O'er beings like himself; teach the hard hearts
Of rulers that the poorest hind who dies
For their unrighteous quarrels in thy sight
Is equal to the imperious lord that leads
His disciplined destroyers to the field.
May lovely Freedom in her genuine charms,
Aided by stern but equal Justice, drive
From the ensanguined earth the hell-born fiends
Of Pride, Oppression, Avarice and Revenge
That ruin what thy mercy made so fair!
Then shall these ill-starred wanderers, whose sad fate
These desultory lines lament, regain
Their native country; private vengeance then
To public virtue yield, and the fierce feuds
That long have torn their desolated land
May (even as storms that agitate the air
Drive noxious vapours from the blighted earth)
Serve, all tremendous as they are, to fix
The reign of Reason, Liberty, and Peace!

From Beachy Head: with Other Poems (1807)[1]

Beachy Head

On thy stupendous summit, rock sublime,
That o'er the channel reared, halfway at sea
The mariner at early morning hails,[2]
I would recline; while Fancy should go forth
And represent the strange and awful hour
Of vast concussion when the Omnipotent
Stretched forth his arm and rent the solid hills,[3]
Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between
The rifted shores, and from the continent
Eternally divided this green isle.
Imperial lord of the high southern coast,
From thy projecting headland I would mark

Beachy Head

[1] The 'Advertisement' to this posthumous volume states: 'The poem entitled *Beachy Head* is not completed according to the original design. That the increasing debility of its author has been the cause of its being left in an imperfect state will, it is hoped, be a sufficient apology' (p. vii).

[2] 'In crossing the Channel from the coast of France, Beachy Head is the first land made' (Smith's note).

[3] 'Alluding to the idea that this island was once joined to the continent of Europe, and torn from it by some convulsion of nature. I confess I never could trace the resemblance between the two countries. Yet the cliffs about Dieppe resemble the chalk cliffs on the southern coast. But Normandy has no likeness whatever to the parts of England opposite to it' (Smith's note).

Far in the east the shades of night disperse,
Melting and thinned, as from the dark blue wave
Emerging, brilliant rays of arrowy light
Dart from the horizon, when the glorious sun
Just lifts above it his resplendent orb.
Advances now, with feathery silver touched,
The rippling tide of flood; glisten the sands,
While, inmates of the chalky clefts that scar
Thy sides precipitous, with shrill harsh cry,
Their white wings glancing in the level beam,
The terns, and gulls, and tarrocks,[4] seek their food,
And thy rough hollows echo to the voice
Of the gray choughs[5] and ever-restless daws,
With clamour not unlike the chiding hounds,
While the lone shepherd and his baying dog
Drive to thy turfy crest his bleating flock.
The high meridian[6] of the day is past,
And ocean now, reflecting the calm heaven,
Is of cerulean hue, and murmurs low
The tide of ebb upon the level sands.
The sloop, her angular canvas shifting still,
Catches the light and variable airs
That but a little crisp the summer sea,
Dimpling its tranquil surface.
Afar off,
And just emerging from the arch immense
Where seem to part the elements, a fleet
Of fishing vessels stretch their lesser sails,[7]
While more remote, and like a dubious spot
Just hanging in the horizon, laden deep,
The ship of commerce, richly freighted, makes
Her slower progress on her distant voyage,
Bound to the orient climates where the sun
Matures the spice within its odorous shell,
And, rivalling the grey worm's filmy toil,
Bursts from its pod the vegetable down,[8]
Which, in long turbaned wreaths, from torrid heat
Defends the brows of Asia's countless castes.[9]
There the earth hides within her glowing breast

[4] 'Terns: *sterna hirundo*, or sea swallow; gulls: *larus canus*; tarrocks: *larus tridactylus*' (Smith's note).

[5] 'Gray choughs: *corvus graculus*. Cornish choughs, or, as these birds are called by the Sussex people, saddle-backed crows, build in great numbers on this coast' (Smith's note).

[6] *high meridian* noon.

[7] *lesser sails* as they drag their nets, the fishing vessels proceed slowly through the sea, dependent only on their smaller sails.

[8] 'Cotton: *gossypium herbaceum*' (Smith's note).

[9] The Indiaman on the horizon is sailing to India to pick up cotton to take back to Europe. Lines 41–9 are inspired by *Paradise Lost* ii 636–42.

The beamy adamant[10] and the round pearl
Enchased[11] in rugged covering, which the slave,
With perilous and breathless toil, tears off
From the rough sea-rock deep beneath the waves.
These are the toys of nature, and her sport
Of little estimate in Reason's eye;
And they who reason, with abhorrence see
Man, for such gauds[12] and baubles, violate
The sacred freedom of his fellow man –
Erroneous estimate! As heaven's pure air,
Fresh as it blows on this aërial height,
Or sound of seas upon the stony strand,
Or inland, the gay harmony of birds,
And winds that wander in the leafy woods,
Are to the unadulterate taste more worth
Than the elaborate harmony brought out
From fretted stop, or modulated airs
Of vocal science.[13] So the brightest gems
Glancing resplendent on the regal crown,
Or trembling in the high-born beauty's ear,
Are poor and paltry to the lovely light
Of the fair star[14] that, as the day declines
Attendant on her queen, the crescent moon
Bathes her bright tresses in the eastern wave.
  For now the sun is verging to the sea,
And as he westward sinks, the floating clouds
Suspended move upon the evening gale,
And gathering round his orb, as if to shade
The insufferable brightness, they resign
Their gauzy whiteness and, more warmed, assume
All hues of purple. There transparent gold
Mingles with ruby tints and sapphire gleams
And colours such as nature through her works
Shows only in the ethereal canopy.[15]
Thither aspiring fancy fondly soars,
Wandering sublime through visionary vales
Where bright pavilions rise, and trophies fanned
By airs celestial, and adorned with wreaths
Of flowers that bloom amid Elysian bowers.

[10] 'Diamonds, the hardest and most valuable of precious stones. For the extraordinary exertions of the Indians in diving for the pearl oysters, see the account of the pearl fisheries in Percival's *View of Ceylon*' (Smith's note). Robert Percival's *An Account of Ceylon* was first published in 1803.

[11] *Enchased* set.

[12] *gauds* showy ornaments, finery.

[13] Lines 57–68 are an attack on slavery. To reasonable people, the enslavement of men in exchange for jewels is an unequal transaction; just as, to the unadulterated sensibility, the delights of nature are worth more than the elaborate harmonies of music or the sound of the human voice.

[14] *fair star* Venus.

[15] *ethereal canopy* sky.

