

A PROSE PREACHMENT

significant in human beings than it is in any other animate creatures, animal or vegetable. It is merely dissolution and transmutation. Men and women become dead, *after* they die, by a slow, spiritual process—by our gradual forgetfulness of them, or, as Tom Hood beautifully and truthfully put it, when, as time passes, there comes to be of them

"No resurrection in the minds of men"

The only real and everlasting death is *oblivion*—obliteration of the departed from the thoughts, affectionate memory and converse of the living. For us, the living, to permit continued, excessive sorrow for our beloved dead, or for us to permit oblivion of them, by forgetting them totally, is to be guilty of the most terrible homicide—we utterly slay, not mortal bodies, but pure spirits. To cause such real and enduring death is an unpardonable sin.

Let us, then, resurrect, as we can, if we will, our beloved dead; and as surely as we attempt it, so surely will they come to us—

"Up the dark distance, radiant though unseen"

—nay, radiant and seen. They will come to us as companions, as comforters, as heralds of a new dawn, as our confident sustainers of joy in life and of equal joy in release from life when our work here is done. But who are they who will thus come? They are the dead, the departed, in their essential selves, divested of all those angularities of humanity that gave us pain, those waywardnesses of speech and conduct that caused us to doubt them, those contradictions in pieties and sins that made us wonder at them, or sorrow for them, while alive and to pray for them after they passed:—our dead in their pure spiritual selves, with all that was dear, delightful, and lovable about them—stars on their white brows, eyes radiant, lips eloquent with sweet and laughing speech, gently communing with us and winning us to a tender peace. And they will belong to us, by dying, by being dead in the flesh but alive in the spirit, more truly, really, vividly and helpfully than if they were with us corporeally. For love, which knows no bounds, will make them rich in lovingkindness, suffuse them with ethereal beauty, immerse them in holiness and make them radiant with a shining glory; and we shall love them and possess them as never before. While we remain on earth they will be our one ineluctable joy, our salvation, and our life's star—beckoning us to go down the slopes of mundane existence to the happy valley of Avalon, unafraid and "with unreluctant tread."