

ished : for making many books there is no end ; and much *d* study is a weariness of the flesh.

d Or, reading.

23^r 13 *e* Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter : Fear God, and keep his commandments : for this is the whole duty of man.

e Or, The end of the matter, even all that hath been heard, is.

23^r 14 For *i* God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

i Matt. 12. 36

GENERAL STATEMENT.

The cursory reader of the Book of Ecclesiastes, who glances at certain sentences, without considering their relation, and who fails to grasp the central thought of the work, may find here and there expressions which seem to teach a worldly way of life, and to show a cynical spirit. But let one study carefully the entire book, and see how its thought cumulates, and he finds in it throughout the strongest argument against a life for this earth only. The grand summing up we find in this final chapter. Having shown the worthlessness of earthly aims, and the futility of a life of pleasure, the writer now points to a true and noble life, a life wrought out "as ever in the Great Taskmaster's eye." The young man is urged to fear God and keep his commandments as "the whole of man's life." The picture of old age is drawn before him, not of a green old age in God's service, beautiful with the radiance of saintly character, but of such an old age as inevitably comes when youth has been wasted, and in maturer years a man finds himself left alone in decay and wretchedness. To this plea is added that of the judgment to come, a warning that for opportunities here God will require an accounting hereafter. May we in the closing year seek that knowledge which will enable us to meet life calmly, to endure age with patience, to look into eternity fearlessly, and to meet our God with joy !

EXPLANATORY AND PRACTICAL NOTES.

Verse 1. Remember now. Literally, "and remember." The sentence has close connection with the last verse of the preceding chapter, from which it should not have been separated. **Thy Creator.** This exhortation is to the "young man" in the previous chapter, who had been bidden to rejoice in his youth, but is now told that in his rejoicing he is to remember him from whom all blessings flow. There is but one way to remember God aright, and that is by giving him our hearts, loving him as our Father, and obeying his word as a son. This remembrance of God will keep us from many dangers, make life happy and eternity joyous. **In the days of thy youth.** Because it is easier in youth, while habits are unformed, while cares and occupations are few, while associations are being chosen : and because it is the noblest work of youth to serve God. **While the evil days come not.** The days of age with its burden and trouble, pleasant days if youth has been rightly spent,

but sad and remorseful if youth has been wasted in sin. 1. The most important business of life is the service of God. 2. The best time in which to begin that service is youth. 3. "Wild oats," sown in youth, will grow up to a crop of wretchedness in age.

2. While the sun. These verses contain a vivid description of the miseries of old age, which is compared first to an oriental winter, or rainy season, and then to a decaying house. **Be not darkened.** A picture of the dull dreary winter days, when clouds gather and the sunshine fails. **Clouds return.** After clouds we expect sunshine ; but in the rainy season, storms follow each other in quick succession. So in old age, ailment succeeds ailment, and troubles come often. It must be remembered, however, that it is the sinner's old age, not the saint's, "just on the wing for heaven," which Solomon is describing.

3. In the day. In these verses the body of the aged man is compared to a decaying house, which once stood fair and stately, with keepers around it to guard, trees to shade it, and birds singing in the branches, golden lamps hanging in its halls, and a fountain playing in its court. Now the keepers of the house, the hands and arms, are trembling with palsy ; the strong men, the legs, supporting the body, are bent and tottering ; the grinders, the women grinding the grain representing the teeth in the human body, become few and cease their work ; those that look out at the windows, the eyes, the windows of the soul, become dim, and the sight is obscure.

4. The doors shall be shut. Referring to the lips and the ears, by which the man communicates with the outer world. In old age deafness and dullness of faculties often interfere with intercourse ; and the aged have less and less community of thought with youth. **4. To avoid this it is well for both young and old to be together and keep interests in common.** **Sound of the grinding is low.** The mumbling sound of the toothless while eating. **Rise up at the voice of the bird.** Old people sleep lightly and are awakened early by the voice of the birds singing without. **Daughters of music.** Musical sounds seem low and faint to the dull ears of the aged, and they have lost the power of sounding musical notes.

5. Afraid of that which is high. The youth can climb the cliffs and look from the top of the tower, but the old man's limbs are weak and his head dizzy, so he fears high places. **Fears...in the way.** He fears the crowds in the street and the danger of missing his way in the fields, and crouches over the fireplace at home. **Almond-tree shall flourish.** The almond tree, covered with white blossoms, is a beautiful picture of old age crowned with its white locks. **The grasshopper.** Perhaps meaning the locust. **A burden.** An expression equivalent to "he cannot bear the least weight." **Desire shall fail.** Appetite no longer makes him desire food, nor has pleasure a power to call. Some