Now bright and brighter still the colours glow,
Till half the lustrous orb within the flood
Seems to retire, the flood reflecting still
Its splendour, and in mimic glory dressed;
Till the last ray, shot upward, fires the clouds
With blazing crimson, then in paler light
Long lines of tenderer radiance lingering yield
To partial darkness, and on the opposing side
The early moon distinctly rising throws
Her pearly brilliance on the trembling tide.
  The fishermen who at set seasons pass
Many a league off at sea their toiling night
Now hail their comrades from their daily task
Returning, and make ready for their own
With the night-tide commencing. The night tide
Bears a dark vessel on, whose hull and sails
Mark her a coaster from the north. Her keel
Now ploughs the sand, and sidelong now she leans,
While with loud clamours her athletic crew
Unload her, and resounds the busy hum
Along the wave-worn rocks. Yet more remote,
Where the rough cliff hangs beetling[16] o'er its base,
All breathes repose; the water's rippling sound
Scarce heard, but now and then the sea-snipe's cry[17]
Just tells that something living is abroad;
And sometimes crossing on the moon-bright line
Glimmers the skiff, faintly discerned awhile,
Then lost in shadow.
  Contemplation here,
High on her throne of rock, aloof may sit
And bid recording Memory[18] unfold
Her scroll voluminous, bid her retrace
The period when from Neustria's hostile shore[19]
The Norman launched his galleys, and the bay
O'er which that mass of ruin[20] frowns even now
In vain and sullen menace, then received
The new invaders – a proud martial race,
Of Scandinavia the undaunted sons
Whom Dogon, Fier-a-bras, and Humfroi led
To conquest, while Trinacria to their power
Yielded her wheaten garland, and when thou,

[16] *beetling* beetling (overhanging) cliffs recollect Thomson, *Spring* 454, who describes the hawk 'High, in the beetling Cliff'.

[17] 'In crossing the Channel this bird is heard at night, uttering a short cry, and flitting along near the surface of the waves. The sailors call it the sea-snipe, but I can find no species of sea-bird of which this is the vulgar name. A bird so called inhabits the Lake of Geneva' (Smith's note).

[18] *recording Memory* history.

[19] *Neustria's hostile shore* Normandy.

[20] *ruin* Pevensey Castle.

Parthenope, within thy fertile bay
Received the victors.[21]
In the mailed ranks
Of Normans landing on the British coast
Rode Taillefer, and with astounding voice
Thundered the war-song daring Roland sang
First in the fierce contention; vainly brave,
One not inglorious struggle England made,
But failing, saw the Saxon heptarchy[22]
Finish for ever. Then the holy pile,
Yet seen upon the field of conquest, rose,[23]
Where to appease Heaven's wrath for so much blood,
The conqueror bade unceasing prayers ascend,
And requiems for the slayers and the slain.

[21] 'The Scandinavians (modern Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Lapland, etc.) and other inhabitants of the north, began towards the end of the eighth century to leave their inhospitable climate in search of the produce of more fortunate countries.

The north-men made inroads on the coasts of France and, carrying back immense booty, excited their compatriots to engage in the same piratical voyages; and they were afterwards joined by numbers of necessitous and daring adventurers from the coasts of Provence and Sicily.

In 844 these wandering innovators had a great number of vessels at sea and, again visiting the coasts of France, Spain, and England, the following year they penetrated even to Paris; and the unfortunate Charles the Bald, King of France, purchased at a high price the retreat of the banditti he had no other means of repelling.

These successful expeditions continued for some time till Rollo (otherwise Raoul) assembled a number of followers and, after a descent on England, crossed the Channel, and made himself master of Rouen, which he fortified. Charles the Simple, unable to contend with Rollo, offered to resign to him some of the northern provinces, and to give him his daughter in marriage. Neustria, since called Normandy, was granted to him, and afterwards Brittany. He added the more solid virtues of the legislator to the fierce valour of the conqueror; converted to Christianity, he established justice, and repressed the excesses of his Danish subjects, till then accustomed to live only by plunder. His name became the signal for pursuing those who violated the laws, as well as the cry of Haro, still so usual in Normandy. The Danes and Francs produced a race of men celebrated for their valour, and it was a small party of these that in 983, having been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, arrived on their return at Salerno, and found the town surrounded by Mahometans, whom the Salernians were bribing to leave their coast. The Normans represented to them the baseness and cowardice of such submission and, notwithstanding the inequality of their numbers, they boldly attacked the Saracen camp and drove the infidels to their ships. The Prince of Salerno, astonished at their successful audacity, would have loaded them with the marks of his gratitude but, refusing every reward, they returned to their own country from whence, however, other bodies of Normans passed into Sicily (anciently called Trinacria); and many of them entered into the service of the Emperor of the east, others of the Pope, and the Duke of Naples was happy to engage a small party of them in defence of his newly founded duchy. Soon afterwards three brothers of Coutance, the sons of Tancred de Hauteville – Guillaume Fier-a-bras, Drogon, and Humfroi – joining the Normans established at Aversa, became masters of the fertile island of Sicily and, Robert Guiscard joining them, the Normans became sovereigns both of Sicily and Naples (Parthenope). How William, the natural son of Robert, Duke of Normandy, possessed himself of England, is too well-known to be repeated here. William, sailing from St Valori, landed in the bay of Pevensey and at the place now called Battle met the English forces under Harold – an esquire (ecuyer) called Taillefer, mounted on an armed horse, led on the Normans, singing in a thundering tone the war song of Rollo. He threw himself among the English and was killed on the first onset. In a marsh not far from Hastings, the skeletons of an armed man and horse were found a few years since, which are believed to have belonged to the Normans, as a party of their horse, deceived in the nature of the ground, perished in the morass' (Smith's note).

[22] *Saxon heptarchy* the seven kingdoms established by the Angles and Saxons in Britain.

[23] 'Battle Abbey was raised by the Conqueror, and endowed with an ample revenue, that masses might be said night and day for the souls of those who perished in battle' (Smith's note).

But let not modern Gallia form from hence
Presumptuous hopes that ever thou again,
Queen of the isles, shalt crouch to foreign arms.
The enervate[24] sons of Italy may yield,
And the Iberian,[25] all his trophies torn
And wrapped in Superstition's monkish weed,
May shelter his abasement, and put on
Degrading fetters. Never, never thou,
Imperial mistress of the obedient sea!
But thou, in thy integrity secure,
Shalt now undaunted meet a world in arms.
England, 'twas where this promontory rears
Its rugged brow above the channel wave,
Parting the hostile nations, that thy fame,
Thy naval fame, was tarnished, at what time
Thou, leagued with the Batavian, gavest to France
One day of triumph – triumph the more loud
Because even then so rare.[26] Oh well redeemed,
Since, by a series of illustrious men
Such as no other country ever reared,
To vindicate her cause. It is a list
Which, as Fame echoes it, blanches the cheek
Of bold Ambition, while the despot feels
The extorted sceptre tremble in his grasp.
From even the proudest roll by glory filled,
How gladly the reflecting mind returns
To simple scenes of peace and industry
Where, bosomed in some valley of the hills,
Stands the lone farm, its gate with tawny ricks
Surrounded, and with granaries and sheds
Roofed with green mosses, and by elms and ash
Partially shaded; and not far removed
The hut of sea-flints built – the humble home
Of one who sometimes watches on the heights
When hid in the cold mist of passing clouds

[24] *enervate* weak, effeminate.

