisted in the Turkish army.

It may seem odd that he would enlist in the Turkish army. He wore the Turkish uniform and encouraged Armenian women to train as nurses and help Turkey during the war. He made it obvious to the government officials that Armenians were helping the country during war-time. There was only one serious problem—Sevag was an Armenian and like all other Armenians he was to be massacred.

Roupen Sevag remained faithful to his two loves—the woman he loved and the people he loved. He never compromised these two loves and died for these loves.

Sevag was massacred in Changereh. We have numerous accounts of the barbaric manner in which he was massacred. For us it is simple—when Sevag and the others were massacred they turned into saints.

There is a very special incident in Sevag's life which must be recounted. While he was in prison in Changereh a Turkish officer asked Sevag to take care of his ailing daughter. Sevag, the doctor, helped the Turkish girl recover from her ailment. Somehow that Turkish girl fell in love with Sevag and wanted to marry him. The girl's father confided in Sevag and said, "You are doomed to die. Convert to Islam, marry my daughter and you will be set free."

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

Roupen Sevag had a chance to escape death. His friends in prison suggested that he accept the offer, but he refused saying, “I cannot deny my Armenianness, I cannot deny the love I have for my wife. To become a Turk is an insult.”

The love of Roupen Sevag had for the woman he loved was constant and stayed so to the very last day of his life. Hovanness Shiraz has said, “Love the best, love one and love well.”

It is important that was translate and print the letters of Sevag written in French to his wife. Then and only then will we discover the complete Sevag. The best way we can honor our martyrs is by preserving the Armenian language, encouraging the printing of Armenian books and newspapers and teaching our children the Armenian history.

## **The Crane**

It was a cold winter day. Outside, the freezing wind whipped the faces of the passersby. And the thick snow blinded their eyes.

We were sitting in a friend's room, just a few friends, all of us expatriates. The door creaked and the cold wind swept into the room. It was Karo; he was coming from the cemetery.

“Brrrr,” he said, “it isn't fit for a dog out there. How could a man pick such a day to die on?”

A bit later the door opened once more. A few other late arrivals came in, all of them friends. They had waited in the snow until the corpse was completely buried; they had even said a few words of farewell to the unknown dead man.

Who knew, who would ever know the thousand and one pages torn from the drama of life and death that today we buried under the snow in a foreign hole? Without a name, like the body of a dead bird....

“I didn't know him either,” one of us said, “but the people at the hotel knew that he was an Armenian and tried to find an Armenian doctor to have a look at him. After looking for only a week, they found me. When I entered the room, the shutters were closed. But bit by bit I made out a face in the darkness: long, angular, a greenish-yellow pattern of darkness and light, a Rembrandtian head.

“The second thing I noticed in the blackness was bone-colored fingers, which stretched out to me and grasped my hand with clammy tenacity, as if there were not a drop of blood in his body. The eyes had already lost their glitter—black within blackness, they could not be discerned.

“When I got more accustomed to the semi-darkness, I saw spots of blood on his beard: splotches of congealed red blood. The warm exhalation of a slaughtered animal poured from his mouth. He breathed slowly and deeply, as if an invisible knife had slashed his lungs from the inside, from top to bottom.

“What kind of treatment could I give to this body that was almost dead? But he made an effort to speak; a cough choked his words, but I plucked a word from his hoarse, rasping cacophony: “‘The *Krunk*’ (crane)...”

“And I sang for him. Who doesn’t know ‘*Krunk*’: the ‘*Krunk*’ of all travelers whose eyes look back...and beyond...the ‘*Krunk*’ of all whose necks are bent and of all who follow endless roads....And it seemed to me that he flew back to his homeland and was refreshed, and he cried....He had entrusted the *Krunk* with all the yearnings of his heart....”

When the story ended we were all silent. There was something terrible in this student’s destiny; he had set out to return to his homeland, and on his way he had died, and was now buried in a country he had never seen before....

The tuberculosis had been there, inside of him, for centuries, waiting for years, until all of his hopes were realized, all of his studies completed, and all of his efforts and work were terminated, before it began its awful labor, delivering its crucial blow at a crucial moment....Ah, what a nasty, disagreeable illness!

“Doctor,” somebody said, “when we uncovered his face at the cemetery, it was as black as ink....Why is that?”

But the doctor did not speak; no one spoke.

Silence once again fell on us like a stone, this time heavier than before. To break the ice, someone else said: “Hey boys, it’s Armenian New Year tomorrow...”

But who was in the mood to think of New Year? We could hear snow smacking on the windowpane, as if the dead youth’s fingers were tapping on the window....In this cold he had escaped from his grave and wanted to join us. And you never know what that nameless and unknown dead young man had for all of us—a symbol or a warning....

And as a matter of fact, at the very moment we all felt the presence of death: death, the unknown and horrifying, came to the student, the laborer, the believer, and the agnostic, to both the healer and the healed....

We were going to be somebodies, to be educated, to carry light to our dark world: lies, lies, lies! Which of us was not filled with the age-old breath of death? Was not thinking about himself and suspecting himself of....

What noble sentiments could be found among those young souls, who did not even believe in the bonds of prayer that unite the dead and the living? Thus, each of us remained isolated within himself....

But suddenly, from an unlit corner, arose a low tremulous song: first as a solo, then rising from multiple lips—a tender and overpowering song, which broke the ice, melted the tears, warmed the hearts, and united all the souls, all the cares, all the sorrows, all the sadness.

The homeless lad’s heart is wounded, and his lungs afflicted with consumption.

The bread he eats is bitter and the water is cursed....

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

*Krunk, Krunk*, from every corner of the world, from every chamber of every heart, how many heavy tidings are tied to your legs? And yet you can still fly! How many deaths have been tied to your wings, *Krunk*? And yet on those wings you still fly forward!

And when the doctor made a sign and we all stood up as a sign of respect for the dead, I had goose flesh all over my body at the thought that at that moment, far, far away, in a place far over the seas and mountains, an old mother and a white-haired father, their faces wreathed in smiles and hope, were watching the road for the young man we knew would never return, never ever return....

And, trembling now, I joined my voice to the others, as if I were singing the death-scented song into his mother's ear.... On the roads of exile an entire people was dying anonymously—that song contained enough grief to poison the entire world, and enough sweetness to make the stones weep.

Lausanne, 1913.

*From the Heritage of Armenian Literature, Volume III*

## **Degeneration**

Schopenhaur, Nietzsche, Byron, etc. could have killed more young, promising and chosen souls, than all the killers and evil doers of the world put together.

The preachers of suicide, apostles of pessimism and prophets of corruption should be looked for in the cradle of the degenerated infants. They are the ones who enfeeble every urge of action, every hope of happiness, every faith of purity. They do not progress, but hope; they do not dream, but rave; they do not bless, but curse; they do not love, but lust. Their song is arrogant like the blasphemy; their smile is offensive like an irony.

Do you want an example? The Armenian intelligentsia is, more than any other nation's, infested with these negative geniuses.

The number of semi-geniuses are many. But when the intellectual army of a race abounds with small talented abortive children, then it turns into an intolerable, scandalous and culpable race.

And, instead of uprooting them, we ignorantly pick up and cultivate the morbid buds. We take these vigorous, struggling, happy, smart young men who fill our schools and engage them in business.

But, on the other hand, we send the feeble, pale, unhappy boys and teenage seniors, who shun the sun and the struggle, or who scribble on papers in the dark corners of the school, to better schools and better universities in foreign countries.

And the miserables, fill the graves of the emigrant student, the anterooms of the rich man, the offices of a merchant and the straw mattresses of a hospital.

Whatever happened to us, has not happened to any other civilized nation.

**Our peasant and working class are more brainy than he who calls himself an intellectual; the reader has more common sense than the writer; the followers are more farsighted than their leaders; in other words, the body is cleverer than the brain.**

According to the law of physiology the body gradually neutralizes, detaches and expels all the degenerate parts from within itself.

