

**PROVIDENCE AS
MANIFESTED THROUGH
ISRAEL, PP. 1-114**

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Providence as Manifested Through Israel, pp. 1-114 by Harriet Martineau

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HARRIET MARTINEAU

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AS MANIFESTED THROUGH ISRAEL.

BY
HARRIET MARTINEAU.

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold. Them also I must bring; and they will hear my voice. And there shall be one flock and one shepherd."

JOHN X. 16.

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AND
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PROVIDENCE

AS MANIFESTED THROUGH ISRAEL.

AN ADDRESS TO THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM.

SECTION I.—*Spirit of Judaism.*

THE peculiarity by which your nation has ever been honourably distinguished from all others is an aversion to form *systems* of religion. While, among heathen nations, princes and priests formed laws and created mythologies which the ignorant multitude adopted as soon as offered, your lawgivers dispensed only what they had received from above, and your fathers required evidence that the dispensation was from above, before they would adopt it. While the mysteries of paganism were concealed in the recesses of Egyptian temples, your fathers were assembled at the foot of Sinai, listening to the thunders and watching for the disclosures of the cloud in which the glory of God was shrouded. Your prophets and priests bowed themselves before God as children who would know the will of their father; while the wisest of less favoured nations withdrew into grottoes and groves, or approached oracles of their own institution, pretending to commune with nymphs or demigods, but in reality seeking to invest the imaginations of their own hearts with the sanctity of a supposed revelation from on high. The issues were evident to the whole world; the state of the Hebrew nation as to reli-

gion, morals, and legislation, being as superior to that of all their contemporaries as the moving pillar of fire was more awful than the descent of Belus, the Mosaic law more exalted than the twelve tables, and the Hebrew judges wiser than heathen legislators. As long as none presumed to add to or to diminish from the word which the Eternal imparted, his people were glorious, enlightened, and blessed; while the sages of the heathens could not attain to the wisdom of the least among the sons of Israel.

This unreserved submission to the voice from heaven is not, however, inconsistent with the desire and the endeavour to understand, as far as possible, the designs of that Providence whose guidance is acknowledged. Though there is sin and folly in seeking to forestall or change the Divine counsels, there is piety and wisdom in striving to comprehend them when they are disclosed; because that obedience must ever be the most perfect which is the most enlightened. Moses was reproved for his backwardness in fulfilling his mission to his brethren in bondage, and vengeance from the Lord followed Jonah when he would have evaded his duty of prophesying destruction to Nineveh, because in both cases these prophets ventured to prejudge the event which was in the hand of God: but the people were also rebuked when they yielded a blind external obedience only, instead of the ready cooperation of the heart with the will of God; and were perpetually exhorted to examine into and understand his ways, that their obedience might be not only strict but enlightened.

The duty of ascertaining the Divine purposes from his dispensations becomes more important as the facilities for the investigation are multiplied. The more ancient the dispensation, the more easy it becomes to understand its object. Ezra the scribe, and the people who listened to him as he read the law, were better able to comprehend the designs of the Allwise in separating his people from the rest of the world, than the judges who were under Moses; and those judges knew more concerning this dispensation, than any one of all the multi-

tudes on the day that they crossed the Red Sea. These designs of Providence have also been growing clearer and clearer to this day; and it therefore becomes more and more the duty of all who acknowledge that Providence, to search into his ways, and see how the spirit of man may best cooperate with God for the sanctification of man.

In such an investigation there is no danger, as long as the inquirer is careful to admit no evidence but that which God himself has given. It is indeed the highest and holiest employment in which the human faculties can be occupied, and as acceptable to him who loves the obedience of an understanding heart, as it is salutary to the heart itself. As long as men interpret, instead of imagining the ways of God; as long as they seek to know, instead of presuming to dictate his will, they may hope for some portion of that favour which blessed the child Samuel in the tabernacle, which distinguished David as "the man after God's own heart," and magnified the wisdom of the mighty Solomon.

Hesitate not, therefore, to enter on a full investigation of the designs of the Allwise in separating your nation from other nations, and in calling you peculiarly his own. Dismiss from your minds, as far as you can, all remembrance of the religious systems framed by man with which people of other modes of faith have disgusted you. Repel, with the reprobation they deserve, all attempts to mix superstition with the worship which the Eternal established among you. Cast out as impious all suggestions which would change your views of the nature and attributes of the One God, and the offices of his chosen prophets; and taking for your guides only the Scriptures of your people, and the history of your nation and of the world, endeavour to trace those ways and thoughts, which, however higher than ours, are placed in some degree within the reach of our comprehension; which, however shrouded in the future, are disclosed in the past.

The best method by which an individual can pursue such an inquiry as is now proposed, is to collect all the evidence

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he can obtain, and deduce from it the truth he seeks. This is the mode in which a solitary student should proceed. But when several inquirers are invited to advance together, and are conducted by one who has gone over the ground before them, the method may advantageously be reversed, for the sake of proceeding in a clear and orderly manner: as in the schools, where a definite object is first placed before the view of the students, and then the sources of evidence are laid open to them by which they may establish the truth for themselves. Such a method will now, for the sake of clearness, be pursued. The apparent design of the Eternal in his providence towards the Hebrew nation will be first disclosed, and evidences of this design will be afterwards offered to your consideration.

The *plan* of Providence is a strictly correct expression; because, though time and eternity are alike to the One God, though to him "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day," yet, as his children are weak in sight and narrow in comprehension, they cannot see the end from the beginning, but only understand it by slow degrees. By the gradual development of a plan only can they so far comprehend anything that exists, as to be able to use their bodily powers in action, and the faculties of their minds in understanding. If the fruits of the earth were not brought forth according to a regular plan, if the soil and the dews, and the sunshine and the seed, were not perceived to be adapted to produce the corn, there would be no seed-time and no harvest among men; for no one would comprehend how it could be in the power of man to raise food out of the ground, and the whole race must be nourished, like your fathers in the wilderness, by miracle, or not at all. The whole of the creation was conducted by a plan; the preservation of created things is ordered by a plan; the destinies of the human race, spiritual as well as material, are also evolved according to a plan;—mysterious, like other plans, in its commencement, but growing more and more intelligible as it is gradually disclosed, and