Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell

Susanna Clarke

Published by Bloomsbury

1

The library at Hurtfew

Autumn 1806–January 1807

Some years ago there was in the city of York a society of magicians. They met upon the third Wednesday of every month and read each other long, dull papers upon the history of English magic.

They were gentleman-magicians, which is to say they had never harmed any one by magic – nor ever done any one the slightest good. In fact, to own the truth, not one of these magicians had ever cast the smallest spell, nor by magic caused one leaf to tremble upon a tree, made one mote of dust to alter its course or changed a single hair upon any one's head. But, with this one minor reservation, they enjoyed a reputation as some of the wisest and most magical gentlemen in Yorkshire.

A great magician has said of his profession that its practitioners ". . . must pound and rack their brains to make the least learning go in, but quarrelling always comes very naturally to them,"[1] and the York magicians had proved the truth of this for a number of years.

In the autumn of 1806 they received an addition in a gentleman called John Segundus. At the first meeting that he attended Mr Segundus rose and addressed the society. He began by compli-

[1] *The History and Practice of English Magic*, by Jonathan Strange, vol. I, chap. 2, pub. John Murray, London, 1816.

menting the gentlemen upon their distinguished history; he listed the many celebrated magicians and historians that had at one time or another belonged to the York society. He hinted that it had been no small inducement to him in coming to York to know of the existence of such a society. Northern magicians, he reminded his audience, had always been better respected than southern ones. Mr Segundus said that he had studied magic for many years and knew the histories of all the great magicians of long ago. He read the new publications upon the subject and had even made a modest contribution to their number, but recently he had begun to wonder why the great feats of magic that he read about remained on the pages of his book and were no longer seen in the street or written about in the newspapers. Mr Segundus wished to know, he said, why modern magicians were unable to work the magic they wrote about. In short, he wished to know why there was no more magic done in England.

It was the most commonplace question in the world. It was the question which, sooner or later, every child in the kingdom asks his governess or his schoolmaster or his parent. Yet the learned members of the York society did not at all like hearing it asked and the reason was this: they were no more able to answer it than any one else.

The President of the York society (whose name was Dr Foxcastle) turned to John Segundus and explained that the question was a wrong one. ''It presupposes that magicians have some sort of duty to do magic – which is clearly nonsense. You would not, I imagine, suggest that it is the task of botanists to devise more flowers? Or that astronomers should labour to rearrange the stars? Magicians, Mr Segundus, study magic which was done long ago. Why should any one expect more?''

An elderly gentleman with faint blue eyes and faintly-coloured clothes (called either Hart or Hunt – Mr Segundus could never quite catch the name) faintly said that it did not matter in the least whether any body expected it or not. A gentleman could not do

magic. Magic was what street sorcerers pretended to do in order to rob children of their pennies. Magic (in the practical sense) was much fallen off. It had low connexions. It was the bosom companion of unshaven faces, gypsies, house-breakers; the frequenter of dingy rooms with dirty yellow curtains. Oh no! A gentleman could not do magic. A gentleman might study the history of magic (nothing could be nobler) but he could not do any. The elderly gentleman looked with faint, fatherly eyes at Mr Segundus and said that he hoped Mr Segundus had not been trying to cast spells.

Mr Segundus blushed.

But the famous magician's maxim held true: two magicians – in this case Dr Foxcastle and Mr Hunt or Hart – could not agree without two more thinking the exact opposite. Several of the gentlemen began to discover that they were entirely of Mr Segundus's opinion and that no question in all of magical scholarship could be so important as this one. Chief among Mr Segundus's supporters was a gentleman called Honeyfoot, a pleasant, friendly sort of man of fifty-five, with a red face and grey hair. As the exchanges became more bitter and Dr Foxcastle grew in sarcasm towards Mr Segundus, Mr Honeyfoot turned to him several times and whispered such comfort as, "Do not mind them, sir. I am entirely of your opinion;" and "You are quite right, sir, do not let them sway you;" and "You have hit upon it! Indeed you have, sir! It was the want of the right question which held us back before. Now that you are come we shall do great things."

Such kind words as these did not fail to find a grateful listener in John Segundus, whose shock shewed clearly in his face. "I fear that I have made myself disagreeable," he whispered to Mr Honeyfoot. "That was not my intention. I had hoped for these gentlemen's good opinion."

At first Mr Segundus was inclined to be downcast but a particularly spiteful outburst from Dr Foxcastle roused him to a little indignation. "That gentleman," said Dr Foxcastle, fixing Mr Segundus with a cold stare, "seems determined that we should

share in the unhappy fate of the Society of Manchester Magicians!''

Mr Segundus inclined his head towards Mr Honeyfoot and said, ''I had not expected to find the magicians of Yorkshire quite so obstinate. If magic does not have friends in Yorkshire where may we find them?''