By the same law it can also be explained why the tie between our intellectuals and the common people are gradually getting thinner.

The race is still healthy – more than ever. It is neutralizing, detaching and expelling all the alienated and degenerated elements from within itself.

The neck which connects the head to the body is gradually getting thinner. Perhaps the day is not far away when the neck will break away and our intelligentsia will become a bodyless head; and our race a body without a head.

Don't you see? Some of our writers have the audacity to announce that they are not writing for their people.

The misunderstanding between the flock and the shepherds has never been this great.

An unarmed nation like us, is ever day being dismembered like a lamb; whereas our shepherd-dogs have become more discreet, discerning and civilized; they speak to us about universal brotherhood and dream of the distant day when the wolf and the lamb will graze together.

An ignorant race yearns for the milk of education; for the good, unadulterated and white milk which is usually digestible, even by the sick. But our university graduates, instead of sustaining us intellectually, start regurgitating in front of us, before they could digest the food.

We are a brave race; thirsty for a luminous and sincere education, yet we are as helpless as an orphan. Our writers say



puzzling, enigmatic and dark things to us; our poets dipping their pen in the Armenian blood, are creating Chinese poems, so that nobody may understand anything.

Down with the morbid intellectuals. You are the brain of this race. When the brain drives our vitality to despair, we should detach and throw it away.

We will forge new minds, new hearts and a new spirit.

We need a red, meaty, strong and smiling literature.

We need healthy and young intellectuals. The fish rots from the head, and the nation from its intellectuals. They are the leaders of the nation. Their body stays strong and active, but when the brain deteriorates, the movements of that body turn into foolish activities and fruitless weariness.

This is the reason why we, ignoring the real perils, are fighting against the wind and against ourselves. This is the reason why we, instead of progressing, are marking time on the same ground for two thousand years.

Yes, our race is usually vital and industrious. Yes, our ancient boat is still floating on the water, without sinking.

**Why is it though, that the boats of yesteryears have surpassed us and we are still floating like the Ghost Boat that doesn't sink and yet is unable to reach dry land?**

The reasons for this are complicated. One of them is that we have the knack of placing our most morbid, degenerate and good-for-nothing sons at the head of the rudder.

But verily, verily I say unto you, let us react. We need a new Golden Age. A Renaissance, not Degeneration.

Lausanne

1911

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

## **The Illness and Death Of Reteos Berberian**

Rereos Berberian was born in Has-keui, a suburb of Constantinople, on October 20, 1848, the frail twin brother of a big baby sister. His father was a poor barber. The Berberian family was in an indigent and wretched state; the mother would comfort the children with the phrase “inshallah.” (Good willing). Reteos was 6 years old when his father died. At the age of 14, he became a teacher at the Nersesian School (Has-keui) and the family’s breadwinner. When he was 16, he went to Edirne (Adrianopolis) as a teacher, earning 10 gold pieces a month. Subsequently he moved back to Kadi – keui. During his youth, Reteos had done some singing; he had a beautiful voice and could give an address lasting three hours. In 1876, at the age of 28, he opened a school. He passed away at the age of 59.

Berberian was afflicted with diabetes three years prior to his death.

A year before his death, he began to have angina attacks. While walking in the street, he would turn yellow when climbing steps or going uphill, and he would experience specific heart pains. He would inhale nitrate d’amil initially once every few months, then once a week until he had to stay in bed. Eventually he got better. We expected that he would go somewhere during the spring. The diabetes had disappeared.

Generally speaking, he didn’t fast often; he always liked sweets.

His doctors ordered him to rest but he didn’t want to do so.

Reteos had an argument with Mesrob Noubarian over a point in classical Armenian. Saturday was a holiday and the

school was closed; he worked all day long on an article and we got together in the evening. Then he went to bed, Mannig covered him. He had woken up early Sunday morning (April 7, 1907) and had an attack which quickly subsided. He asked for some coffee, drank it and began to sing, as he did every morning instead of praying. Suddenly he had a second attack which was extremely severe. Commotion ensued. Shahan was startled from his sleep. We roused Mannig out of bed, Reteos was terribly colorless. The doctors came and gave him an injection of morphine because he was experiences acute pain. He called for his children. He suffered an attack which lasted 20 minutes. The pain was constant; again he received a shot of morphine. Shahan entered his room; alas! He had already passed away. His was a peaceful countenance with the calmness of death. He died pallid.

Berberian didn't believe he would die. He had many projects in the works, including outlines and notes for various books. A week prior to his death, his last book **School and Education** was published, which he had awaited impatiently. When it arrived, he was very happy.

Lausanne  
1907

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

**Song  
Of  
Joy**

**By Reteos Berberian**

It is not the sun that lights the world,  
Gives nature its beauty, color and life.

It is not the stars that endow the sky  
With nocturnal grace found nowhere else.

It is not the spring that draws out the flowers  
Or shapes shadows of mystery in the woods;  
Not the birds, not the streams, or the wind  
That moves us themselves with their sounds

The torch that sparks all other lights,  
From which the grace of all things flares,  
Without it the world is lifeless and dark,  
Is the joy of the soul that loves and cares.

**I keep  
Yearning**

See how I keep yearning for you still,  
Hurt and cursed and dark with sorrow,  
Because I love you, dearest, still.

Who brought your shadow into the hollow  
Echoless tomb of my soul  
And made me sear to love you still?

My soul a tomb in darkness sealed,  
A soul you did not choose to love,  
But a soul which loves you, dearest, still

Why do I adore, embrace your steps  
Even after being trampled by your feet,  
And beg for love from the black cup of death?

Couldn't you forgive me since I love you still?

**With Love  
Wounded**

It was with love you wounded me,  
With love you pierced my heart,  
Its petals open like a rose,  
But like a coffin quickly closed.

With sweetness too you wounded me,  
With love consumed my heart,  
Its petals open like a rose,  
But shamed and humbled with a kiss.

With song and pain you cradled me,  
And in my heart you planted thorns,  
The budding roses of my heart  
You scattered to the winds forlorn.

## **In Lieu of Weddings**

While we were still classmates, my friend Aram used to tell me, “When we turn twenty, we’ll have such a party, such a celebration, that the whole village will rejoice with us...”

In those days it seemed that reaching the age of twenty would be a major turning point for us.

Our motto was: It takes twenty years to prepare for life, twenty years to raise a family and twenty years to prepare for death...”

In our childish innocence, we imagined life to be a mathematical straight line which, when broken into three equal segments, would automatically collapse like a triangle...

A lot of things happened since then, and I barely came to understand that life is not a straight line but an unpredictable zigzag, not a regular triangle but a ridiculous black zero...

Those individuals, who used to cry in school when they got a zero, will be forced to cry the rest of their lives. Meanwhile, for those who used to laugh when they got zeros, life has many similar and unusual amusements in store.

For example, my friend Aram was barely ready for life yet he met his death before reaching that pre-determined age of twenty. By the time I – left alone – was ready to celebrate that milestone, the spring of my life had already passed by unnoticeably and, alas, irretrievably.

However, we had planned another celebration, a great celebration, perhaps the greatest celebration – our wedding – which of course couldn’t pass by unnoticed.

Who could have guessed that I myself would refrain from such a great celebration? Let me tell you the reason.

Witnesses relate that a person sentenced to death, wearing a white shirt, moves forward in silence and slips the noose around his neck subserviently because he knows that

any effort to resist is useless; others have already predetermined his fate without obtaining his approval.

I have yet to personally see somebody sentenced to death. Once, however, I saw a bride in a Persian church and, to this day, I get goose bumps every time I think of her.

