

51. **endured some wrong**, at the hands of the critics, presumably.

55. **Wairoa**. A river and arm of the sea on the west-coast of the North Island of New Zealand.

 AN EPISTLE.

In section xxxi. of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, the poet touches upon the silence of the evangelist in regard to the experiences and results of that marvellous event in the history of Lazarus, his death and return again to this world of flesh and blood (see *John*, chap. xi). In the poem before us Browning ventures to conceive some of the possible results of this strange experience. He represents these results as conforming to one of his own fundamental principles, viz., that this earthly existence has its real end in exercising and developing the soul for a higher sphere beyond the gates of death; that the things for which and against which we men so earnestly struggle, have—could we see them as they really are—no intrinsic importance; but that they are made to *seem* important, in order that by eager pursuit of them we may develop and strengthen the soul,—the only thing that abides and has real worth. If this he so we might imagine that one who had penetrated the higher sphere and attained the deeper insight which belongs to it, might regard the objects which rouse the energies of ordinary men, with utter indifference; and hence his profounder knowledge might in so far unfit him for life in a lower sphere. This theory would, therefore, serve as at least a partial explanation of the purpose of God in the limitation of the powers and knowledge of man,—as a partial solution of this problem of evil, why man is encompassed with temptations and suffering on every side.

The concrete example of this theory in the case of Lazarus is the centre about which the poem gathers, but more space is given and more interest attaches to another subject interwoven with this, viz., the effect of an encounter with Christianity—its influence and its central doctrine of the incarnation—upon a learned man of the early years of our era, imbued with whatever of scientific spirit then existed. This effect is not merely local; the poet makes us feel it as typical of the fitness of Christianity to the needs of men at all periods.

Such are the abstract ideas which here, as in so many of Browning's poems, lie behind the concrete picture and give significance thereto. But the real merit of the poem lies, of course, in the concrete embodiment