

THOUGH you are so happy as to have parents, who are both capable and desirous of giving you all proper instruction, yet I, who love you so tenderly, cannot help fondly wishing to contribute something, if possible, to your improvement and welfare:—And, as I am so far separated from you, that it is only by pen and ink I can offer you my sentiments, I will hope that your attention may be engaged, by seeing on paper, from the hand of one of your warmest friends, Truths of the highest importance, which, though you may not find new, can never be too deeply engraven on your mind. Some of them perhaps, may make no great impression at present, and yet may so far gain a place in your

A me-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 *On the First Principles of Religion.*

memory, as readily to return to your thoughts when occasion recalls them.— And, if you pay me the compliment of preserving my letters, you may possibly re-peruse them at some future period, when concurring circumstances may give them additional weight ;—and thus they may prove more effectual than the same things spoken in conversation. — But, however this may prove, I cannot resist the desire of trying to be in some degree useful to you, on your setting out in a life of trial and difficulty ; your success in which, must determine your fate for ever.

Hitherto you have “thought as a child, “ and understood as a child ; but it is “ time to put away childish things.”— You are now in your fifteenth year, and must soon act for yourself ; therefore it is high time to store your mind with those principles, which must direct your conduct, and fix your character. — If you desire to live in peace and honour, in favour with God and man, and to die in the glorious hope of rising from the grave

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)*On the First Principles of Religion.* 3

grave to a life of endless happiness—if these things appear worthy of your ambition, you must set out in earnest in the pursuit of them,—Virtue and happiness are not attained by chance, nor by a cold and languid approbation; they must be fought with ardour, attended to with diligence, and every assistance must be eagerly embraced, that may enable you to obtain them.—Consider, that good and evil are now before you;—that, if you do not heartily choose and love the one, you must undoubtedly be the wretched victim of the other.—Your trial is now begun—you must either become one of the glorious *children of God*, who are to rejoice in his love for ever, or a *child of destruction*—miserable in this life, and punished with eternal death hereafter.—Surely, you will be impressed by so awful a situation! you will earnestly pray to be directed into that road of life, which leads to excellence and happiness—and, you will be thankful to every kind hand that is held out, to set you forward in your journey.

A 2

The

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)

#### 4 *On the First Principles of Religion.*

The first step must be to awaken your mind to a sense of the importance of the task before you ; which is no less than to bring your frail nature to that degree of Christian perfection, which is to qualify it for immortality, and, without which, it is necessarily incapable of happiness ; for, it is a truth never to be forgotten, that God has annexed happiness to virtue, and misery to vice, by the unchangeable nature of things ; and that, a wicked being (while he continues such) is in a natural incapacity of enjoying happiness, even with the concurrence of all those outward circumstances, which in a virtuous mind would produce it.

As there are degrees of virtue and vice, so are there of reward and punishment, both here and hereafter : But, do not, my dearest Niece, aim only at escaping the dreadful doom of the wicked ;—let your desires take a nobler flight, and aspire after those transcendent honours, and that brighter crown of glory, which await those who have excelled in virtue—and, let the animating thought, that  
every

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)*On the First Principles of Religion.* 5

every secret effort to gain his favour is noted by your all-seeing Judge, and that he will, with infinite goodness, proportion your reward to your labours, excite every faculty of your soul to please and serve him.—To this end, you must *inform your understanding* what you ought to *believe*, and to *do*.—You must *correct* and *purify* your *heart*; cherish and improve all its good affections; and continually mortify and subdue those that are evil.—You must *form* and *govern* your *temper* and *manners*, according to the laws of benevolence and justice; and qualify yourself, by all means in your power, for an *useful* and *agreeable* member of society.—All this you see is no light business, nor can it be performed without a sincere and earnest application of the mind, as to its great and constant object.—When once you consider life, and the duties of life, in this manner, you will listen eagerly to the voice of instruction and admonition; and seize every opportunity of improvement; every useful hint will be laid up in your heart, and your

A 3 chief

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)6 *On the First Principles of Religion.*

chief delight will be in those persons, and those books, from which you can learn true wisdom.