A large dense crowd was surging, each spectator struggling to catch a glimpse of the bride. And then she appeared. She was proceeding in a confused and lifeless manner, involuntarily and as if resigned, for others had already decided her fate without getting her approval.

Dressed in white from head to toe, she was marching forward to be hung by the rope of her innocence... What a happy girl she had been up till now! She used to sing love songs during the day and, at night, dream of gallant knights; she was as carefree as the field crickets, as free as the birds... But that very night, all her dreams would be shattered; she would experience the pains of motherhood, she would be beaten and turned into an ugly animal...

Dressed in white but as pale as a ghost, she advanced through a pack of human wolves, whose looks were eating her alive. Her heart was pounding and her petite body trembling; she was like a small bird trapped in a villain's clutches, soon to be feasted upon by the old ravenous vulture by her side...Sporting a stiff, pointed and blackened moustache, the groom approached with puffy eyes and one arm scratched...

The entire crowd has become transformed into a pair of eyes. The spectators were all leering at the bride. Her innocence, which would cease to exist very shortly, was like the bread offering of which every person took a little piece.

"Being wealthy is so wonderful," someone in the crowd whispered, drooling.

"If your pockets are loaded, go waste your life with whores and, when you get old, marry the youngest, most beautiful and innocent girl you can find. Violate her, make her bleed, beat her, make her sick... nobody has the right to say anything, not



even your wife... the only thing people want to know is how much you paid for God's blessing.

And, true enough, at that very moment, a high-ranking celibate priest was liberally quoting from the Bible as he praised the groom's virtues. He then proceeded to breeze through all the enticements of married life.

"He's never been to the ocean yet he purports to teach others how to swim," whispered someone sitting next to me.

However, someone else said something so embarrassing that I blushed to the end of my ears.

From that day on, I decided that, if I ever got married, my wedding wouldn't be like this one at all.

That day I realized that marriage, under those conditions, was nothing but a fraudulent contract, which the virgin signed without understanding a word of it. On the other hand, the husband who understood the terms of the contract well, wasn't obligated to honor the agreement.

This was no different from slave trading, except that in this case the young girl was the one being sold and, to boot, she herself had to pay.

How ironic that this young girl, whose testimony would have no bearing in a court of law, will have to honor her "I do," until death. She will have to carry the burden of her kiss in her womb, while her husband, just like a dog, will betray her the moment he will have gotten her pregnant.

I was amazed as how proud her parents seemed to be. They shed such copious tears of joy. They were so proud at how skillfully they had carried on the negotiation of their daughter's dowry... and such a good choice... what a fine son-in-law... Everybody crowded around them and wished them well.

I was about to leave this slave market, filled with jealousy and disgust, when someone grabbed me by the arm and asked my name, maybe to include me on the guest list.

More than a decade has passed since that day but I still haven't forgotten that pale-faced girl all dressed in white. That was the first – and last – time I saw her.

Her spirit, though, troubled me for a long time.

Well, one day, it was my turn to accept my fate and join my better half in matrimony.

Our wedding was so different from hers that it constituted the opposite extreme.

It was a wedding without music and festivities – a simple civil ceremony which is required in Europe of believers and unbelievers, rich and poor, alike.

In the presence of two witnesses, the Swiss mayor placed a marriage contract before us.

“Would you please sign here, Miss...?” he said.

“Yes, sir,” said the bride and signed the papers with a bold flourish.

“Thank you, Mrs....,” the mayor responded.

That was it. From that moment on, the Miss was a Mrs..

And yet, if you want my honest reaction, I should say that I felt hurt by that maliciousness.

The fact that the papers had been previously drawn up in the spirit of accommodating two opposing parties, gave our wedding love, our infinite dreams, our mutual devotion, and eternal promises the air of a crass business deal.

And Love, which “is as powerful as Death” according to Solomon, became as shaky as a business deal because the Law that brought us together also spelled our the terms of separation...

To alleviate the burden of all these legal chains, our nuptials needed a divine blessing. My bride too quickly felt the need for that missing element.

She said, “Since we didn't spend that much money for our wedding, let's make a less fortunate girl happy by giving her money **in lieu of wedding**. I know an orphan girl who's

engaged but doesn't have the means necessary to get married; let her joy be a blessing for us..."

It is said, "Great ideas come from the heart," from women, that is.

"In lieu of wedding." That's what we decided and that's what we just did.

To make our joy more complete, we traveled to Paris to visit an Armenian church and find therein what was missing at Lausanne's city hall.

A kind priest greeted us with a smile.

"Before coming to me, you should have discussed things with Effendi, the treasurer..." he said.

After searching in every nook and cranny of the city, we finally located the treasurer effendi in a jewelry store. An elderly gentleman with sallow complexion, he was hunched over behind a scale and chewing gum...

Upon learning the reason for my visit, he said, "People come here from all over the world to get a cheap blessing... Our prices are already known to all, so there's no need to negotiate... If you pay a thousand francs, we will light up the entire church and the effect will be something special... If you only want the center of the church lit up, and rugs on the floor, that will cost you so many hundred francs... If you want all the lights together, it's --- hundred francs... And the illumination of the alter will cost you --- hundred francs..."

"But what about a simple blessing?"

"What do you mean by **simple blessing**," Effendi? Do you think the late Mantashov spend millions to build this splendid edifice for simple blessings to be dispensed? There's a price for every candle we light, every chorister here has his price. You should know that our singers are students at the Paris Conservatory and sing at the Opera House... Our Shah-Mouradian plays in 'Faust'. If you want a laudatory sermon too, you'll have to discuss price with the priest."

This then is the kind of mud through which I had to drag our Love in order to give it an insoluble, inseparable, heavenly and everlasting form.

However, the next day, when I was in church, I forgot all these bitter experiences.

There we were, a young couple holding each other tight in the very center of this empty edifice, under its mysterious dome, with an elderly priest and a French beadle standing by.

On the alter and on either side of us, there were long white candles burning; even though it was daylight, they produced a faint dreamlike flames that appeared and disappeared. From time to time, strangers would peek through the opening in the doorway, out of curiosity; it was only at those times that we heard the hustle and bustle of the street. Indeed, outside the world's capital was buzzing, howling, cursing and generally going wild; inside, meanwhile, two heads – one blonde, the other dark – were being joined by a silk string for Life and Death...

Outside was the realm of all the passions, all the sins, knowledge and civilization. Inside, an Armenian priest, who looked as if he had been snatched from the reliefs of ancient Ani – he resembled an apostle – was repeating words that were thousands of years old, everlasting and frightful...

The white candles were melting, and the incense holder engulfed us in a blue cloud. The priest was reading and singing nonstop. That reading and singing gradually lulled us into a stupor, enraptured us and transformed us to ancient and distant places...

The godfather – loner and misanthropic artist who had never set foot in a church – was now crying like a child. The bride, who understood not a word of this divine golden-age classical Armenian, was silently weeping. And then a hot teardrop fell on our clasped hands and made me shiver to the marrow of my bones.

Neither the dewdrop falling onto the hollow of a rose from the canopy of heaven, nor the drop of water falling onto the bosom of a virgin from the bath-house dome can cause such shuddering...

What do I care of Science shall mock the pious position of its unworthy pupil! That is doubly ridiculous because the Science that doesn't understand Religion doesn't understand Love either. Science only believes in relative truths, whereas Love and Religion strive for the absolute ideal. They are the eternal forms of the same eternal feeling: love is a personal, tangible, earthly and natural ideal, whereas Religion is an impersonal, intangible, universal and supernatural ideal.

Let the unbelievers stone me. I can't deny that inedible tear drop which my mother church caused to fall into my soul. All the sciences combined could not have made that drop fall...

At any rate, let's rid the wedding ceremony of its medieval excesses, its slave-trade trappings and its snobbish exhibitionism... All these aspects simply serve to put a burden on marriage, humiliate the poor and embarrass virgins...

