

A change of base / by John F.W. Ware.

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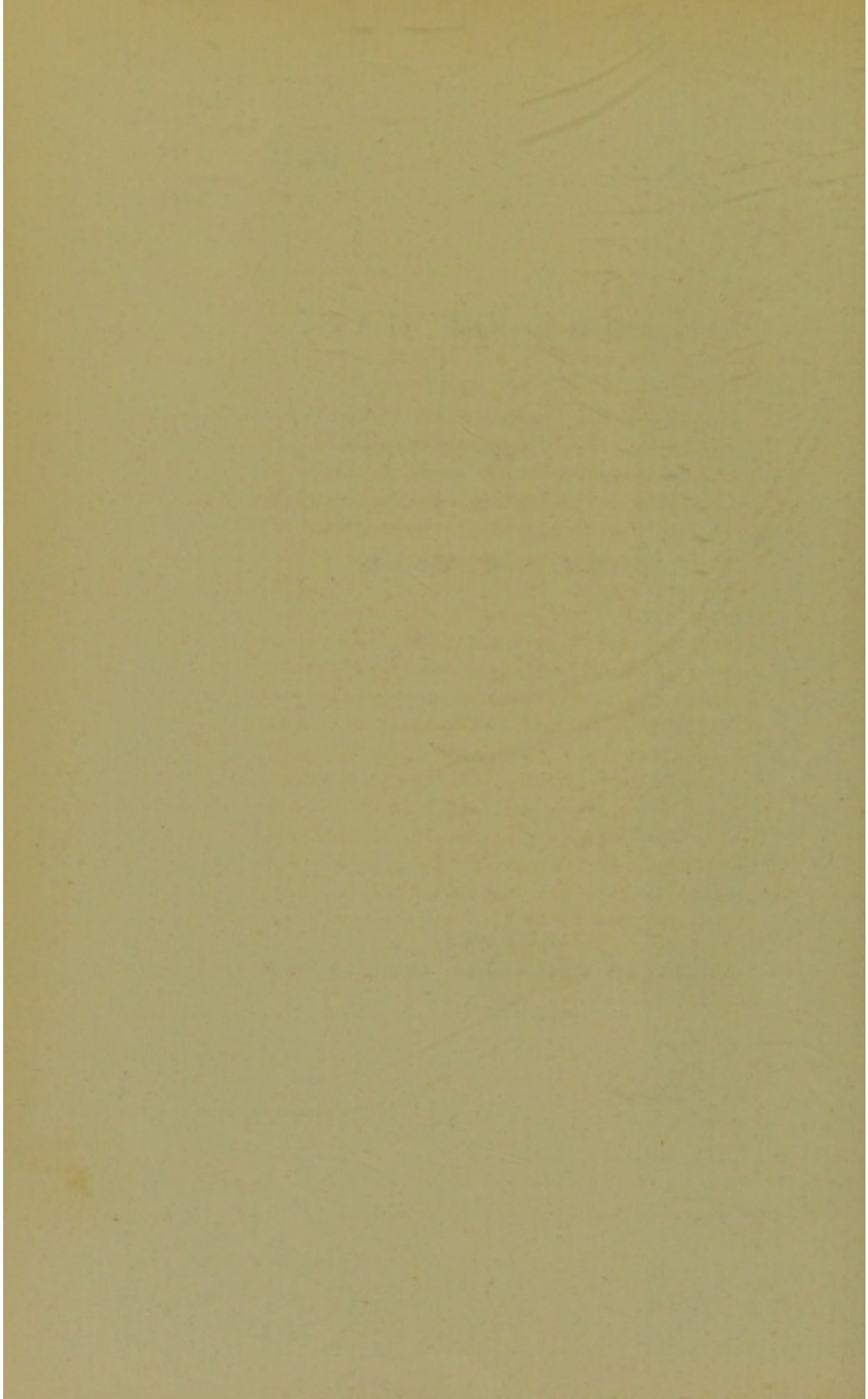
A

CHANGE OF BASE.

BY

JOHN F. W. WARE.