[25] As Curran observes, Napoleon had conquered Italy and the Iberian peninsula.

[26] 'In 1690, King William being then in Ireland, Tourville, the French admiral, arrived on the coast of England. His fleet consisted of 78 large ships, and 22 fire-ships. Lord Torrington, the English admiral, lay at St Helens with only 40 English and a few Dutch ships, and, conscious of the disadvantage under which he should give battle, he ran up between the enemy's fleet and the coast, to protect it. The Queen's Council, dictated to by Russell, persuaded her to order Torrington to venture a battle. The orders Torrington appears to have obeyed reluctantly: his fleet now consisted of 22 Dutch and 34 English ships. Evertson, the Dutch admiral, was eager to obtain glory; Torrington, more cautious, reflected on the importance of the stake. The consequence was that the Dutch rashly sailing on were surrounded, and Torrington, solicitous to recover this false step, placed himself with difficulty between the Dutch and the French. But three Dutch ships were burnt, two of their admirals killed, and almost all their ships disabled. The English and Dutch, declining a second engagement, retired towards the mouth of the Thames. The French, from ignorance of the coast and misunderstanding among each other, failed to take all the advantage they might have done of this victory' (Smith's note).

The flock, with dripping fleeces, are dispersed
O'er the wide down; then from some ridged point
That overlooks the sea, his eager eye
Watches the bark that for his signal waits
To land its merchandise. Quitting for this
Clandestine traffic his more honest toil,
The crook abandoning, he braves himself
The heaviest snowstorm of December's night,
When with conflicting winds the ocean raves,
And on the tossing boat unfearing mounts
To meet the partners of the perilous trade
And share their hazard.[27] Well it were for him
If no such commerce of destruction known,
He were content with what the earth affords
To human labour, even where she seems
Reluctant most. More happy is the hind[28]
Who with his own hands rears on some black moor
Or turbary[29] his independent hut
Covered with heather, whence the slow white smoke
Of smouldering peat arises. A few sheep,
His best possession, with his children share
The rugged shed when wintry tempests blow;
But when with spring's return the green blades rise
Amid the russet heath, the household live
Joint tenants of the waste throughout the day,
And often, from her nest among the swamps,
Where the gemmed sun-dew[30] grows, or fringed buck-bean,[31]
They scare the plover[32] that with plaintive cries
Flutters, as sorely wounded,[33] down the wind.
Rude, and but just removed from savage life,
Is the rough dweller among scenes like these
(Scenes all unlike the poet's fabling dreams
Describing Arcady).[34] But he is free;
The dread that follows on illegal acts
He never feels, and his industrious mate
Shares in his labour. Where the brook is traced
By crowding osiers,[35] and the black coot[36] hides

[27] 'The shepherds and labourers of this tract of country, a hardy and athletic race of men, are almost universally engaged in the contraband trade, carried on for the coarsest and most destructive spirits, with the opposite coast. When no other vessel will venture to sea, these men hazard their lives to elude the watchfulness of the Revenue officers, and to secure their cargoes' (Smith's note).

[28] *hind* peasant, farm labourer.

[29] *turbary* peat bog.

[30] 'sun-dew: *drosera rotundifolia*' (Smith's note).

[31] 'buck-bean: *menyanthes trifoliatum*' (Smith's note).

[32] 'plover: *tringa vanellus*' (Smith's note).

[33] *as sorely wounded* i.e. as if sorely wounded, so as to distract attention from her nest.

[34] *Arcady* the mountainous central Peloponnesus, named after Arcas, son of Zeus, who reigned here; the people were shepherd-musicians. Although the Greeks regarded it as barbaric, the Romans idealized it into a paradise of nymphs and shepherds. The 'poet' Smith has in mind is probably Virgil, who celebrates Arcadia at *Eclogues* x 31ff.

[35] *osiers* willow trees.

[36] 'coot: *fulica aterrima*' (Smith's note).

Among the plashy reeds her diving brood,
The matron wades, gathering the long green rush
That well prepared hereafter lends its light
To her poor cottage, dark and cheerless else
Through the drear hours of winter. Otherwhile
She leads her infant group where charlock[37] grows
'Unprofitably gay',[38] or to the fields
Where congregate the linnet and the finch
That on the thistles so profusely spread
Feast in the desert, the poor family
Early resort, extirpating[39] with care
These and the gaudier mischief of the ground;
Then flames the high-raised heap, seen afar off
Like hostile war-fires flashing to the sky.[40]
Another task is theirs. On fields that show
As[41] angry Heaven had rained sterility
Stony and cold, and hostile to the plough,
Where, clamouring loud, the evening curlew[42] runs
And drops her spotted eggs among the flints,
The mother and the children pile the stones
In rugged pyramids, and all this toil
They patiently encounter, well content
On their flock bed[43] to slumber undisturbed
Beneath the smoky roof they call their own.
Oh little knows the sturdy hind who stands
Gazing, with looks where envy and contempt
Are often strangely mingled, on the car
Where prosperous Fortune sits; what secret care
Or sick satiety is often hid
Beneath the splendid outside. *He* knows not
How frequently the child of luxury,
Enjoying nothing, flies from place to place
In chase of pleasure that eludes his grasp,
And that content is e'en less found by him
Than by the labourer whose pick-axe smooths
The road before his chariot, and who doffs
What *was* an hat; and, as the train pass on,
Thinks how one day's expenditure like this
Would cheer him for long months, when to his toil
The frozen earth closes her marble breast.

[37] *charlock* wild mustard.

[38] '"With blossomed furze, unprofitably gay", Goldsmith' (*Deserted Village* 194) (Smith's note).

[39] *extirpating* rooting out.

[40] 'The beacons formerly lighted up on the hills to give notice of the approach of an enemy. These signals would still be used in case of alarm, if the telegraph now substituted could not be distinguished on account of fog or darkness' (Smith's note). The semaphore, an upright post with moveable arms, was invented in 1792, and a chain erected along the south coast in 1795.

[41] *As* i.e. as if.

[42] 'Curlew: *charadrius oedicnemus*' (Smith's note).

[43] *flock bed* mattress stuffed with waste wool from shearing.