Instead of inviting hundreds of people who, the very next day, will criticize your wedding as pitiful, it would be far better to make an orphan girl happy and enjoy her blessing for the rest of your lives.

Indeed, any newspaper will be glad to announce to the world:

**Newlywed couple K. donates \$**  
**To a girl's orphanage in lieu**  
**of wedding.**

I have taken the lead, who will second it?

Lausanne  
1913

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

## **Letter from a student**

Lausanne, May 27, 1909

We're again living black days, days of terror. Telegrams are arriving hourly, conveying new horrors. First it's massacre and, if it's not massacre, it's fire; then if it's not fire, it's starvation and what is most frightening, epidemic! Every day the newspapers carry stories of ever-increasing grief and woe. This very evening I was reading in the papers the letter of a known Swiss woman, Lucy Borel, who had devoted herself for years to the education of Cilician Armenian children. After describing how a corpse-like calm seemed to prevail in the dead city of Adana and the Red Cross was getting organized to take care of the injured, the dedicated Swiss woman mentioned that the marvelous Armenian school, in which thousands of injured were being sheltered, was burned down in the haste and confusion caused by sudden, new and unparalleled round of fire... L.Borel sighs, "It's enough for the new cabinet to order 'don't kill any more, but burn everything' and..."

Everything! And what's left anyway?

Yesterday my curiosity was aroused by a crowd which had gathered in front of a newspaper office, and I headed in that direction. On display were newly arrived photographs: thousands of hapless people at the Mediterranean seashore, beds in churches, feet, dismembered human bodies, a baby whose belly had been split open and was spilling out, lying on its mother's dead body, the Mediterranean Sea full of corpses, old people, orphaned girls, wretched lying on the ground... **Armenians! Armenians! Armenians!** My heart was torn to pieces over my being the only representative of a wretched race among that curious throng. As I was going away from that revolting exhibition of blood, I paused upon overhearing a short conversation between two little girls, aged seven and eight.

“What are those pictures?” asked the younger girl.  
“The Armenians are being massacred...”  
“Why?”

The older girl paused, bewildered. She didn't know the reason. She merely knew, beginning from the cradle, that at nighttime her parents would relate unheard-of stories concerning the Armenians. “Why?” Dismayed, petrified, stupefied, I thought about that big **why**, that red **why** that erupted from the soul of the ignorant seven-year-old girl. That big revolutionary **why** spouted from her mouth as naturally as the pure water flows from the spring. The greatness of children!... So many of us – all the “elders,” “decent” people, the nation's “sages” – still haven't pondered that primary question that torments the child's mind. Ah, because that **why** is the huge cornerstone of Revolution, and because disagreeable things may come out from beneath that word as far as their interests are concerned, like scorpions coming out from under a rock...

This week, there was a bitter, very bitter piece of sarcasm in a Swiss political magazine about this:

“God created donkeys to be insulted, and Armenians to be massacred...” If the regime changes in Turkey, it results in the massacre of Armenians. If a new Sultan is to be enthroned, Armenians are massacred. If a new law shall be promulgated, Armenians are massacred. However, all this is not as strange for us that demoralizing “discretion” with which the Armenians hail those massacres. **When will this nation learn to react with righteous indignation...**”

Yes, indeed! **To react with righteous indignation!** This basic virtue seems to have altogether forsaken the Armenian heart. And this applies not only to our pious clergy, our incense-loving common folk, and our ignorant artisans, but even and especially our intellectuals. Just take a look at our papers; trust me, in the past few months, the European press has touched upon the Armenian tragedy more closely than the Armenian press of Constantinople. There was

unanimity among the political papers of all countries concerning the number massacred, which surpasses thirty thousand. The officers of the French warships report, “**The Sihan river alone dumped three thousand Armenian corpses into the Mediterranean Sea.**” European eyewitnesses are telling the most horrid true accounts on a daily basis.

Dismayed, petrified we wait for the Armenian press from Constantinople in order to receive more extensive information, or at least to be tempered by reading a strong protest... The papers arrive but all they offer is the eternal gilded vanity which characterizes the Armenian intellectuals of Constantinople... Our papers are still carrying on their paralytic life. We read magazines immediately prior to the Cilician massacres, in which there were immodest rhymed love poems, engagement stories, and still other such ridiculous items... Whereas, the general Armenian Press should have been covered with the black of the Grief, or it should have burst with the red of Blood, or – if it couldn't say everything – it should have remained silent. At least they shouldn't have written these depressing, excessively pessimistic, feeble, dismal obituaries. Those who died, knowingly, heroically need neither tears, nor hired artificial weepers, nor advice. The obituaries should be read on behalf of the obituary editors. Races possess the instinct of self-preservation, the perpetuation of the group. **Struggle.** In these terrible periods, the press shouldn't obscure that instinct of the people in a haze of pessimism, grief, irremediable pain. Fatalism will not save the oppressed races: that is what our press is forgetting.

The foreign press – and particularly the Swiss dailies – publishes a daily record of the donations made in connection with the Armenian massacres. What is our press doing in kind? The Armenian papers, on the occasion of the death of this or that **Honorable** so-and-so, continue to publish the never ending list of donations in lieu of flowers. Shouldn't



*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

those same papers, on the occasion of the death of thousands of Armenians, in lieu of flowers (the irony of the word!...) have presented themselves to this seven-fold martyred race with column after column of unending gifts?... The provinces, the starving, much-tormented provinces have given their share. **When will the feeling of self-consciousness stir in the soul of the capital-city dwellers? When will their compassion be aroused?**

**And when, particularly, will our people react with righteous indignation!...**

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

## **Living is Winning (Struggle Against Death)**

Oh man, have you ever thought about that miraculous thing called life?

It is said that there are kisses that make roses bud. Yet a rose a really nothing, there are kisses that beget life.

Parents, instruct your sons that within each one of them there is a sleeping God.

Woe unto him who hangs around dark alleys like a degenerate, dirtying and poisoning his life-giving organ. He will be an unfortunate father, if he ever becomes one...

Drunkard and dissolute fathers are responsible for disinherited, handicapped, lunatic, depressed, demonical and sickly children.

The fruit of love is very delicate.

That tiny body imprisoned in darkness can neither see nor hear, speak or breathe. However that piece of flesh is more sensitive than any heart.

That future life is so dependent of the mother that a mother's sorrow can drastically influence its entire destiny. Each heartbeat of the mother is echoed in the baby's heart. That baby can die from a simple pain, a wound or even from nothing, while lying in the mother's womb.

But it will live. The decisive moment arrives, that turbulent hour of suffering and hope, when a baby's birth and a mothers death counterbalance each other on a wavering scale...

The husband has already deserted, like a guilty animal. The terrified wife is left alone to face the great UNKNOWN, that which gets nourishment from her blood and which, in fact, may momentarily cause her death...

How fortunate is today's child. He can make himself understood and can communicate with the outside world...

Do you see this man of science, his head resting upon the mother's womb, listening to the baby's heartbeat. The infant

is sending prenatal data to the doctor about his age, his height, his health and his manner of birth i.e. whether he plans to come out with his head, hands or feet first...

And thus he is born...

How sweet is this unknown of which the mother was so terrified...

They were one and became two, and are now smiling at each other...

It was a star that fell down to the earth. Yet how much bitterness does this world harbor for this angel that has fallen from the sky. A bread crumb is sufficient to choke him. Will he be able to live or is he merely a visitor?

Ask the grieving mothers how many babies are lost to diphtheria, whooping cough, scarlet fever, encephalitis.

If the baby is strong and healthy it will win and will live.

That healthy ball of flesh will make its way through all manner of diseases and deaths. This tottering being which even a scarab beetle can kill, shall overcome all difficulties, shall flourish and grow up and become a king.

