

TEACHING VALUES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

LESSON I.

THE LAND AND THE BOOK

1. Broadly speaking, we find in the Old Testament three classes of contents: first, an account of the origin, historical development and peculiar character of the chosen people as a community, and of their sacred institutions; secondly, an account of the successive divine communications to Israel through the agency of the prophets; and thirdly, a collection of lyrics, proverbs, and other products of religious emotion and reflection, which embody the response of the regenerate heart and life to the revelation of God's character and will. Accordingly the ancient Jews divided the books of their canon into three great classes which they called respectively The Law, The Prophets, and The Hagiographa or Holy Writings. Thus the three outstanding literary forms are History, Oratory and Poetry.

THE PALESTINIAN ATMOSPHERE OF THE BIBLE

2. One thing these different literary forms have in common. They are all pervaded by a distinctive local atmosphere. They all teem with images drawn from a land that is unique in its location and its structure. Therefore a thorough knowledge of the physical features of this land is an indispensable qualification for the effective teaching of any part of the Old Testament. These physical features have largely determined the very dialect of revealed religion. "Like other books, the Bible has had a home, a birthplace; but beyond all other examples, this birthplace has given form and color to its language." In a preeminent degree the phraseology and imagery of the Bible reflect