Ah, who *is* happy? Happiness! A word
That like false fire[44] from marsh effluvia born
Misleads the wanderer, destined to contend
In the world's wilderness with want or woe.
Yet *they* are happy who have never asked
What good or evil means: the boy
That on the river's margin gaily plays
Has heard that death is there; he knows not death,
And therefore fears it not, and venturing in
He gains a bullrush or a minnow – then,
At certain peril, for a worthless prize,
A crow's or raven's nest, he climbs the boll[45]
Of some tall pine, and of his prowess proud
Is for a moment happy. Are *your* cares,
Ye who despise him, never worse applied?
The village girl is happy who sets forth
To distant fair, gay in her Sunday suit,
With cherry-coloured knots and flourished shawl,
And bonnet newly-purchased. So is he,
Her little brother, who his mimic drum
Beats till he drowns her rural lovers' oaths
Of constant faith and still-increasing love.
Ah, yet a while, and half those oaths believed,
Her happiness is vanished, and the boy,
While yet a stripling, finds the sound he loved
Has led him on till he has given up
His freedom and his happiness together.[46]
I once was happy, when while yet a child,[47]
I learned to love these upland solitudes,
And, when elastic[48] as the mountain air,
To my light spirit care was yet unknown,
And evil unforeseen. Early it came,
And childhood scarcely passed, I was condemned,
A guiltless exile,[49] silently to sigh,
While Memory with faithful pencil drew
The contrast, and, regretting, I compared
With the polluted smoky atmosphere
And dark and stifling streets, the southern hills

[44] *false fire* the ignis fatuus, a phosphorescent light seen hovering over marshy ground, believed to be produced by the spontaneous combustion of inflammable gas produced by decaying organic matter. The phenomenon was frequently blamed by contemporary poets for misleading lost travellers; see, e.g., Collins, *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands* 95–8; Erasmus Darwin, *The Loves of the Plants* iv 53–4.

[45] *boll* trunk.

[46] *the boy . . . his happiness together* the boy becomes a soldier with a real drum.

[47] Smith echoes her own *Sonnet V. To the South Downs* 1: 'Ah hills beloved, where once, an happy child . . .' See also line 368.

[48] *elastic* buoyant.

[49] Her father married Charlotte to Benjamin Smith, a young merchant in the City of London, when she was only sixteen, in 1765. Living over the business in Cheapside, she felt herself to be in 'personal slavery'.

That to the setting sun their graceful heads
Rearing, o'erlook the frith[50] where Vecta[51] breaks
With her white rocks the strong impetuous tide,
When western winds the vast Atlantic urge
To thunder on the coast. Haunts of my youth!
Scenes of fond daydreams, I behold ye yet,
Where 'twas so pleasant by thy northern slopes
To climb the winding sheep-path, aided oft
By scattered thorns whose spiny branches bore
Small woolly tufts, spoils of the vagrant lamb
There seeking shelter from the noonday sun;
And pleasant, seated on the short soft turf,
To look beneath upon the hollow way
While heavily upward moved the labouring wain
And, stalking slowly by, the sturdy hind,
To ease his panting team, stopped with a stone
The grating wheel.
Advancing higher still
The prospect widens, and the village church
But little, o'er the lowly roofs around
Rears its gray belfry and its simple vane;
Those lowly roofs of thatch are half concealed
By the rude arms of trees, lovely in spring[52]
When on each bough the rosy-tinctured bloom
Sits thick and promises autumnal plenty.[53]
For even those orchards round the Norman farms
Which, as their owners mark the promised fruit,
Console them for the vineyards of the south,
Surpass not these.
Where woods of ash and beech
And partial copses fringe the green hill-foot,
The upland shepherd rears his modest home,
There wanders by a little nameless stream
That from the hill wells forth, bright now and clear,
Or after rain with chalky mixture gray,
But still refreshing in its shallow course
The cottage garden – most for use designed,
Yet not of beauty destitute. The vine
Mantles the little casement, yet the briar
Drops fragrant dew among the July flowers;

[50] *frith* firth; long narrow inlet from the sea.

[51] 'Vecta: the Isle of Wight, which breaks the force of the waves when they are driven by south-west winds against this long and open coast. It is somewhere described as "Vecta shouldering the western waves"' (Smith's note).

[52] 'Every cottage in this country has its orchard, and I imagine that not even those of Herefordshire or Worcestershire exhibit a more beautiful prospect, when the trees are in bloom, and the *Primavera candida e vermiglia* is everywhere so enchanting' (Smith's note). As Curran notes, Smith alludes to Petrarch, Sonnet 310, line 4 ('pure and rosy spring').

[53] *autumnal plenty* as Curran notes, apple harvests.

And pansies rayed and freaked,[54] and mottled pinks
Grow among balm, and rosemary and rue;
There honeysuckles flaunt, and roses blow
Almost uncultured – some with dark green leaves
Contrast their flowers of pure unsullied white;
Others, like velvet robes of regal state
Of richest crimson, while in thorny moss
Enshrined and cradled, the most lovely, wear
The hues of youthful beauty's glowing cheek.
With fond regret I recollect e'en now
In spring and summer what delight I felt
Among these cottage gardens, and how much
Such artless nosegays, knotted with a rush
By village housewife or her ruddy maid,
Were welcome to me, soon and simply pleased.
  An early worshipper at Nature's shrine,
I loved her rudest scenes – warrens and heaths,
And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows, bordering unfrequented lanes
Bowered with wild roses, and the clasping woodbine
Where purple tassels of the tangling vetch[55]
With bittersweet[56] and bryony[57] inweave,
And the dew fills the silver bindweed's[58] cups –
I loved to trace the brooks whose humid banks
Nourish the harebell and the freckled pagil,[59]
And stroll among o'ershadowing woods of beech,
Lending in summer, from the heats of noon,
A whispering shade; while haply there reclines
Some pensive lover of uncultured[60] flowers
Who from the tumps[61] with bright green mosses clad
Plucks the wood sorrel[62] with its light thin leaves,
Heart-shaped and triply folded, and its root
Creeping like beaded coral; or who there
Gathers the copse's pride, anémones[63]
With rays like golden studs on ivory laid
Most delicate, but touched with purple clouds –
Fit crown for April's fair but changeful brow.
  Ah, hills so early loved, in fancy still
I breathe your pure keen air, and still behold

[54] *pansies rayed and freaked* a recollection of *Lycidas* 144: 'the pansy freaked with jet' ('freaked' is Milton's coinage).
[55] 'vetch: *vicia sylvatica*' (Smith's note).
[56] 'bittersweet: *solanum dulcamara*' (Smith's note).
[57] 'bryony: *bryonia alba*' (Smith's note).
[58] 'bindweed: *convolvulus sepium*' (Smith's note).
[59] 'harebell: *hyacinthus non scriptus*; pagil: *primula veris*' (Smith's note).
[60] *uncultured* uncultivated; i.e. wildflowers.
[61] *tumps* humps.
[62] 'sorrel: *oxalis acetosella*' (Smith's note).
[63] 'anémones: *anemóne nemorosa*. It appears to be settled on late and excellent authorities that this word should not be accented on the second syllable, but on the penultima. I have however ventured the more known accentuation as more generally used, and suiting better the nature of my verse' (Smith's note).

