

THE HOLLY-TREE

ROBERT SOUTHEY

O Reader ! hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly-tree ?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves
Ordered by an Intelligence so wise 5
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries.

Below, a circling fence¹, its leaves are seen,
Wrinkled and keen ;
No grazing cattle through their prickly round
Can reach to wound ; 10
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralise ;
And in this wisdom of the Holly-tree 15
Can emblem see
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,
One which may profit in the aftertime.

Thus, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere, 20
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,—
Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the Holly-tree.

1. A circling fence is in opposition to its leaves below.