

What is a Christian?

ACTS xi. 26.

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”

THERE are few words which have, in their ordinary use, deviated more widely from their original application, than the term—CHRISTIAN. In its original use, it was descriptive of a comparatively small number of men, who were distinguished from the rest of the world by a singular and striking peculiarity of sentiments and character. In the use that is generally made of it now, it can hardly with truth be said that it is distinctive of principles and character at all;—for it is applied indiscriminately to persons, whose principles and characters are diametrically opposite. Nay, to such a degree has it been generalized in its application, as to have become a term in geography, rather than in religion, marking out—not a distinct and defined variety of individual character,—but birth, and local residence, and national boundaries.—Great Britain is a Christian country; and its inhabitants are of course, Christians, because they are not, by profession, Pagans, or Mahometans.

It has so happened, that, of a variety of appellations, originally used to denote the same class of individuals, CHRISTIAN is the one that has been thus sadly perverted from its original and appropriate application. From this circumstance has arisen the curious fact, that the name of Christian is taken, and reciprocally given to one another, by multitudes of persons, who never for a moment dream of any of the other terms being at all applicable to them. How many, for example, would be highly provoked, should you refuse them the designation of *Christians*,