Those widely spreading views, mocking alike
The poet and the painter's utmost art.
And still, observing objects more minute,
Wondering remark the strange and foreign forms
Of sea-shells, with the pale calcareous[64] soil
Mingled, and seeming of resembling substance[65] –
Though surely the blue ocean (from the heights
Where the Downs westward trend,[66] but dimly seen)
Here never rolled its surge. Does Nature then
Mimic, in wanton mood, fantastic shapes
Of bivalves[67] and inwreathed volutes[68] that cling
To the dark sea-rock of the wat'ry world?
Or did this range of chalky mountains once
Form a vast basin where the ocean waves
Swelled fathomless?[69] What time these fossil shells,
Buoyed on their native element, were thrown
Among the embedding calx;[70] when the huge hill
Its giant bulk heaved, and in strange ferment
Grew up a guardian barrier 'twixt the sea
And the green level of the sylvan weald?[71]
  Ah, very vain is Science'[72] proudest boast,
And but a little light its flame yet lends
To its most ardent votaries; since from whence
These fossil forms are seen is but conjecture,
Food for vague theories or vain dispute,
While to his daily task the peasant goes
Unheeding such inquiry – with no care
But that the kindly change of sun and shower
Fit for his toil the earth he cultivates.
As little recks the herdsman of the hill,
Who, on some turfy knoll idly reclined,
Watches his wether[73] flock, that deep beneath
Rest the remains of men, of whom is left

[64] *calcareous* containing lime.
[65] 'Among the crumbling chalk I have often found shells, some quite in a fossil state and hardly distinguishable from chalk. Others appeared more recent – cockles, mussels, and periwinkles, I well remember, were among the number, and some whose names I do not know. A great number were like those of small land-snails. It is now many years since I made these observations. The appearance of sea-shells so far from the sea excited my surprise, though I then knew nothing of natural history. I have never read any of the late theories of the earth, nor was I ever satisfied with the attempts to explain many of the phenomena which call forth conjecture in those books I happened to have had access to on this subject' (Smith's note).
[66] *trend* incline, stretch.
[67] *bivalves* double-shelled molluscs; e.g. oyster, mussel.
[68] *volutes* spiral-shelled molluscs; e.g. periwinkles.
[69] 'The theory here slightly hinted at is taken from an idea started by Mr White' (Smith's note). Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne* (1789) concerns the countryside of south-east England.
[70] *calx* lime.
[71] *sylvan weald* wooded tract between the North and South Downs, including parts of Surrey, Sussex, and Kent.
[72] *Science'* the possessive case is indicated, but Smith elides the final 's' on account of the metre.
[73] *wether* castrated male sheep.

No traces in the records of mankind
Save what these half-obliterated mounds
And half-filled trenches doubtfully impart
To some lone antiquary, who on times remote,
Since which two thousand years have rolled away,
Loves to contemplate.[74] He perhaps may trace,
Or fancy he can trace, the oblong square
Where the mailed legions under Claudius[75] reared
The rampire[76] or excavated fossé[77] delved;
What time the huge unwieldy elephant
Auxiliary reluctant, hither led
From Afric's forest glooms and tawny sands,
First felt the northern blast, and his vast frame
Sunk useless – whence in after-ages found,
The wondering hinds on those enormous bones
Gazed;[78] and in giants dwelling on the hills
Believed and marvelled.[79]
Hither, ambition, come!
Come and behold the nothingness of all
For which you carry through the oppressed earth
War and its train of horrors – see where tread

[74] 'These Downs are not only marked with traces of encampments, which from their forms are called Roman or Danish, but there are numerous tumuli among them – some of which, having been opened a few years ago, were supposed by a learned antiquary to contain the remains of the original natives of the country' (Smith's note).

[75] 'That the legions of Claudius were in this part of Britain appears certain, since this Emperor received the submission of Cantii, Atrebates, Irenobates, and Regni, in which latter denomination were included the people of Sussex' (Smith's note).

[76] *rampire* rampart, barrier.

[77] *fossé* ditch, trench.

[78] 'In the year 1740 some workmen digging in the park at Burton in Sussex discovered, nine feet below the surface, the teeth and bones of an elephant. Two of the former were seven feet eight inches in length. There were, besides these, tusks, one of which broke in removing it, a grinder not at all decayed, and a part of the jaw-bone, with bones of the knee and thigh, and several others. Some of them remained very lately at Burton House, the seat of John Biddulph, Esq. Others were in possession of the Revd. Dr Langrish, minister of Petworth at that period, who was present when some of these bones were taken up, and gave it as his opinion that they had remained there since the universal deluge. The Romans under the Emperor Claudius probably brought elephants into Britain. Milton, in the second Book of his *History*, in speaking of the expedition, says that "He, like a great eastern king, with armed elephants, marched through Gallia." This is given on the authority of Dion Cassius, in his Life of the Emperor Claudius. It has therefore been conjectured that the bones found at Burton might have been those of one of these elephants, who perished there soon after its landing, or, dying on the high downs (one of which, called Duncton Hill, rises immediately above Burton Park), the bones might have been washed down by the torrents of rain and buried deep in the soil. They were not found together but scattered at some distance from each other. The two tusks were twenty feet apart. I had often heard of the elephant's bones at Burton, but never saw them, and I have no books to refer to. I think I saw, in what is now called the National Museum at Paris, the very large bones of an elephant, which were found in North America – though it is certain that this enormous animal is never seen in its natural state, but in the countries under the torrid zone of the old world. I have, since making this note, been told that the bones of the rhinoceros and hippopotamus have been found in America' (Smith's note).

[79] 'The peasants believe that the large bones sometimes found belonged to giants who formerly lived on the hills. The devil also has a great deal to do with the remarkable forms of hill and vale: the Devil's Punchbowl, the Devil's Leaps, and the Devil's Dyke, are names given to deep hollows, or high and abrupt ridges, in this and the neighbouring county.' (Smith's note) The 'neighbouring county' is Surrey.

The innumerous hoofs of flocks above the works
By which the warrior sought to register
His glory, and immortalize his name.
The pirate Dane, who from his circular camp
Bore in destructive robbery fire and sword
Down through the vale,[80] sleeps unremembered here;
And here, beneath the greensward, rests alike
The savage native who his acorn meal
Shared with the herds that ranged the pathless woods,[81]
And the centurion who, on these wide hills
Encamping, planted the Imperial Eagle.
All, with the lapse of time, have passed away,
Even as the clouds, with dark and dragon shapes,
Or, like vast promontories crowned with towers,
Cast their broad shadows on the Downs, then sail
Far to the northward, and their transient gloom
Is soon forgotten.
But from thoughts like these,
By human crimes suggested, let us turn
To where a more attractive study courts
The wanderer of the hills; while shepherd girls
Will from among the fescue[82] bring him flowers
Of wondrous mockery, some resembling bees
In velvet vest, intent on their sweet toil;[83]
While others mimic flies that lightly sport
In the green shade, or float along the pool,
But here seem perched upon the slender stalk
And gathering honey-dew;[84] while in the breeze
That wafts the thistle's plumed seed along,
Bluebells wave tremulous. The mountain thyme[85]
Purples the hassock of the heaving mole,[86]
And the short turf is gay with tormentil[87]

[80] 'The incursions of the Danes were for many ages the scourge of this island' (Smith's note).

