

may be either, What conclusion can we arrive at from the knowledge we possess of the properties of the soul, and of spirits in general? or, What is deducible from our observation of the mysterious process, Death? Now, as to the first of these enquiries, we should be disposed to say that it seems less difficult to comprehend how a spirit can exist, and exercise its functions, in a state of separation from matter, than in conjunction with it, and that, therefore, the former is abstractly more probable than the latter. And if we believe that God and angels live and act entirely without corporeal alliance, that consideration surely increases the probability. If it be said, that we have no experience of the human soul exercising its faculties, or experiencing sensations of any kind, apart from a bodily companion, it may be answered that we have no evidence that the soul has existed at all in such a state of separation; and, consequently, that if, on this point, we are to argue from the past to the future, our conclusion should be, not that the soul enters on a state of unconsciousness, but that it undergoes annihilation, at the death of the body—an idea at which the party with whom we are reasoning revolt. Then as to what death is, viewed with reference to the soul, reason plainly does not furnish us with data sufficient for forming even any tolerable conjecture respecting the point in question. The well-weighed words of Bishop Butler seem to us satisfactory and decisive:—  
 “Our posthumous life, whatever there may be in it additional to our present, yet may not be entirely beginning anew, but going on. Death may, in some sort, and in some respects, answer to our birth, which is not a suspension of the faculties which we had before it, or a total change of the state of life in which we existed when in the womb, but a continuation of both, with such and such great alterations. \* \* \* The truth is reason does not at all show us in what state death naturally leaves us.”

On turning now to the teaching of Scripture on this intensely interesting subject, the least that can be said is, that we have found nothing within the domain of reason to prepossess us against the continued consciousness of the soul, if we should find the Word of God giving its sanction to that doctrine; and that it does give that sanction seems to us so clear, that we marvel how persons recognising the authority of the Bible should entertain two opinions on the subject. Without laying such stress as we might on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and though we were to admit what we hold to be an unnatural translation of our Lord's answer to the thief on the Cross—“Verily, to day, I say unto thee, thou shalt be with me in Paradise,” still how can we get over such passages as the following? “We are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” “For I am in a straight betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth.” It is trifling to attempt balancing against these and similar texts, those which speak of departed Christians as “asleep,” and so forth. Such expressions may refer mainly to their bodies, as must be the case where we read of “those that sleep in the dust of the earth.”

The passages just referred to seem to assure us not only of the continued consciousness of such as have died in the Lord, but also of their intimate communion with Jesus, implying, of course, distinguished honour and felicity, in their state of separation from the body. It is, however, quite