

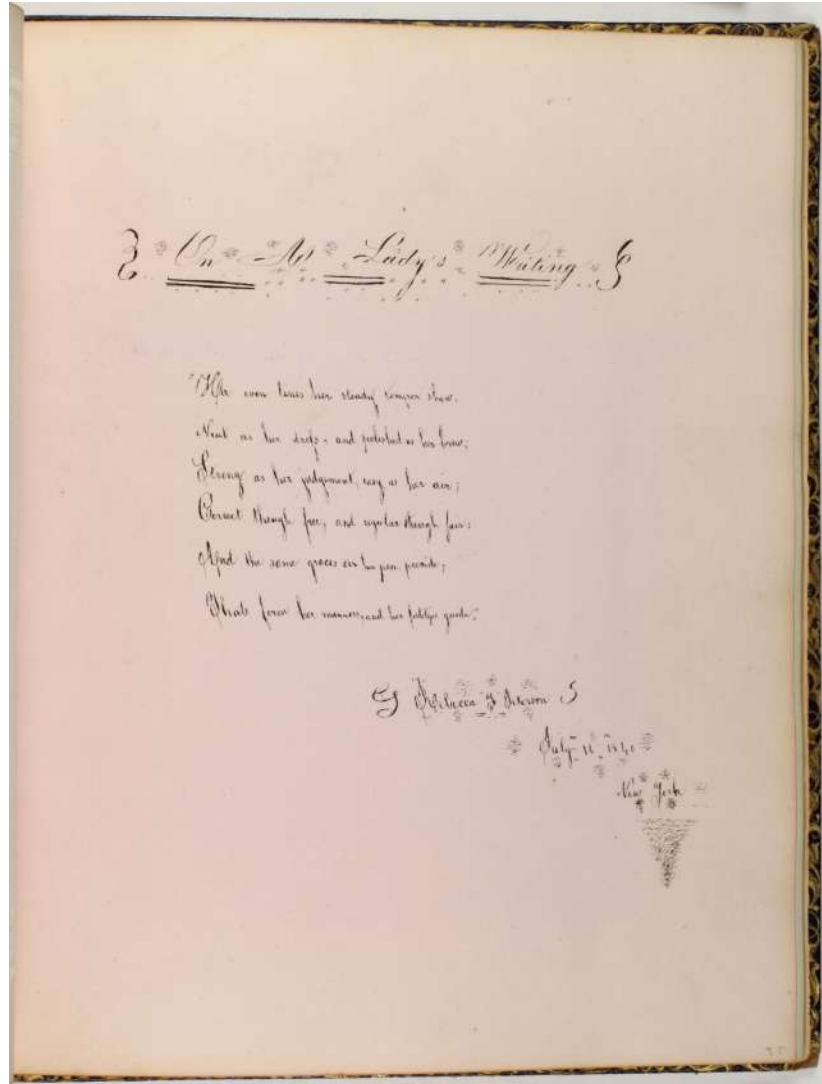
Headnote:

Within this poem, entitled "True Courage," it appears that courage was a necessity to African Americans in the antebellum North. The poem is unsigned, but was likely a contribution by an associate of Martina Dickerson. It presses the reader to contemplate what the value of "true courage" was for African Americans in the early 19th century.

Transcription:

True Courage.

“Onwards! throw all terrors tenors off:
Slight the scorner – scorn the scoff.
In the race, and not the prize,
Glory’s true distinction lies.
Triumph herds– with meanest things,
Common robbers – vilest kings,
'Midst the base mean multitude!
But the generous–but the good
Stand in modesty alone,
Still serenely struggle on,
Planting peacefully the seeds
Of bright hopes – and better deeds.”



Headnote:

Transcribed in stylized script by Rebecca J. Peterson, the poem “On a Lady’s Writing” speaks to the importance of handwriting by an African American woman. This poem speaks to the educational background that many African American women obtained or desired in the early 19th century. Like many of the album’s entries, the author of the poem – situated in New York – was part of a network of African Americans in the urban North.