BOSTON:
AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION.
1863.



A CHANGE OF BASE.

It has been the necessity, it may have been the misfortune, of our contest, that it has demanded a frequent *change of base* in the operations of its most prominent army. By many it has been made a subject of ridicule, as arguing weakness, want of foresight and plan in government or its generals. There are men who always feel so about any change. It is thought to be a symptom, a confession, either of ignorance or fickleness. This is not just. The strong man, the wise man, never hesitates to accept a change when he is convinced of its worth. It is not possible always to be wise the first time, and to continue wrong when the wrong is discovered, though you may call it consistency, is only self-will, folly, and madness. When battles have been fought, strategy exhausted, defeats suffered, when reverses have accumulated, and demoralization is threatened, when all has been done from the old base that can be, it is no weakness to desert it. To remain is sure disaster; to change, to begin again, has a large element of hope

in it. A nation, a general, a man, is greater in owning a mistake than in adhering to it.

The old base, then, must be abandoned. A change must be made. Everything demands it. And in choosing the new, the careful general, guided by past experience, will endeavor not merely to escape the peculiar difficulties, weaknesses, disadvantages, of his old position, but will seek one which shall present, at the start, most palpably, the largest element of success, — one which shall in itself inspire his men and the country with confidence, — one which shall impel all to say, at once, This last is better than the first. He must make it his last change, and the campaign from it final and complete.

Now, with many of you, as with so many everywhere, your life campaign is thus far a failure. You have not been what you ought to be; you have not done what you ought to do. You have not satisfied yourself, you have not satisfied God. When temptations have assaulted, you have skulked and run, you have laid down your arms and surrendered, or fought with so little heart that you have been defeated. When principle ordered you to the front, you have refused duty; when prudence bade you watch, you have slumbered at your post. You have been many ways unfaithful. The verdict of your own conscience is against you. You look back upon a long line of mistakes, of greater or

lesser positive wrongs and sins. At times, this troubles you. You don't like to think of life wasting so. You really want to make something better out of it, to become another man. You resolve to mend. You mend a little, but you soon fall back. And every new resolve is followed by the same experience, until you lose courage and hope, and cease all effort at reform.

What is the difficulty? The old, the common, the almost universal difficulty, — YOUR LIFE HAS HAD A WRONG BASE. You have been operating from wrong motives, principles. You have pursued wrong objects. You have had wrong desires. The whole tone of life has been low and unworthy. You have lived for self, for outward decency, for social respectability, for human approval. You have not had God and duty first. You have never laid a broad, deep, substantial, immovable foundation upon which you could build a superstructure of character and life against which floods and winds might beat in vain, which should stand siege and sap of any foe. You have only a shallow, superficial foundation, and are always in danger of a fall. Life that has not a proper base is just as sure to topple and then fall before temptation as any mere earthwork before a siege. Sumter could not have stood out so under the terrible guns of army and navy but for that deep foundation builded of granite and sunk in the bed of the river. The brick and

mortar and cotton of the superstructure alone could not avail. You may think the difficulty is in some lesser thing,—that you can save yourself some easier way. Your many defeats ought to tell you better, and that, behind all, your great trouble is your *base*.

What is the remedy? *A change of base.* Life can have no success, no glory, no honor, no worthy immortality otherwise. The great fight you are to fight will otherwise be shameful demoralization and defeat. Everything is going wrong with you from that old base, and cannot be made to go right, and you know it. You may bring up supplies, you may patch up your field-works, you may hold on a little at this pit, at that ravine, you may keep off great moral disaster, you may escape ruin, but the most you can do is to stand still in that old, unsatisfactory life, ever exposed, ever in danger. The batteries of the foe command you. From your present stand-point you can rise to nothing higher or better than you now are. You can never be victor, you can never hear the plaudit of angels, the *well done* of God. You can only be one of that host innumerable, which, with banners trailing, crestfallen, ashamed, march through the streets of the City of God toward their doom, while angels and all good avert their faces and keep their peace. It is the law that the corrupt tree shall yield the corrupt fruit. As a man is in his heart, so is he. Out of the heart are the issues of life.