[81] 'The aborigines of this country lived in woods, unsheltered but by trees and caves, and were probably as truly savage as any of those who are now termed so' (Smith's note).

[82] 'The grass called sheep's fescue (*festuca ovina*) clothes these downs with the softest turf' (Smith's note).

[83] '*Ophrys apifera*, bee ophrys, or orchis, found plentifully on the hills, as well as the next' (Smith's note).

[84] '*Ophrys muscifera*, fly orchis. Linnaeus, misled by the variations to which some of this tribe are really subject, has perhaps too rashly esteemed all those which resemble insects as forming only one species, which he terms ophrys insectifera. See *English Botany*' (Smith's note).

[85] 'Bluebells: *campanula rotundifolia*; mountain thyme: *thymus serpyllum*. "It is a common notion that the flesh of sheep which feed upon aromatic plants, particularly wild thyme, is superior in flavour to other mutton. The truth is that sheep do not crop these aromatic plants unless, now and then, by accident, or when they are first turned on hungry to downs, heaths, or commons; but the soil and situations favourable to aromatic plants produce a short sweet pasturage, best adapted to feeding sheep, whom nature designed for mountains and not for turnip grounds and rich meadows. The attachment of bees to this, and other aromatic plants, is well known." Martyn's *Miller*' (Smith's note). Smith quotes Thomas Martyn, *The Gardener's and Botanist's Dictionary . . . by the late Philip Miller . . . To which are now added a complete enumeration and description of all plants* (1797–1807).

[86] *hassock of the heaving mole* molehill.

[87] 'Tormentil: *tormentilla reptans*' (Smith's note).

And birdsfoot trefoil, and the lesser tribes
Of hawkweed,[88] spangling it with fringed stars.
Near where a richer tract of cultured land
Slopes to the south, and burnished by the sun,
Bend in the gale of August floods of corn;
The guardian of the flock, with watchful care,[89]
Repels by voice and dog the encroaching sheep,
While his boy visits every wired trap[90]
That scars the turf, and from the pitfalls takes
The timid migrants[91] who, from distant wilds,
Warrens, and stone quarries, are destined thus
To lose their short existence. But unsought
By luxury yet, the shepherd still protects
The social bird[92] who, from his native haunts
Of willowy current or the rushy pool,
Follows the fleecy crowd, and flirts and skims
In fellowship among them.
Where the knoll
More elevated takes the changeful winds,
The windmill rears its vanes, and thitherward,
With his white load, the master travelling
Scares the rooks rising slow on whispering wings,
While o'er his head, before the summer sun
Lights up the blue expanse, heard more than seen,
The lark sings matins and, above the clouds
Floating, embathes his spotted breast in dew.
Beneath the shadow of a gnarled thorn
Bent by the sea-blast,[93] from a seat of turf
With fairy nosegays[94] strewn, how wide the view![95] –
Till in the distant north it melts away
And mingles indiscriminate with clouds;
But if the eye could reach so far, the mart
Of England's capital, its domes and spires
Might be perceived. Yet hence the distant range

[88] 'Birdsfoot trefoil: *trefolium ornithopoides*; hawkweed: *hieracium*, many sorts' (Smith's note).

[89] 'The Downs, especially to the south, where they are less abrupt, are in many places under the plough, and the attention of the shepherds is there particularly required to keep the flocks from trespassing' (Smith's note).

[90] 'Square holes cut in the turf, into which a wire noose is fixed, to catch wheatears. Mr White says that these birds (*motacilla oenanthe*) are never taken beyond the River Adur, and Beding Hill – but this is certainly a mistake' (Smith's note).

[91] 'These birds are extremely fearful and, on the slightest appearance of a cloud, run for shelter to the first rut, or heap of stones, that they see' (Smith's note).

[92] 'The yellow wagtail: *motacilla flava*. It frequents the banks of rivulets in winter, making its nest in meadows and cornfields. But after the breeding season is over, it haunts downs and sheepwalks, and is seen constantly among the flocks, probably for the sake of the insects it picks up. In France the shepherds call it *la bergeronette*, and say it often gives them, by its cry, notice of approaching danger' (Smith's note).

[93] 'The strong winds from the south-west occasion almost all the trees, which on these hills are exposed to it, to grow the other way' (Smith's note).

[94] *nosegays* perfumes, scents.

[95] 'So extensive are some of the views from these hills, that only the want of power in the human eye to travel so far, prevents London itself being discerned. Description falls so infinitely short of the reality, that only here and there distinct features can be given' (Smith's note).

Of Kentish hills[96] appear in purple haze,
And nearer undulate the wooded heights
And airy summits[97] that above the Mole[98]
Rise in green beauty, and the beaconed ridge
Of Blackdown[99] shagged with heath, and swelling rude
Like a dark island from the vale, its brow
Catching the last rays of the evening sun
That gleam between the nearer park's old oaks,
Then lighten up the river and make prominent
The portal and the ruined battlements
Of that dismantled fortress, raised what time
The Conqueror's successors fiercely fought,
Tearing with civil feuds the desolate land.[100]
But now a tiller of the soil dwells there,
And of the turret's looped and raftered halls
Has made an humbler homestead where he sees,
Instead of armed foemen, herds that graze
Along his yellow meadows, or his flocks
At evening from the upland driv'n to fold.
In such a castellated mansion once
A stranger chose his home, and where hard by
In rude disorder fallen, and hid with brushwood,
Lay fragments gray of towers and buttresses,
Among the ruins often he would muse.
His rustic meal soon ended, he was wont
To wander forth, listening the evening sounds
Of rushing milldam[101] or the distant team,
Or nightjar chasing fern-flies;[102] the tired hind

[96] 'A scar of chalk in a hill beyond Sevenoaks in Kent is very distinctly seen of a clear day' (Smith's note).

[97] 'The hills about Dorking in Surrey, over almost the whole extent of which county the prospect extends' (Smith's note).

[98] The River Mole rises on the borders of Sussex and flows north to Dorking.

[99] 'This is an high ridge extending between Sussex and Surrey. It is covered with heath and has almost always a dark appearance. On it is a telegraph' (Smith's note).

[100] 'In this country there are several of the fortresses or castles built by Stephen of Blois in his contention for the kingdom, with the daughter of Henry I, the Empress Matilda. Some of these are now converted into farmhouses' (Smith's note).

