170. Sermons I-VI of the Sermon Books, September through December and possibly into 1833, MSS IIA, IIB. Quoted NC, 63, 64, 67, 71, 198-99, 210, 219.

See summary remarks on dating MSS IIA-E (part 1) and nos. 174-75, 182. Since the drafts of sermons VII-X can be ascribed with reasonable confidence to the first part of 1833 (see nos. 174 and 175), the earlier sermons may be assumed to have been drafted during the previous winter. (The idea for the project and even some of the sermons themselves could, however, have originated even earlier, before the family’s summer holiday, as attested by the poem no. 161 on the destruction of Pharaoh, the theme of sermon VIII.) Unlike sermons VII-X, no drafts of the earlier sermons survive apart from the Sermon Books containing the fair copies, but MS IIB (containing sermons V-VIII) shows on several leaves a pencilled draft lightly visible beneath the ink script. Thus at this first stage of the Sermons project, Ruskin’s practice was to recycle or discard draft on foolscap, rather than use his Red Books for drafting as he did starting with sermon VIII (see no. 174). This change in drafting practice suggests, though with no certainty, that Ruskin fair-copied at least these earlier sermons as he drafted them, rather than first through-composing as he apparently did with “Iteriad” (see no. 91). (This practice, incidentally, is used briefly also in nos. 166 [summer 1831 or 1832] and 157, the latter dateable as either early or late 1832--good supporting evidence, especially if the later date is the correct one for no. 157.)

This interpretation of Ruskin’s activities during fall and winter 1832 is corroborated by the infrequency of poetic composition for the period. The epic “Athens,” no. 135, had ground to a halt by early fall, and the shorter poems nos. 168-69, even if they could have been composed during the winter, hardly measure up to Ruskin’s usual output. His parents at about this time ordered a restraint on his poetry (see nos. 135, 170a, 176) and perhaps commissioned the Sermons project as a more instructive and pious use of his bookmaking energy. The only remaining investment for his time, besides lessons, was mineralogy, which probably intensified slightly later, in early 1833 (see nos. 171-72).

170a. New Year’s address, late 1832 for January 1, 1833, no known manuscript. Unpublished and probably lost.

A New Year’s poem must have been presented, since John James, commenting on the check he and Margaret have recently put on John’s poetry writing, remarks “he addressed me on New Years day only” (letter of 17 January 1833, RFL, 276). John James evidently refers to a new poem for the occasion, but no such work is known to me.