Not a king of some geographical spot, but the king of all species of animals the king of animate and inanimate creatures.

Yesterday's lamb shall cause today's lions to tremble and shall imprison them in cages for his amusement.

He shall command the mountains to bow down and if they disobey he shall pierce their entrails with his steel roads.

He shall command the skies to be silent or else he shall abort the viciousness of their disobedient elements, with the lightning rod and with cannons he shall put to rest the threatening hail which lies in the clouds...

He shall bring out the evil spirits from the womb of the earth and shall command shapeless and formless metals to bend, to take shape and labor for him.

He shall change the order and nature of creation. Nature has condemned him to land and yet he shall rule the waters and the skies.

He shall pursue the mountain-like (antideli) monster that  
rollicks in the oceans. Perching on his fast moving plane he  
shall terrify the eagle that soars high above the clouds.

Behold the king, the king of the universe...

But how weak and pitiful is he!

He who used to fly through the air is now stuck on the  
ground, like the reptile, bedridden and choking on his cough.  
Invisible enemies have filled his throat and impaired his  
breathing...

The king is about to die and yet he does not know who is  
killing him...

He destroyed generations of beasts. He wiped out poisonous  
reptiles from his inhabited regions, he passed laws against  
criminals and hung those who were disobedient. So who is  
this new enemy and where did it come from?

But do you see this man of science, who caringly leans over  
the sick and gives him a routine injection in the leg, instantly  
killing millions of germs in the throat... long live the king!

So far the king had waged his battles against visible enemies.  
Now he is faced with a new crusade that is against invisible  
enemies.

Who are the commanders and princes of this new crusade?

They don't sport gold-braided decorations. Instead of swords  
they have sharp knives and instead of pistols they have  
microscopes in their hands. The doctors who were ridiculed  
by Moliere, the doctors who made their living solely by  
cleaning the bowels of kings, today they stand united  
throughout the world. They are the ones who are officials of  
universal life and are promising hope for the final victory.

Do you see this old man who is collecting saliva from the mad  
dog's mouth for examination?

Do you see the young man who sacrifices his life among the  
poor to snatch the secret of the cholera disease.

Do you see this new Prometheus who, in stealing radium from  
the heart of darkness, burns his hand in that magical fire?

Do you see this Armenian scientist who sacrifices his life for the development of X-ray in the New World?

There are so many other doctors who sacrifice their lives for others and remain unknown.

What is the result?

Have you forgotten those bygone days, when all the people along with their kings and knights would rot from their wounds. Of the 20,000 leper houses that covered the length and breadth of Europe, not a single one remains this day. The three infernal diseases – **plague, smallpox, cholera** – that killed countless armies in one year, do not dare set foot on the vast continent of Europe where doctors are standing watch. Doctors are the watchful guards at civilization's frontiers. They spend sleepless nights in the trenches watching out for the treacherous enemy, so that the general populace can sleep peacefully.

In this unequal war, unarmed men are facing violent gods.

The victory will yet be ours...

The other day smallpox and diphtheria surrendered. Yesterday rabies was controlled. Today they are about to find a cure for the plague and syphilis. Tomorrow in will be tuberculosis's turn.

Remember the Spartan mother's word "**with your shield or on your shield.**" You will either win or lose. There is no alternative.

Doctors instruct your patients to be brave. Because to live is to win and there is no room for hopeless people on the earth. Woe unto those who are spiritually and physically weak; woe unto the timid and the pessimist; woe unto unbelievers. There is no room on this earth for the wicked.

If you are tired then give your hand. If it is a universal law that life is a struggle then helping each other is an animal instinct.

Let us greet tomorrow with songs.

I did not say, let us greet death. Because to die from sickness is as unnatural and unjust as dying from an accident.

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

Let all the infirm people throughout the world unite. Let them  
join hands and organize for the great victory, the victory of  
life!

Let's advance, living is winning!

Lausanne 1913

**Lord Have Mercy  
(Der Voghormia)**

“Did you see the Circassian, Doctor?”

“What Circassian?”

“I don’t know. As far as I could guess from his manners he seemed to be a Circassian. He had asked for an appointment just for this hour.”

“Didn’t he tell you what he wanted?”

“He doesn’t know any French or any other European language,” answered my Swiss clerk.

A Cicassian? Illiterate and ignorant of any of the major languages, right in the very center of Europe? A lion digressing from the deserts and roving in the busy streets of a big city wouldn’t be this extraordinary! And a read lion he was, a magnificent beast! You should have seen with your own eyes! I quickly picked him out in the waiting room. Even if you threw him among million men, the onlooker’s eye would first and foremost fall directly on him!

He had the huge build of an exceptional mountaineer. He wore an enormous overcoat with an infinity of creases girdled with a silver belt at the waist. He had proud shoulders which had never bent. He towered above the crowd of slightly hunched city dwellers. A thick beard covered his whole face, and on his head he wore a high tapering bonnet made of camel skin. He stood there motionless, bewildered and contemptuous. His arms crossed his bosom. He looked like a lion imprisoned in a hen-run. What was the mysterious reason which had forced this colossal titan of the Asiatic mountains to come to these centers of civilization. Judging by his proudly bestial look one could tell he hated this place. He was accompanied by his three children, each of whom held a package. I do not quite recall from what remote corner of Caucasian Armenia he came. Crossing from one border to the other, from one station to the next, from one train to the other,

they had finally arrived here like horses sent to the battle front.

They had told him that the doctors out here could perform miracles. He had come to Lausanne in the firm belief that he could name any disease and could immediately find a cure. So this Goliath was sick?

“Why did you bring your children with you?” I asked.

“I have come especially for them, Doctor. My life means nothing to me. Death means absolutely nothing to me! I am a sinful father. But my kids, my kids!...”

He broke down and chewed the words as he spoke in his awful Armenian. As a father, it was not easy for him to confess his sin. In his youth he had contracted a serious case of syphilis in the army. He had kept that a secret. It seemed that this giant had hardly felt the effect of the mark of that dreadful disease on his skin. He married and had three children. His wife died when she was barely twenty years old. He didn't tell nor did he quite know the reason for his innocent wife's death. But in time he noticed, with horror, that his sons were losing their hearing. He went to holy places and made vows. He went to saintly men asking for their blessing and healing powers. He prayed much to God. He even gave different drugs to his children, but all had proved of no avail. And why all this? A physician had examined the children's blood and found out that the father's disease freely circulated in the veins of his children, so much so that each pumping of their heart took the horrible poison to the very ends of other tissues of their body and impregnated the poison further into them.

It was his youngest child's turn to show signs of deafness. He was terrified at the thought that his daughter would also be contaminated with the disease...

“It's easy to diagnose,” I interrupted. “It's easy to examine her blood.”

“No, no,” he gasped, getting paler and paler, “Let that one's future remain undecided. To have deaf children is not capital



sorrow. But it is very hard to accept that they are deaf only because of my sin, because years ago I was tempted to fornication. Sometime, some where, some fifteen years ago I became a fornicator...”

His eyes grew moist and began to shine with an ominous luster. His teeth gnashed as if he ground under them hard pebbles into dust. But who can he get angry at? This primitive man for whom revenge was the supreme pride and law, could take his revenge on nobody other than his children. Only his children!

“Oh, God, Haven’t you got children of Your own blood? Haven’t you got a morsel of pity left innocent children?” he sighed and departed, waving his head and swinging his colossal stature. I remained motionless and watched the tossing body of this gigantic mountaineer. **Whether dwarf or titan, man is really infinitely small and insignificant before the inexorable and unalterable laws of nature!**

This consultation took place yesterday. Today was a glorious Sunday. I was going to his lodging to see the lion’s cubs in their den. My interest accelerated my steps through the dark streets and narrow houses. How was this stranger able to find the center of the slums of misery!

