146. “I enter on a very mighty Nought,” second half of November, MS VIII. Previously unpublished.

A satire, like no. 145 which it follows in manuscript. The occasion of this poem is obscure; however, if the final word is “bible”--and the handwriting is barely legible--a tentative meaning can be inferred from the pattern of composition in late 1831 and early 1832. In fall 1831, Ruskin had been alternating poems on biblical, apocalyptic subjects (nos. 140-42) with satirical, Juanesque poems (nos. 136-37, 143-45)--the latter often unleashing a spirit of rebellion. The apology in this poem, no. 146, perhaps refers to this obstreperousness in general, and to the heavily canceled no. 145 in particular. See also no. 147 for Ruskin’s self-censorship in fair copying.

Ruskin would not “commence considering the [bible(?)]” in his lengthy sermons until fall 1832 (see no. 170), but, in the meantime, he wrote more biblical poems--as well as more mock-epic, satirical poems. What he means in this poem by “enter[ing] on a very mighty Nought” is unclear, but the phrase may be Juanesque in the spirit of no. 136.

I enter on a very mighty Nought

Indeed I almost wonder how I dare

Which was which is which shall be and which ought

To be the mighty source of mighty care

With much of meditation much of thought

Lest I ensnaring should myself ensnare

I never tried before Pray sir have you

A book and not a regiment review

2

Perhaps you often have the pages cut

Of some sharp article <and with> whose great employment

Was cutting at and also cutting up

Perhaps youve even read it with enjoyment

Ah you old Magaziner you old Buck

But dont you take it ill Twas nothing I meant

But let apologizing speeches be still<y>

<Just for> While I commence considering the [bible(?) or title(?)]1

1The hand is very difficult to read, but I think that the word is “title.”