A change of heart is, then, what you want, — a thorough change in motive, principle, desire, affection, conduct, — an entirely new base for the operations of life. You want to put off the old man and put on the new man. You need, like Nicodemus, to be born again. Every man does, who has not his heart and life subject to the highest laws, who does not make it his first work to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness. You must utterly abandon the old base. Everything about it must be given up. It will not do to keep any one element of it. If you do, it will prove an element of disaster. Many men have ruined themselves so. They have made a change, but not a thorough one. They have kept and clung to some one old, darling sin, and it has been a plague-spot, festering and spreading, and taking the strength and marring the symmetry, preventing a healthy and perfect growth. When the prodigal came to himself, and felt that he must make his way back to his father's house, he did not say, "These husks have been my food, my life, I will still keep them"; but he left everything of his old, sinful life behind him. Nothing of it cleaved to him as he made his way back. His was a *thorough change of base*. The thoroughness saved him. It brought him home. It gave him his Father's welcome. Suppose, when it had been demonstrated that the Peninsula was no longer tenable as an army base, the commander had said: "There

are some good points here. There are decided military advantages in this river, that hill. Here are some fine works of mine. My men have done nobly here. I will withdraw from some parts, but I will hold these. I must change my base; but it is not worth while to be ultra, I will only partly change it"; — would not such a course have been fatally disastrous, and the army that lived to write the name of *Antietam* and *Gettysburg* on the record of national immortality have miserably wasted and perished? It was the utterness of the change that saved it, and gave it spirit for new deeds. It is the utterness of the change that will alone save man, and make him capable of the best things.

How is this change to be made? By a surrender of the whole man to the principles and laws which ruled in the life of Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus the Christ." Not by any outside, mysterious pressure does such a change come, but by a man's own effort and fidelity, winning to itself the help and blessing of God. To the prodigal came the conviction that he was all wrong, that he must change. Only his inner want suggested the necessity of change, — not a here and there change, but a change of base, total, radical. Of himself he arose from his degradation, turned his back upon his riotous living, the harlots and the husks, and toiled toward his home. While he was a *great way off* his Fa-

ther saw him and ran to him. It is just so with us. While we are a great way off God comes to our help, and the work that is begun alone is finished by both. *Change your base*, commence your new operations from it, show that you are sincere, determined to persevere and to win. You will not long work alone. God not only gives his *blessing*, but lends his *help*.

There is one advantage a Christian has over a soldier,—he can carry his base with him. It is told of the rebel General Lee, that, when remonstrated with for crossing into Maryland, so far from his base, he replied, “*I shall take my base with me.*” There is the true ring to that. It is not the word of a braggart, or a desperate gambler, but the word of one who had measured and had faith in himself; and though I am glad that he failed, I shall always think the better of him for his reply. That is just what every Christian can do securely. Indeed, he is not secure unless he can. *His base must be with him.* He must at every moment have that sure power in himself by which he can act, through which he can conquer. As in his trade, or profession, or business, the man carries his base with him,—has not to stop and run back to principles and rules, to books and laws, but carries a well-digested result always, that he can refer to and rely on at the moment,—so must the man in his higher duty and life. It will not do to run back to your Bible,

to your sect, to opinions of the Church and the world, to your minister, to your chaplain, at every demand of duty or pressure of temptation. It will not do to wait till you can bring up your supplies from them. You jeopard everything so. But you must have with you, *in* you, strong, reliable, persistent, always awake, a conviction, a purpose, a faith, which you can depend on, for which no emergency is too much. So you are secure; so only are you secure.

Now is the time to make this change. If you are a good soldier, you will not put it off a day. None as a good soldier knows the necessity of promptness. No good soldier ever puts upon tomorrow what to-day should do. Accept to-day as the appointed time, and it shall bring you salvation. Victory will be yours and the life immortal.

“The present moment flies,
And bears our life away!
Lord, make thy servants truly wise,
That they may live to-day.”