

*St. Matthew, 10th Chapter, and latter part of 8th Verse.*

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FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE.

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THERE is a very peculiar circumstance respecting the propagation of the Gospel, which can scarcely fail, I think, to arrest the attention, even of the most cursory student of history,—though it may well excite both wonder and curiosity. The circumstance to which I allude is this:—*the amazingly wide and rapid diffusion of the Gospel during the earlier centuries after our Blessed Lord's ascension into heaven,—and its comparatively slow and trifling progress during the middle and latter centuries.* In the course of a very few years, as we read, the religion of Jesus Christ had more or less pervaded the whole Roman empire; and had likewise made successful inroads among the neighbouring nations, both barbarous and civilized. In the course of little more than three centuries, it had extended far and wide. But it might well be asked,—what has *since* been effected, which will bear any resemblance or proportion to the earlier triumphs of the Cross of our Blessed Redeemer? What I have here mentioned, brethren, though it may serve to produce abundant speculation, is, itself, a mere naked matter of fact; and however we may account for it—however we may regret it,—still nothing can be more clear, than that the progress of the Gospel has for many past ages been comparatively small. Individually, some conquests have been made by the pious and laborious men who have undertaken the mighty task,—and to the humble Christian the tidings of late from many devoted labourers in the East, are cheering indeed, and delightful. But still, if we look at many parts of the habitable world, or even cast our eye over only the whole of Southern Asia, what do we behold?