Mr Honeyfoot's kindness to Mr Segundus did not end with that evening. He invited Mr Segundus to his house in High-Petergate to eat a good dinner in company with Mrs Honeyfoot and her three pretty daughters, which Mr Segundus, who was a single gentleman and not rich, was glad to do. After dinner Miss Honeyfoot played the pianoforte and Miss Jane sang in Italian. The next day Mrs Honeyfoot told her husband that John Segundus was exactly what a gentleman should be, but she feared he would never profit by it for it was not the fashion to be modest and quiet and kind-hearted.

The intimacy between the two gentlemen advanced very rapidly. Soon Mr Segundus was spending two or three evenings out of every seven at the house in High-Petergate. Once there was quite a crowd of young people present which naturally led to dancing. It was all very delightful but often Mr Honeyfoot and Mr Segundus would slip away to discuss the one thing which really interested both of them – why was there no more magic done in England? But talk as they would (often till two or three in the morning) they came no nearer to an answer; and perhaps this was not so very remarkable, for all sorts of magicians and antiquarians and scholars had been asking the same question for rather more than two hundred years.

Mr Honeyfoot was a tall, cheerful, smiling gentleman with a great deal of energy, who always liked to be doing or planning something, rarely thinking to inquire whether that something were to the purpose. The present task put him very much in mind of the great mediaeval magicians,[2] who, whenever they had some seemingly

[2] More properly called *Aureate* or Golden Age magicians.

impossible problem to solve, would ride away for a year and a day with only a fairy-servant or two to guide them and at the end of this time never failed to find the answer. Mr Honeyfoot told Mr Segundus that in his opinion they could not do better than emulate these great men, some of whom had gone to the most retired parts of England and Scotland and Ireland (where magic was strongest) while others had ridden out of this world entirely and no one nowadays was quite clear about where they had gone or what they had done when they got there. Mr Honeyfoot did not propose going quite so far – indeed he did not wish to go far at all because it was winter and the roads were very shocking. Nevertheless he was strongly persuaded that they should go *somewhere* and consult *someone*. He told Mr Segundus that he thought they were both growing stale; the advantage of a fresh opinion would be immense. But no destination, no object presented itself. Mr Honeyfoot was in despair: and then he thought of the other magician.

Some years before, the York society had heard rumours that there was another magician in Yorkshire. This gentleman lived in a very retired part of the country where (it was said) he passed his days and nights studying rare magical texts in his wonderful library. Dr Foxcastle had found out the other magician's name and where he might be found, and had written a polite letter inviting the other magician to become a member of the York society. The other magician had written back, expressing his sense of the honour done him and his deep regret: he was quite unable – the long distance between York and Hurtfew Abbey – the indifferent roads – the work that he could on no account neglect – etc., etc.

The York magicians had all looked over the letter and expressed their doubts that any body with such small handwriting could ever make a tolerable magician. Then – with some slight regret for the wonderful library they would never see – they had dismissed the other magician from their thoughts. But Mr Honeyfoot said to Mr

Segundus that the importance of the question, ''Why was there no more magic done in England?'' was such that it would be very wrong of them to neglect any opening. Who could say? – the other magician's opinion might be worth having. And so he wrote a letter proposing that he and Mr Segundus give themselves the satisfaction of waiting on the other magician on the third Tuesday after Christmas at half past two. A reply came very promptly; Mr Honeyfoot with his customary good nature and good fellowship immediately sent for Mr Segundus and shewed him the letter. The other magician wrote in his small handwriting that he would be very happy in the acquaintance. This was enough. Mr Honeyfoot was very well pleased and instantly strode off to tell Waters, the coachman, when he would be needed.

Mr Segundus was left alone in the room with the letter in his hand. He read: ''. . . I am, I confess, somewhat at a loss to account for the sudden honour done to me. It is scarcely conceivable that the magicians of York with all the happiness of each other's society and the incalculable benefit of each other's wisdom should feel any necessity to consult a solitary scholar such as myself . . .''

There was an air of subtle sarcasm about the letter; the writer seemed to mock Mr Honeyfoot with every word. Mr Segundus was glad to reflect that Mr Honeyfoot could scarcely have noticed or he would not have gone with such elated spirits to speak to Waters. It was such a *very* unfriendly letter that Mr Segundus found that all his desire to look upon the other magician had quite evaporated. Well, no matter, he thought, I must go because Mr Honeyfoot wishes it – and what, after all, is the worst that can happen? We will see him and be disappointed and that will be an end of it.

The day of the visit was preceded by stormy weather; rain had made long ragged pools in the bare, brown fields; wet roofs were like cold stone mirrors; and Mr Honeyfoot's post-chaise travelled through a world that seemed to contain a much higher proportion of chill grey sky and a much smaller one of solid comfortable earth than was usually the case.

Ever since the first evening Mr Segundus had been intending to ask Mr Honeyfoot about the Learned Society of Magicians of Manchester which Dr Foxcastle had mentioned. He did so now.