The lion’s den? It was a room with a low ceiling, with dark and barren walls. At the four corners of the room there were four wooden bedsteads, like four coffins, hardly two inches above the floor. Right in the middle of the room there was a table made of the same wood. On the table there was a gas boiler. I understood why he had hesitated in inviting me to his house.

“Pardon me, Doctor,” he had, “I wouldn’t have received you like this had I been in my native land; but this is the fate of immigrants. I am sure you understand. These coffins and this table, I have made them with my own two hands; my fingers have bled in every tip and when I put my hands in cold water they pain me to death. I have to take care of the children’s

food, the mending of their clothes and their laundry. I am both a father and a mother to my orphans...”

What a price to pay for a hereditary disease which is incurable. A sin committed cannot be erased. He really cared for the kids as tenderly as a mother would.

Medicine has its laws just like justice has it's. But the laws of medicine are more horrible, unalterable, pitiless and revengeful.

There was only one thing I could do, advise him to return to his native country as soon as possible. But he really misinterpreted my intentions. He thought I refused to take care of him because he had no money!

“Try it Doctor, try it once. Why should medicine deny us it's cures? If my money is not enough for you, let me be your servant or even your slave for the rest of my life. A trial, a trial, is all I ask. Try it once for God's sake!”

He was quiet all of a sudden because he heard the door creak outside. They were his cubs! He called them by their names “Hovhaness, Garabed, Mariam!”

On the door-sill appeared a timid child's head and then another.

“Don't be afraid children, come in and kiss the hand of the Doctor.”

They didn't move because they couldn't hear him. He moved towards them and holding them by their hands he brought them in and let them sit on his knees and hugged and kissed them.

It gradually got dark. The widows grew dark. Night was falling. It was time for the children to go to bed.

“It's Sunday today, my children, do not forget your prayers,” he reminded them. The three orphans, falling in line side by side, bowed their heads and then fixed their eyes upwards to heaven and began singing with a heart-melting tone the **Der Voghormia.**

**Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy**

**Jesus our Savior have mercy.**

What a song, what a heart tearing song, my God! And how many years had it been since I had last heard this beautiful and charming spiritual melody. One of the gems of the Armenian Church. A shudder crossed my body. My flesh was creeping. Those innocent mouths sang with amazing faith. This graceful and spiritually solemn song was ours, just like the ‘Groong’, cherished songs of the Armenian expatriates. These are songs that remind us of our homeland, songs that depict supreme suffering and supreme hope.

The innocent children gave a more solemn meaning to **Der Voghornia** as they recited the words on their childish lips:

**Lord give peace to the world**

**Forgive the sinners**

**And call on sick people...**

So begged the orphans in their innocent prayers and with drooping necks.

“Forgive sinners...” repeated the father, holding his head in his hands and continued:

“Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy...”

I am sure that tonight when the coal-black darkness will fill that horrible room and when the three orphans will sleep sweetly their innocent sleep, the father will lie awake in the fourth coffin... with a guilty conscience...

Lausanne

1913

## THE DIARY OF AN ARMENIAN DEAF PERSON DESIRED

In the annals of old Stamboul, there's an anecdote as follows:

“... And there was a judge who was blind in his right eye and deaf in his left ear. And that judge saw the people's wounds with his right eye and listened to the lament of the sufferers with his left...”

Truly a legend, but believe me when I say that the truth couldn't be more accurate than this.

I am hardly guilty of exaggeration in recalling this age-old legend and applying it to our present-day life. A blind and deaf judge, why not?

We're going through a period of unimaginable, unbelievable indifference. Where is that ever open eye of yesterday's government, that eye which didn't miss the smallest, the most insignificant of words in the newspaper columns? Where is that every-attuned ear which could hear behind rocks and ramparts, and was aware of the most pitiable cry of protest which was punishable with the death penalty? Now frightful cries of protest are being raised but who's listening? What happened to the surveillance? Are there special government personnel to communicate our protests, as they say, to whom is may concern? (Oh, what a lazy explanation!)

Now that the horrible days of slavery are over, we have to face the days of anarchy...

Here's an old example: Our neighbors in Constantinople are making the fearful air of Stamboul ring day and night with the useless shots of firearms, and no attention is paid to them. However, let a solitary bullet be fired in Kum Kapu and behold, a regiment of 40-odd soldiers attacks the innocent Armenians with bayonets. The newspapers protest; the ink flows; pens are unbelievably

active. The question is: Against whom is this all directed? Who is listening? This is a matter for us to seriously think about...

Sounds of protest are coming daily from the provinces; choked throats are crying out from dark corners. In the interior, we still have centers in which it is forbidden to utter the word Constitution. There are still unhappy beys in power, red from the blood of Armenians, and as immovable as gods. There is the fear of massacre in the interior provinces, do you hear? The fear of massacre... Countless letters of appeal and protest, addressed to the revolutionary committees, are pouring into the newspaper offices; worn-out, slavish, adulatory statements are rearing their ugly heads. Unfortunately, we have blissful committees which don't listen...

The press is free, true, but that freedom of the press can only be helpful when there is a government willing to listen to us.

A judge is desired to take the job of listening – no matter of he is deaf. Because when it is the voice of a people suppressed for centuries that is crying out, when the stones are crying out, even the deaf can hear, as the simple expression goes.

A deaf person is desired...

(1908)

## **The Half – Crazy One**

One beautiful morning I received an unexpected letter from Constantinople. A prominent family was requesting that I depart immediately for Monte Carlo because their son had suddenly gone crazy there. As proof, they enclosed the following letter which their son had written to them:

“Dearly dear ones

Having received your letter, I received it as soon as I received it and, in

Response, I’m writing that which I am about to write...”

There were 16 large pages in this style. However, what interested me more than the contents was the shape of the letters. In the past 1500 years, the Armenian alphabet – the invention of Sahag-Mesrob – hadn’t been tortured this much. Those letters were irregular in size and consisted of thin wavering lines which rose and fell; they formed rows, not knowing where they were supposed to go. They would linger one place or, in order to find themselves, would form a crooked circle and compress a large word in a hollow space such that the words, in an effort to impact a meaning, had to be repeated twice, ten times, be lined up next to each other or one behind the other like a military procession.

“My respects with the respects of my respects...”

Furthermore, there wasn’t even a comma or period in these 16 pages. The reason is, that smallest of things – the punctuation mark – requires sufficient definiteness and decisiveness to be put in place, something that even very intelligent people lack. And the content of the letter wasn’t all that stupid. It made it clear in a vague and roundabout manner that the boy had gone through his money and wanted more to be spend (the amount requested was illegible, it was a totally new number that wasn’t recognizable in terms of ordinary arithmetic...)

What more intelligent thing could a traveler demand from his wealthy parents? On the other hand, they supposed that, having lost his fortune in the casinos, their son had undoubtedly gone crazy.

How many times that I read those 16 pages during the 18 hours I spent on the train in order to produce a light in my mind! On the contrary, all those **dearly dear ones**, the jerks of the train and the clanking of its wheels totally numbed my brain. The stupidity of that letter contained something unsettling, almost contagious. And, sometime after midnight, I arrived at the Monte Carlo station totally bewildered.

I wondered where to go in the dark in the strange city. A dirty solitary light was blinking suspiciously above a doorway in an alley – (I don't know why). I knocked on the door, it turned out to be a hotel. A fat woman with salt-and-pepper hair showed me to a room but the fact that there was no lock on the door made me uncomfortable.

“This is a safe place,” said the woman who then asked me if I was alone.

“Yes,” I replied, “but I left my suitcase at the station.”

Mine was a small room decorated with paper flowers. There was a warm, penetrating, nameless odor in the air, a feminine odor. The wide bed was barely covered; on it was a wrinkled sheet with mysterious hollows. I drew closer to it, holding a candle, and saw two red spots, still wet...