Transcription:

On a Lady's Writing

The even lines her steady temper show,
Neat as her dress, and polished as her brow;
Strong as her judgment, easy as her air;
Correct though free, and regular though fair:
And the same graces on her pen preside,
That form her manners, and her footsteps guide.”

Rebecca J. Peterson

July 16, 1840

New York

Martina Dickerson Album

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Headnote:

The poem “Martina” was written expressly for Martina Dickerson. Signed Rebecca, the author was likely a friend of Martina’s and among the elite African Americans in the North. Though Martina resided in Philadelphia, her album made its way to other cities, such as New York, through a network of African American communities.

Transcription:

To Martina

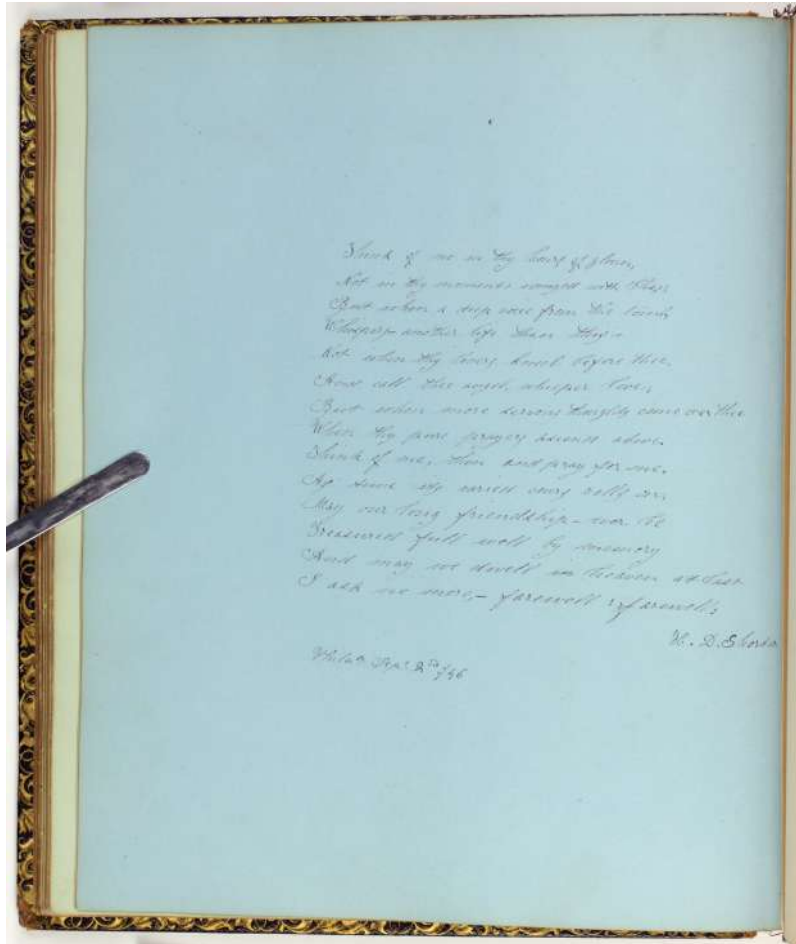
Fair maiden thou hast many charms,
And thou art much admired,
By all, who know thee, thy friendship
Is highly prized and much desired.

Thy lovely smile delights us all,
Enchants whenever tis given,
And leaves a lasting cheerful spell,
Which does our hearts enliven.

