

Robert Southey (1774-1843)

3 *Cornelius Agrippa;*

A ballad, of a young man that would read unlawful books, and how he was punished.

Very pithy and profitable.

Cornelius Agrippa went out one day,
His Study he lock'd ere he went away,
And he gave the key of the door to his wife,
And charged her to keep it lock'd on her life.

“And if any one ask my Study to see, 5
I charge you to trust them not with the key;
Whoever may beg, and entreat, and implore,
On your life let nobody enter that door.”

There lived a young man in the house, who in vain 10
Access to that Study had sought to obtain;
And he begg'd and pray'd the books to see,
Till the foolish woman gave him the key.

On the Study-table a book there lay,
Which Agrippa himself had been reading that day;
The letters were written with blood therein, 15
And the leaves were made of dead men's skin;

And these horrible leaves of magic between
Were the ugliest pictures that ever were seen,
The likeness of things so foul to behold,
That what they were is not fit to be told. 20

The young man, he began to read
He knew not what, but he would proceed,
When there was heard a sound at the door
Which as he read on grew more and more.

And more and more the knocking grew, 25
The young man knew not what to do;

But trembling in fear he sat within,
Till the door was broke, and the Devil came in.

Two hideous horns on his head he had got,
Like iron heated nine times red-hot; 30
The breath of his nostrils was brimstone blue,
And his tail like a fiery serpent grew.

“What wouldst thou with me?” the Wicked One cried,
But not a word the young man replied;
Every hair on his head was standing upright, 35
And his limbs like a palsy shook with affright.

“What wouldst thou with me?” cried the Author of ill,
But the wretched young man was silent still;
Not a word had his lips the power to say,
And his marrow seem’d to be melting away. 40

“What wouldst thou with me?” the third time he cries,
And a flash of lightning came from his eyes,
And he lifted his griffin claw in the air,
And the young man had not strength for a prayer.

His eyes red fire and fury dart 45
As out he tore the young man’s heart;
He grinn’d a horrible grin at his prey,
And in a clap of thunder vanish’d away.

THE MORAL.

Henceforth let all young men take heed
How in a Conjuror’s books they read. 50

1798

(From *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey*. Vol. 6.
Collected by Himself. 10 vols. London, 1838)