I bid goodbye to this “safe place” and embarked on a new expedition in the dark, going from one street to the next, until I was finally able to find a clean pillow upon which to rest my head. I woke up the following morning at my usual hour. The room was still dark. I went back to sleep and woke up again; again it was dark but the darkness was the type that must have prevailed prior to God having made his famous “let there be light” pronouncement. How long were the nights of Monte Carlo! I tried again and again to fall asleep until the hotel owner, suspecting that I might be dead, came and knocked on my door. It was only then that I noticed that my

room had no window, not even an aperture. It was a perfect box. It was simply a miracle that I didn't suffocate during the night. (Don't forget this fact when you're evaluating gilded cities!)

It was midday outside. I went straight to my crazy man's address and ducked into the restaurant opposite his house. The mysterious door opened and there appeared a man wearing a fez. I approached him and said hello.

"Godspeak, how are you?" he said in such a casual manner that you'd think he saw me ten times a day.

He sat down to have lunch with me and, like old friends, we talked about a variety of mundane topics. It's true that his swollen ears imparted an idiotic lumpishness to his face but that man wasn't crazy, a thousand times no! I thought I had found the key to his secret in talking with him about women but his face turned sour. When I made reference to the casinos, he shrugged his shoulders. Already confused, I became more perplexed. Just think if I had collared the wrong man!

He was a married man. He spoke at length about his wife who wasn't able to join him on account of her feeling indisposed. He asked me for the address of a Swiss school for his older son. He also had a younger son, an infant in fact, who had a slight case of diarrhea caused by teething.

It was only subsequently that I found out this man wasn't married and didn't have any children. Rather, he simply had a desire to fabricate, to make up completely natural, disinterested, harmless lies. Art for art's sake.

"You've written a letter to your parents," I said timidly.

"I don't remember," he said.

"You've squandered your money in the casinos."

"That's not correct."

"Well then, where did your money go?"

"I had made a habit of eating ice cream during the daytime..."



“You mean to tell me you exhausted your fortune just buying ice cream?”

“I was in the habit of drinking milk in the mornings as well,” he stammered; his eyes welled up and tears rolled down into his beard. I felt sorry for him and remorseful as well. What business of mine that the man had wasted his money? However, he wasn’t thinking like this; he wanted to convince me of his innocence with his tears, he wanted me to absolutely believe that he was an honest man, that neither woman, nor wine, nor gambling had enticed him (and this was true!)... However people were mean: they wished him ill and they would wink at each other mysteriously when passing him in the street (this was also true but on account of the fez he wore). Many were trying to bankrupt him and have him hanged: people he never even knew would send him endless and impossible bills from all corners of the earth... This too was true, and here’s how...

This unassuming man had delusions of grandeur of such tremendous proportions that they’re beyond the grasp of the normal human mind... Since everybody was making him their business and plotting against him, he figured – albeit unconsciously – that quite possibly he was a famous person, who knows, maybe a future king... This man had the misfortune of believing his delusions and, with the simple logic of this type of “patient,” he desired to make his insignificant life conform to that grandiose conception in advance... He would order drums made of the finest donkey skin from a French factory for his army in such a quantity that far exceeded the number odd donkeys on this earth... if we’re referring solely to humble four-legged creatures by that word. He would write a handwritten letter to the German Kaiser to request his younger daughter’s hand in marriage. However, a suitable palace was also necessary for that grand marriage. He had seen a magnificent mansion for sale on the hills overlooking Monte Carlo and, with the utmost calmness and

without bargaining, had signed an option to purchase agreement with a signature befitting a king.

From that day on, his affairs took a turn from the worse: huge sums of money were demanded from him, on the strength of phony laws, for a house which he hadn't bought: there was only a simple signature. Therefore he was inclined to think that his one signature was of tremendous worth.

He had exhausted his resources in such megalomaniacal schemes as these and was engaging in immense speculative enterprises to generate new funds.

He had commissioned a scientist to work on the development of artificial rice at his expense.

After reading one day that a Stradivarius violin had sold for thousands of pounds sterling, he immediately wrote to an Italian factory and ordered 12 dozen Stradivarius violins, in order to sell them ten years later at tenfold the price. Furthermore, he gave the factory a month's time to complete the order. However, his attention turned to completely different matters during that month and he totally forgot about the violins.

Of all those wholesale orders, he had kept only two items for himself which I saw in his room. One was a huge long endless rope which confused me.

“Are you planning on measuring the width and depth of the seas with this?” I asked.

“No,” he said matter-of-factly, “this is an unsafe country. If they break into my room, I can use this to escape from the window.”

I knew, however, that again he was lying as was his custom. The endless rope was there for him to use to hang himself from the ceiling...

Then he opened a box – you'd never guess what was inside: razors, more razors, countless numbers of razors, a mountain of razors, one just like another! I, in turn, experienced the gamut of emotion from surprise to

amazement when he proceeded to open up another box identical in size, filled to the top with identical razors.

“These are the sharpened razors,” he said.

At this point, I didn’t persist in pursuing the matter much, and left. Here was a man who sharpened thousands of razors at nighttime and roamed the streets during the daytime freely, openly, while minding his own business. Until he killed an innocent bystander, the Law couldn’t have him confined to an insane asylum. Nobody cared that he had squandered his fortune through extravagant spending. He was half-crazy: after all, the medical profession doesn’t call this illness insanity. His loss of memory, the childish strangeness of his actions, his excessive lying, his successive megalomania and monomania, and particularly his speech difficulty and careless choice of words, plus the trembling of his tongue and fingers – like his letters – awakened the name of a very definite illness in my mind.

How had this illness started? Not suddenly (as his parents had written), rather over the course of months. He was a well-bred man who gradually changed his nature. First he became melancholic; confined to his room, he would light up and extinguish a hundred cigarettes a day. Then he turned irascible: suddenly he would make a disgusting movement or utter an abominable word presence of high society. His parents considered it preferable to banish him from home in the pretext of his taking a trip and, prior to receiving the aforementioned letter, they didn’t suspect his being crazy. Parents are like that anyway; they don’t doubt your sanity as long as you don’t ask them for money...

This disease was general paralysis, the sister of that other frightful disease which is called tabes, and both of whose father is old fashioned syphilis. However, it was first necessary to check and find out if he had contracted this newer disease at one time...

“Yes,” he said, “I had something like that... it’s an old story.”

The examination of his blood and body didn't leave any doubt; it was impossible to treat him so my task was simple. I entrusted him to the charge of a steamship doctor and sent him straight to Constantinople. Having been left alone, I rested for a while in that wonderful city. On my return home by train, again I read the famous letter and again I pictured that fool but this time not vaguely, rather quite clearly, as he would be in the near future without question.

His brain, after its unusual final flashes, would totally darken and become jet black (like my room the other night); his stupidity would become complete; his movements, impossible; he would become beridden; he would lose his speech; he would forget about eating; he would dirty twenty sheets a day; one day it would become impossible to feed him as well he would become repugnant to his dear loved ones; he would become petrified... and all this would occur without fail.

This story, however, began unexpectedly and will end unexpectedly as well. When I got home, I found a letter waiting for me from Constantinople, informing me that the fool had thrown himself down a well the very day of his arrival as soon as he ceased being under the doctor's supervision. It was as if he did so deliberately to prove my inevitable predictions wrong.

Nature, which has put something good next to every bad thing, has pointed out the remedy for this horrible disease. These patients think about one thing day and night: suicide. Doctors, not having come up with another cure, are content with stopping them from following that natural inclination. However, isn't it better to dirty a well that poison a sacred nest for years?

And now I still remember that day when he made big teardrops roll down into his beard to convince me that he was a kind of harmless man... I believe you after all, poor man, you're not lying. The liars are those who shed crocodile tears on the loss of your soul...

