

# The Funeral

*By T. R. Henn*

On November the tenth 1915, my father died. He had been ill for many months; how ill I, with a boy's carelessness, did not notice. He had spent some weeks in the summer in a nursing home at Limerick, and then, I imagine, realising how hopeless his condition was, returned to die in Paradise, in the room overlooking the Italian garden. I should have been forewarned; for on the morning of my return to school for the September term, he called me to his room, with the dog-cart waiting at the door, made me kneel and blessed me. No doubt it was a ritual handed on to him. I can remember little of what he said except: 'You are coming into the world. I am going out.' Yet it made a double impression, for in the middle my Mother burst into the room, impatient at the delay, saying that I would surely miss the train to the station, twelve miles off. Angrily he told her to go and leave us alone. We caught the train, and I went to school as usual.

On the morning of the tenth I woke up with excitement, anticipating letters and parcels for my birthday. These would be handed out in the eleven o'clock break. At about nine the headmaster sent for me and took me to walk round the paths of the big square walled garden. No doubt he was kind in breaking the news; but he kept on repeating (that is all I can remember of the interview) that though I was going home that day, I must be sure to return home as soon as possible and make up the time I had lost, since I was sitting for a scholarship at the end of term.

The train left some hours later. It was bitterly cold with intermittent snow. I was sent to the matron's room to wait, and played idly with something, perhaps a jigsaw puzzle. It came back with a curious shock, for I seemed wholly numb, when after a long silence the matron looked at me and said: 'Oh, Henn, I am sorry for you.' I got on the train, which crawled wearily through the November countryside. At a drab late junction, I remember looking longingly at some dish or other in the glass-case in the waiting-room – sardines on toast – which I could not buy, for I had been given my train-fare and nothing over. Finally, in the late evening I arrived at Ennis, the country town, where I was met by friends and put up for the night. The next morning I was driven out to Paradise. In the hall the impression was of an intense quiet blackness: my Mother and my sisters in the heavy veiled mourning of the time, all speaking with hushed voices, and faces that seemed unnaturally white. Two events stand out. My Mother asked me if I wished to see my father before he was put into his coffin. I hesitated, and finally said that I did not. In after years this seemed like something of a betrayal. I rationalised it in trying to convince myself that I wished to remember him as he had been that summer, in the low room looking out on the small Italian garden and the woods: I used to sit by his bedside after I returned from the river, and go over him with the day's events, pool by pool and cast by cast.