[101] *milldam* dam constructed across a stream so as to raise its level, enabling it to power a mill-wheel.

[102] 'Dr Aikin remarks, I believe, in his essay "On the Application of Natural History to the Purposes of Poetry", how many of our best poets have noticed the same circumstance, the hum of the dor beetle (*scaraboeus stercorarius*) among the sounds heard by the evening wanderer. I remember only one instance in which the more remarkable, though by no means uncommon noise, of the fern owl, or goatsucker, is mentioned. It is called the nighthawk, the jar bird, the churn owl, and the fern owl, from its feeding on the *scaraboeus solstitialis*, or fern chafer, which it catches while on the wing with its claws, the middle toe of which is long and curiously serrated, on purpose to hold them. It was this bird that was intended to be described in the 42nd sonnet (Smith's *Sonnets*). I was mistaken in supposing it as visible in November; it is a migrant, and leaves this country in August. I had often seen and heard it, but I did not then know its name or history. It is called goatsucker (*caprimulgus*) from a strange prejudice taken against it by the Italians, who assert that it sucks their goats; and the peasants of England still believe that a disease in the backs of their cattle, occasioned by a fly which deposits its egg under the skin and raises a boil, sometimes fatal to calves, is the work of this bird, which they call a puckeridge. Nothing can convince them that their beasts are not injured by this bird, which they therefore hold in abhorrence' (Smith's note). Smith refers to *An Essay on the Application of Natural History to Poetry* (1777) by John Aikin, brother of Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

Passed him at nightfall, wondering he should sit
On the hilltop so late; they[103] from the coast
Who sought bye-paths with their clandestine load,
Saw with suspicious doubt the lonely man
Cross on their way; but village maidens thought
His senses injured, and with pity say
That he, poor youth, must have been crossed in love –
For often, stretched[104] upon the mountain turf
With folded arms, and eyes intently fixed
Where ancient elms and firs obscured a grange[105]
Some little space within the vale below,
They heard him as complaining of his fate,
And to the murmuring wind of cold neglect
And baffled hope he told. The peasant girls
These plaintive sounds remember, and even now
Among them may be heard the stranger's songs.

Were I a shepherd on the hill,
  And ever as the mists withdrew
Could see the willows of the rill
Shading the footway to the mill
  Where once I walked with you;

And as away night's shadows sail,
  And sounds of birds and brooks arise,
Believe that from the woody vale
I hear your voice upon the gale
  In soothing melodies;

And viewing from the Alpine height
  The prospect dressed in hues of air,
Could say, while transient colours bright
Touched the fair scene with dewy light,
  'Tis that *her* eyes are there!'

I think I could endure my lot
  And linger on a few short years,
And then, by all but you forgot,
Sleep where the turf that clothes the spot
  May claim some pitying tears.

For 'tis not easy to forget
  One who through life has loved you still,
And you, however late, might yet
With sighs to memory giv'n, regret
  The shepherd of the hill.

[103] *they* smugglers.

[104] A verbal echo connects Smith's solitary with the melancholic poet of Gray's *Elegy*: 'His listless length at noontide would he stretch, / And pore upon the brook that babbles by' (ll. 103–4).

[105] *grange* granary.

Yet otherwhile it seemed as if young Hope
Her flattering pencil gave to Fancy's hand,
And in his wanderings reared to soothe his soul
Ideal bowers of pleasure. Then, of solitude
And of his hermit life still more enamoured,
His home was in the forest, and wild fruits
And bread sustained him. There in early spring
The barkmen[106] found him ere the sun arose;
There at their daily toil, the wedgecutters[107]
Beheld him through the distant thicket move.
The shaggy dog following the truffle-hunter[108]
Barked at the loiterer, and perchance at night
Belated villagers from fair or wake,
While the fresh night-wind let the moonbeams in
Between the swaying boughs, just saw him pass –
And then in silence, gliding like a ghost
He vanished, lost among the deepening gloom!
But near one ancient tree, whose wreathed roots
Formed a rude couch, love-songs and scattered rhymes,
Unfinished sentences, or half-erased,
And rhapsodies like this, were sometimes found:

Let us to woodland wilds repair
  While yet the glittering night-dews seem
To wait the freshly-breathing air
  Precursive of the morning beam
That, rising with advancing day,
Scatters the silver drops away.

An elm uprooted by the storm,
  The trunk with mosses gray and green
Shall make for us a rustic form
  Where lighter grows the forest scene;
And far among the bowery shades
Are ferny lawns and grassy glades.

Retiring May to lovely June
  Her latest garland now resigns;
The banks with cuckoo-flowers[109] are strewn,
  The woodwalks blue with columbines,[110]

[106] 'As soon as the sap begins to rise, the trees intended for felling are cut and barked. At which time the men who are employed in that business pass whole days in the woods' (Smith's note).

[107] 'The wedges used in ship-building are made of beech wood, and great numbers are cut every year in the woods near the Downs' (Smith's note).

[108] 'Truffles are found under the beech woods by means of small dogs trained to hunt them by the scent' (Smith's note).

[109] 'Cuckoo-flowers: *lychnis dioica*. Columbines: *aquilegia vulgaris*. Shakespeare describes the cuckoo buds as being yellow. He probably meant the numerous ranunculi, or March marigolds (*caltha palustris*) which so gild the meadows in spring; but poets have never been botanists. The cuckoo-flower is the *lychnis flosculi*.' (Smith's note).

[110] 'Columbines: *aquilegia vulgaris*' (Smith's note).

And with its reeds the wandering stream
Reflects the flag-flower's[111] golden gleam.

There, feathering down the turf to meet,
  Their shadowy arms the beeches spread,
While high above our sylvan seat
  Lifts the light ash its airy head;
And later leaved, the oaks between
Extend their boughs of vernal green.

The slender birch its paper rind
  Seems offering to divided love,
And shuddering even without a wind
  Aspens their paler foliage move,
As if some spirit of the air
Breathed a low sigh in passing there.

The squirrel in his frolic mood
  Will fearless bound among the boughs;
Yaffils[112] laugh loudly through the wood,
  And murmuring ring-doves tell their vows;
While we, as sweetest woodscents rise,
Listen to woodland melodies.

And I'll contrive a sylvan room
  Against the time of summer heat,
Where leaves, inwoven in nature's loom,
  Shall canopy our green retreat,
And gales that 'close the eye of day'[113]
Shall linger ere they die away.

And when a sear and sallow hue
  From early frost the bower receives,
I'll dress the sand rock cave for you,
  And strew the floor with heath and leaves,
That you, against the autumnal air
May find securer shelter there.