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

Let the religious experts and moralists argue about suicide, let them throw philosophy tomes at each other. Will one of them dare to step forth and explain to me what value that life would have, physically and spiritually, unable to speak, feel, move, nourish or think – a piece of flesh rotting in urine which even the dogs wouldn't eat...!

Lausanne  
1913

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

## **The Last Days of Roupen Sevag**

This is an account of the last days of Roupen Sevag according to his nephew Mr. Ohaness Cilingirian. Mr. O. Cilingirian is the director of the Roupen Sevag Museum in Cagnes-sur Mer, Cote d'Azur, France. This article had been translated into English by Mr. Daniel Janoyan.

Roupen Sevag was martyred in Changer, on August 26, 1915. The following is the story of the last days of his life.

Roupen Sevag lived in Switzerland from 1905-1914. During this period he pursued his education, he wrote and accomplished the major parts of his literary works and got married to Yanni Apell, a student at the Lausanne School of Arts. His first child, Levon, was born in Lausanne. Until 1914 Sevag practiced medicine in various hospitals in Lausanne. Two months before the outbreak of World War I, he moved to Constantinople along with his family.

Why did he return? His most beloved brother had died and he had always wanted to return to his country and serve his people. On her return Sevag's wife had anticipated something ill was going to happen. She was terrified by the wild looks of people and begged Sevag to return to Switzerland.

There were some unusually peaceful periods in Constantinople, in the years preceding the days of the massacre. Sevag started practicing medicine and found immense success. He also started to take an active part in literary seminars and gave lectures about medicine. His writings and poetry continued to be published in various papers and his fame reached its peak.

Teodik, a well known Armenian intellectual, had described Sevag in the following words. 'Athena had planted the ray of wisdom in his brain, Aesculapius the mystery of medicine and Hermes also had given him the talent of speech.'

A few months later, the World War I broke out and the gates of hell were opened wide. Roupen Sevag served in the Ottoman Turkish army in the rank of lieutenant of medicine. On one of the weekends the Harbiyah military troops were marching through the main street of the Harbiyah neighborhood in Constantinople. Roupen Sevag was to be riding a white horse and participating in that parade. Mr. Mgrdich Hacobovich, who happened to reside across the street from where the parade was to pass, had invited Sevag's niece, Adrienne, to watch the parade from his house.

Adrienne Silver had come to Dam De Sion school as a broadcasting student. Adrienne and her host were following the parade, and anxiously waiting to see Sevag. The soldiers kept on passing. "Now Sevag will arrive along with his soldiers," commented the host and then continued, "What's this? I can't believe my eyes. Sevag is not with them. No one is riding on the horse that led the soldiers." Sevag's white horse was led by some other soldier.

Those were the days of April 24, 1915. Sevag was exiled along with Gomidas Vartabed, Daniel Varoujan, Puzant Keshishian, Dikran Kelegian and others who were considered the masterminds of the Armenian nation.

Roupen Sevag lived, his last days in Changer, as a hero. He inspired all those who were disheartened and who lacked confidence. He uplifted their spirits by telling them not to give in to the Turks and never to surrender to the Turkish wills and wishes.

Roupen Sevag was a humanitarian. He was extremely respected by all and he never failed to take care of all patients, including Turkish patients. It so happened that one day Sevag was asked to treat the daughter of a Turkish nobleman in

Changer. This incident turned to be one of the heroic stories of the times.

Roupen Sevag was a handsome and very attractive young man with black eyes (Sev=black, Ag=eye) and black hair. He tried very hard to save the life of the young Turkish lady and eventually was able to heal her completely. The father was so happy that he did not know how to repay Sevag. As time went by, the Turkish nobleman noticed something strange in his daughter's behaviour; she was depressed and extremely unhappy. She finally confessed to her father that she was in love with Sevag and could not bear life without him.

The Turkish nobleman called on Sevag and explained the situation. "Doctor, you are aware that you are sentenced to die. No one could possibly save you or any of your friends. However, I will attempt to help you if you marry my daughter who is in love with you. I can save you from death on one condition that you convert to Islam and marry my daughter." Sevag replied, "But I am already married and have children." "That doesn't matter. Think about my offer and give me your answer tomorrow," said the Turkish nobleman.

That night Sevag conferred with his cellmates about the proposal of the Turkish nobleman. Every one of his friends tried to convince him to accept the offer until things calmed down. But Sevag refused and added, "To become a convert and a Turk will mean to humiliate and undermine oneself. We are the community leaders and if we betray our cause, then our people will lose faith in their struggle. We have to set an example for them. We are called to sacrifice our lives so that the Armenian people and nation will live and prosper."

On August 26, 1915, Roupen Sevag, along with Taniel Varoujan and their other three friends were taken by horse carriage from Changer to Ayash, under heavy military watch.



On their way to Ayash, they were attacked by Chettas (bandits) headed by Changer's Ittihad's chairman, Jamal Oghosi. The soldiers did not protect Sevag and the other prisoners. In fact, the commander of the so-called military escort stepped aside and watched the Chettas kill the Armenians in the most brutal and inhumane manner. Among those Chettas was Arabjibashi Ismail, the father of the girl that was treated and healed by Sevag.

Sevag's wife, Yanni, made all attempts to free her husband after he was exiled. She pleaded to all top ranking Turkish people and even to the German Embassy, because she herself was a German, daughter of the Erhart, German family. She met with Haliday Edib, who had influence on the Turkish media. She begged him, saying, "I beg you to free my husband. He has harmed no one. Ask all the Turkish noblemen in Switzerland or in Constantinople and they will tell you he helped everyone. They used to worship Doctor Sevag. I beg you! I have two children and they need their father. Please free my husband. Please!"

Adib coldly responded, "I believe you, Mrs. Sevag. But your husband has another unforgivable guilt which is his writing skill and his ability to deliver speeches and thus stir the people. He has a great impact on the Armenian community. Through his writings and speeches, he can make the whole of the Armenian nation stand up and revolt. This is his guilt!"

Mrs. Sevag was not aware that Haliday Adib was one of the pioneers of the Armenian massacre; that he was one of the masterminds of the Ittihad who had planned and executed the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

Her attempts to seek help from Bedri Beg, the chief of police, were of no avail. However, Bedri Beg was different from the rest. He knew she was German and knew that his government

received its orders from Germany, so he advised her to seek help from the German Embassy and the German ambassador, Vangenhaim.

Mrs. Sevag made every effort to see ambassador Vangenhaim in person and finally her persistence paid off. She painstakingly expressed her misery and despair over her husband's exile and asked for help to free him. The ambassador cold-bloodedly interrupted her and said, "You have denied your nationality and married this Armenian, and now you are asking me to help him. You better forget it. He is not going to be returned. They were all driven out to be killed in the desert."

Yanni Sevag pointed her fist at him in anger and terror and screamed at his face with all her might, "I have a son! My son will grow up and take revenge from you Germans!"

Mrs. Sevag returned to Switzerland along with her two children. After the war they settled in France. She rejected her German citizenship and lived as an Armenian dedicated to the Armenian community and cause.

She never visited Germany and she never spoke German. She never taught German to her children, Levon and Shamiram. During World War II, Levon served in the French army and had fought against the Germans.

Yanni Sevag wrote four volumes of poetry all dedicated to Sevag's love. She died on December 28, 1967, in Nice, France. According to her wishes, her funeral took place on December 30, at St. Mary's Armenian Apostolic Church in Nice.

Though a German by origin, Mrs. Yanni Sevag understood better than many Armenian historians, politicians, and

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

intellectuals that the real mastermind behind the Armenian Genocide were the Germans.

*Roupen Sevag (1885 – 1915)*

*“I have neither the passion for money, nor the passion for glory, nor the passion for fame. Life would have been a very stupid thing if its purpose were only a race for the sake of avarice and glory.”*