The only sure foundation of human virtue is religion, and the foundation and first principle of religion is the belief of the one only God, and a just sense of his attributes.—This you will think you have learn'd long since, and possess in common with almost every human creature in this enlightened age and nation; but, believe me, it is less common than you imagine, to believe in the true God — that is, to form such a notion of the Deity as is agreeable to truth, and consistent with those infinite perfections, which all profess to ascribe to him. To form worthy notions of the supreme Being, as far as we are capable, is essential to true religion and morality; for as it is our duty to imitate those qualities of the Divinity, which are imitable by us, so it is necessary we should know what they are, and fatal to mistake them.—Can those who think of God with servile dread and terror, as of a gloomy

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)*On the First Principles of Religion.* 7

gloomy tyrant, armed with almighty power to torment and destroy them, be said to believe in the true God?—in that God who, the Scriptures say, is love?—The kindest and best of Beings, who made all creatures in bountiful goodness, that he might communicate to them some portion of his own unalterable happiness!—who condescends to stile himself our Father—and, who pitieth us, as a father pitieth his own children! Can those who expect to please God by cruelty to themselves, or to their fellow-creatures — by horrid punishments of their own bodies for the sin of their souls — or, by more horrid persecution of others for difference of opinion, be called true believers? Have they not set up another God in their own minds, who rather resembles the worst of beings than the best?—Nor do those act on surer principles who think to gain the favour of God by senseless enthusiasm and frantic raptures, more like the wild excesses of the most depraved human love, than that reasonable adoration, that holy reverential love, which is due

A 4

due

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *On the First Principles of Religion.*

due to the pure and holy Father of the universe.—Those likewise, who murmur against his providence and repine under the restraint of his commands, cannot firmly believe him infinitely wise and good.—If we are not disposed to trust him for future events, to banish fruitless anxiety, and to believe that all things work together for good to those that love him, surely we do not really believe in the God of mercy and truth.—If we wish to avoid all remembrance of him, all communion with him, as much as we dare, surely we do not believe him to be the source of joy and comfort, the dispenser of all good.

How lamentable is it, that so few hearts should feel the pleasures of real piety!—that prayer and thanksgiving should be performed, as they too often are, not with joy, and love, and gratitude; but, with cold indifference, melancholy dejection, or secret horror!—it is true, we are all such frail and sinful creatures, that we justly fear to have offended our gracious Father; but, let us remember the  
con-



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)*On the First Principles of Religion.* 9

condition of his forgiveness; If you have sinned—"sin no more."—He is ready to receive you whenever you sincerely turn to him—and, he is ready to assist you, when you do but desire to obey him.—Let your devotion then be the language of filial love and gratitude—confide to this kindest of Fathers every want, and every wish of your heart;—but submit them all to his will, and freely offer him the disposal of yourself, and of all your affairs.—Thank him for his benefits, and even for his punishments;—convinced that these also are benefits, and mercifully designed for your good.—Implore his direction in all difficulties; his assistance in all trials; his comfort and support in sickness or affliction; his restraining grace in the time of prosperity and joy.—Do not persist in desiring what his Providence denies you; but be assured it is not good for you—Refuse not any thing he allots you, but embrace it as the best and properest for you.—Can you do less to your heavenly Father than what your duty to an earthly one requires?—If you were

A 5

to

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06797-3 - Letters on the Improvement of the Mind: Addressed to a Young Lady

Hester Chapone

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *On the First Principles of Religion.*

to ask permission of your father, to do, or to have any thing you desire, and he should refuse it to you, would you obstinately persist in setting your heart upon it, notwithstanding his prohibition? would you not rather say, My father is wiser than I am; he loves me, and would not deny my request, if it was fit to be granted.—I will therefore banish the thought, and cheerfully acquiesce in his will:—How much rather should this be said of our heavenly Father, whose wisdom cannot be mistaken, and whose bountiful kindness is infinite!—Love him therefore in the same manner you love your earthly parents, but in a much higher degree—in the highest your nature is capable of.—Forget not to dedicate yourself to his service every day;—to implore his forgiveness of your faults, and his protection from evil, every night: and this not merely in formal words, unaccompanied by any act of the mind, but “in spirit and in truth;” in grateful love, and humble adoration.—Nor let these stated periods of worship be your only communication