165. “Aspice pater invocationem,” between spring and fall, MS VIII. Unpublished.

Dated by position following no. 164 and two stanzas (20-21) of no. 135. This baffling poem may be relevant to issues of dating, if it refers, as I suspect it does, to the fair-copying of “Athens,” which Ruskin would have commenced about this time (see no. 135). The Latin is too awkward, and Ruskin’s puns and allusions too obscure, to grasp his meaning securely, but the following rough translation has been suggested by my colleague, Andrew ?: “Behold, father, a supplication (or, invocation) / To give me a book, i.e., a quarto / Four pages having already been sent, the fifth should / Be without a line. . . .” While the next lines are extremely obscure (alluding to “that book that I Charles was writing” [“Liber quem Carolus scriberem ego”], whoever Charles may be), the general sense is to remind John James of his former generosity regarding “Iteriad” (“Iteriadem”)--referring, perhaps, to the farthing bargain, or to the fair-copy notebook containing “Iteriad” (MS VII), or to some boon bestowed in the narrative of the poem itself (see no. 91). “Greater things you have bestowed on me,” Ruskin protests; yet, now his “utterances” are “vain.” Shall he have only “despoiled paper” to show for “all these fragments” that have occupied him for so long?

By “four pages sent,” could Ruskin refer to the MS IA copy of “Athens,” a folded sheet (i.e., four pages, albeit written on only three sides; see part 1, MS IA, “Content,” l)? “The fifth should / Be without a line” may pun on several circumstances involved in fair-copying “Athens”--i.e., unless John James provides a new venue, the fifth page will remain forever blank; unless John James intervenes, the fifth stanza will remain omitted, as it was in the MS V copy (see no. 135); unless John James helps Ruskin get around Margaret, the fifth stanza will retain a certain line that seems to have been in dispute (see no. 135). All this, of course, is conjectural, including the basic hypothesis that Ruskin is angling for a new notebook to contain “Athens,” but the dates of nos. 135 and 165 do support one another. Ultimately, the most elaborate copy of “Athens” ended up in MS VII, following “Iteriad,” where the fair copy of the second epic was soon abandoned.