The nightingale will then have ceased
  To sing her moonlight serenade,
But the gay bird with blushing breast[114]
  And woodlarks still will haunt the shade,[115]

[111] 'Flag-flower: *iris pseudacorus*' (Smith's note).
[112] 'Yaffils: woodpeckers (*picus*); three or four species in Britain.' (Smith's note).
[113] '"And liquid notes that close the eye of day". Milton. The idea here meant to be conveyed is of the evening wind, so welcome after a hot day of summer, and which appears to soothe and lull all nature into tranquillity' (Smith's note). The quotation is form *Sonnet I* 5.
[114] 'The robin (*motacilla rubecula*), which is always heard after other songsters have ceased to sing' (Smith's note).
[115] 'The woodlark (*alauda nemorosa*) sings very late' (Smith's note).

And by the borders of the spring
Reed-wrens will yet be carolling.[116]

The forest hermit's lonely cave
  None but such soothing sounds shall reach,
Or hardly heard, the distant wave
  Slow breaking on the stony beach,
Or winds that now sigh soft and low
Now make wild music as they blow.

And then before the chilling north
  The tawny foliage falling light
Seems as it flits along the earth
  The footfall of the busy sprite
Who, wrapped in pale autumnal gloom,
Calls up the mist-born mushroom.

Oh, could I hear your soft voice there,
  And see you in the forest green
All beauteous as you are, more fair
  You'd look amid the sylvan scene,
And in a wood-girl's simple guise
Be still more lovely in mine eyes.

Ye phantoms of unreal delight,
  Visions of fond delirium born,
Rise not on my deluded sight,
  Then leave me drooping and forlorn
To know such bliss can never be,
Unless Amanda[117] loved like me.

The visionary, nursing dreams like these,
Is not indeed unhappy. Summer woods
Wave over him, and whisper as they wave
Some future blessings he may yet enjoy.
And as above him sail the silver clouds,
He follows them in thought to distant climes
Where, far from the cold policy of this,
Dividing him from her he fondly loves,
He in some island of the southern sea
May haply build his cane-constructed bower
Beneath the breadfruit or aspiring palm
With long green foliage rippling in the gale.[118]

[116] 'Reed-wrens (*motacilla arundinacea*) sing all the summer and autumn, and are often heard during the night' (Smith's note).
[117] *Amanda* Smith leaves a blank at this point in the printed text; the present reading is conjectural.
[118] 'An allusion to the visionary delights of the new discovered islands where it was at first believed men lived in a state of simplicity and happiness, but where, as later enquiries have ascertained, that exemption from toil, which the fertility of the country gives them, produces the grossest vices, and a degree of corruption that late navigators think will end in the extirpation of the whole people in a few years' (Smith's note).

Oh, let him cherish his ideal bliss –
For what is life, when Hope has ceased to strew
Her fragile flowers along its thorny way?
And sad and gloomy are his days who lives
Of Hope abandoned!
Just beneath the rock
Where Beachy overpeers the Channel wave,
Within a cavern mined by wintry tides
Dwelt one who, long disgusted with the world
And all its ways, appeared to suffer life
Rather than live;[119] the soul-reviving gale
Fanning the beanfield[120] or the thymy heath
Had not for many summers breathed on him;
And nothing marked to him the season's change
Save that more gently rose the placid sea,
And that the birds which winter on the coast
Gave place to other migrants; save that the fog,
Hovering no more above the beetling cliffs,
Betrayed not then the little careless sheep
On the brink grazing, while their headlong fall[121]
Near the lone hermit's flint-surrounded home
Claimed unavailing pity – for his heart
Was feelingly alive to all that breathed;
And outraged as he was, in sanguine youth,
By human crimes, he still acutely felt
For human misery.
Wandering on the beach,
He learned to augur from the clouds of heaven,
And from the changing colours of the sea
And sullen murmurs of the hollow cliffs,
Or the dark porpoises[122] that near the shore
Gambolled and sported on the level brine
When tempests were approaching; then at night
He listened to the wind, and as it drove
The billows with o'erwhelming vehemence,
He, starting from his rugged couch, went forth
And hazarding a life too valueless
He waded through the waves with plank or pole

[119] 'In a cavern almost immediately under the cliff called Beachy Head, there lived, as the people of the country believed, a man of the name of Darby, who for many years had no other abode than this cave, and subsisted almost entirely on shellfish. He had often administered assistance to shipwrecked mariners, but venturing into the sea on this charitable mission during a violent equinoctial storm, he himself perished. As it is above thirty years since I heard this tradition of Parson Darby (for so I think he was called), it may now perhaps be forgotten' (Smith's note).

[120] *the soul-reviving gale . . . beanfield* Smith may have in mind Coleridge, *Eolian Harp* 9–10: 'How exquisite the scents / Snatched from yon beanfield!'

[121] 'Sometimes in thick weather the sheep, feeding on the summit of the cliff, miss their footing and are killed by the fall' (Smith's note).

[122] 'Dark porpoises: *delphinus phocoena*' (Smith's note).

Towards where the mariner in conflict dread
Was buffeting for life the roaring surge –
And now just seen, now lost in foaming gulfs,
The dismal gleaming of the clouded moon
Showed the dire peril. Often he had snatched
From the wild billows some unhappy man
Who lived to bless the hermit of the rocks.
But if his generous cares were all in vain,
And with slow swell the tide of morning bore
Some blue-swoln corse to land, the pale recluse
Dug in the chalk a sepulchre – above
Where the dank sea-wrack marked the utmost tide,
And with his prayers performed the obsequies[123]
For the poor helpless stranger.
One dark night
The equinoctial wind blew south by west
Fierce on the shore; the bellowing cliffs were shook
Even to their stony base, and fragments fell
Flashing and thundering on the angry flood.
At daybreak, anxious for the lonely man,
His cave the mountain shepherds visited,
Though sand and banks of weeds had choked their way:
He was not in it, but his drowned corse,
By the waves wafted, near his former home
Received the rites of burial. Those who read,
Chiselled within the rock these mournful lines,
Memorials of his sufferings, did not grieve
That, dying in the cause of charity,
His spirit, from its earthly bondage freed,
Had to some better region fled for ever.

Mary Scott (1751–1793)

Little is known of her life prior to the publication of *The Female Advocate* (1774). She was the daughter of a linen weaver and lived in Milborne Port, Somerset. She had a brother, Russell, who was the Unitarian minister at Portsmouth, 1788–1833. At the age of twenty-one she entered a poem into the commonplace book of her friend, Mary Steele; it reveals that her health was so bad that she could hardly write.

Mary met John Taylor when they were both twenty-two. He was then a student at Daventry Academy, a Unitarian institution in Coventry. For some reason Mary's mother disapproved of him, but he remained faithful to her until Mrs Scott's death in 1787. Mary's father died the following year. She married Taylor in May 1788, at around the same time as the publication of her second volume, *The Messiah*. Taylor became minister

[123] *obsequies* funeral rites.