July 16/ 41 Rebecca
New York

Martina Dickerson Album

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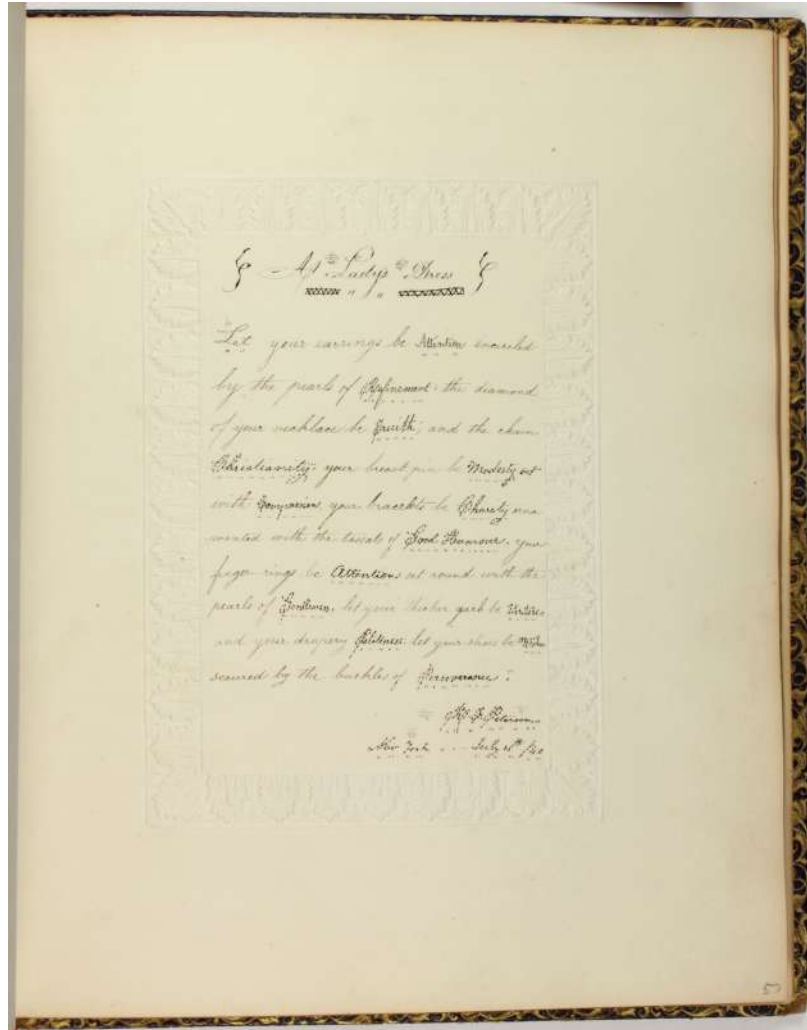
Headnote:

The poem inscribed does not open with a title. Signed H.D. Shorter and dated September 2, 1846, the author of the poem begs Martina to never forget him/her, even in death.

Transcription:

Think of me in thy hours of gloom,
Not in thy moments winged with bliss;
But when a deep voice from the tomb
Whispers, another life than this:-
Not when thy cover & kneel before thee,
And call thee angel, whisper love;
But when more serious thoughts come o'er thee
When thy pure prayer ascend above.
Think of me, then and pray for me,
As time its varied course rolls on;
May our long friendship-ever be
Treasured full well by memory
And may we dwell in heaven at last
I ask no more, - farewell! farewell!

H.D. Shorter
Phila. Sept 2nd / 46



Headnote:

The poem “A Lady’s Dress,” written by Rebecca J. Peterson who contributed other entries in this album (see p. 35), is not what it seems at first glance. Peterson is less interested in telling Martina what to wear than she is in describing how to act. While elite African American women were very aware of dressing properly to reflect their respectability, Peterson uses the metaphor of dressing to discuss the greater importance of values like modesty, charity, and virtue.

Transcription:

A Lady's Dress

“Let your earrings be Attention encircled by the pearls of Refinement; the diamond of your necklace be Truth; and the chain Christianity, your breast-pin be Modesty set with Compassion, your bracelets be Charity ornamented with the tassals of Good Humour. Your finger rings be Attention set around with the pearls of Gentleness, let your thicker garb be Virtue and your drapery Politeness; let your shoes be Wisdom secured by the buckle of Perseverance.”

R.J. Peterson
July 16, 1840