"It was a society of quite recent foundation," said Mr Honeyfoot, "and its members were clergymen of the poorer sort, respectable ex-tradesmen, apothecaries, lawyers, retired mill owners who had got up a little Latin and so forth, such people as might be termed half-gentlemen. I believe Dr Foxcastle was glad when they disbanded – he does not think that people of that sort have any business becoming magicians. And yet, you know, there were several clever men among them. They began, as you did, with the aim of bringing back practical magic to the world. They were practical men and wished to apply the principles of reason and science to magic as they had done to the manufacturing arts. They called it 'Rational Thaumaturgy'. When it did not work they became discouraged. Well, they cannot be blamed for that. But they let their disillusionment lead them into all sorts of difficulties. They began to think that there was not now nor ever had been magic in the world. They said that the *Aureate* magicians were all deceivers or were themselves deceived. And that the Raven King was an invention of the northern English to keep themselves from the tyranny of the south (being north-country men themselves they had some sympathy with that). Oh, their arguments were very ingenious – I forget how they explained fairies. They disbanded, as I told you, and one of them, whose name was Aubrey I think, meant to write it all down and publish it. But when it came to the point he found that a sort of fixed melancholy had settled on him and he was not able to rouse himself enough to begin."

"Poor gentleman," said Mr Segundus. "Perhaps it is the age. It is not an age for magic or scholarship, is it sir? Tradesmen prosper, sailors, politicians, but not magicians. Our time is past." He thought for a moment. "Three years ago," he said, "I was in London and I met with a street magician, a vagabonding, yellow-curtain sort of fellow with a strange disfiguration. This man

persuaded me to part with quite a high sum of money – in return for which he promised to tell me a great secret. When I had paid him the money he told me that one day magic would be restored to England by two magicians. Now I do not at all believe in prophecies, yet it is thinking on what he said that has determined me to discover the truth of our fallen state – is not that strange?''

''You were entirely right – prophecies are great nonsense,'' said Mr Honeyfoot, laughing. And then, as if struck by a thought, he said, ''We are two magicians. Honeyfoot and Segundus,'' he said trying it out, as if thinking how it would look in the newspapers and history books, ''Honeyfoot and Segundus – it sounds very well.''

Mr Segundus shook his head. ''The fellow knew my profession and it was only to be expected that he should pretend to me that I was one of the two men. But in the end he told me quite plainly that I was not. At first it seemed as if he was not sure of it. There was something about me . . . He made me write down my name and looked at it a good long while.''

''I expect he could see there was no more money to be got out of you,'' said Mr Honeyfoot.

Hurtfew Abbey was some fourteen miles north-west of York. The antiquity was all in the name. There had been an abbey but that was long ago; the present house had been built in the reign of Anne. It was very handsome and square and solid-looking in a fine park full of ghostly-looking wet trees (for the day was becoming rather misty). A river (called the Hurt) ran through the park and a fine classical-looking bridge led across it.

The other magician (whose name was Norrell) was in the hall to receive his guests. He was small, like his handwriting, and his voice when he welcomed them to Hurtfew was rather quiet as if he were not used to speaking his thoughts out loud. Mr Honeyfoot who was a little deaf did not catch what he said; ''I get old, sir – a common failing. I hope you will bear with me.''

Mr Norrell led his guests to a handsome drawing-room with a

good fire burning in the hearth. No candles had been lit; two fine windows gave plenty of light to see by – although it was a grey sort of light and not at all cheerful. Yet the idea of a second fire, or candles, burning somewhere in the room kept occurring to Mr Segundus, so that he continually turned in his chair and looked about him to discover where they might be. But there never was any thing – only perhaps a mirror or an antique clock.

Mr Norrell said that he had read Mr Segundus's account of the careers of Martin Pale's fairy-servants.[3] "A creditable piece of work, sir, but you left out Master Fallowthought. A very minor spirit certainly, whose usefulness to the great Dr Pale was questionable.[4] Nevertheless your little history was incomplete without him."

There was a pause. "A fairy-spirit called Fallowthought, sir?" said Mr Segundus, "I . . . that is . . . that is to say I never heard of any such creature – in this world or any other."

Mr Norrell smiled for the first time – but it was an inward sort of smile. "Of course," he said, "I am forgetting. It is all in Holgarth and Pickle's history of their own dealings with Master Fallowthought, which you could scarcely have read. I congratulate you – they were an unsavoury pair – more criminal than magical: the less one knows of them the better."

"Ah, sir!" cried Mr Honeyfoot, suspecting that Mr Norrell was speaking of one of his books. "We hear marvellous things of your library. All the magicians in Yorkshire fell into fits of jealousy when they heard of the great number of books you had got!"

"Indeed?" said Mr Norrell coldly. "You surprize me. I had no idea my affairs were so commonly known . . . I expect it is

[3] *A Complete Description of Dr Pale's fairy-servants, their Names, Histories, Characters and the Services they performed for Him* by John Segundus, pub. by Thomas Burnham, Bookseller, Northampton, 1799.

[4] Dr Martin Pale (1485–1567) was the son of a Warwick leather-tanner. He was the last of the *Aureate* or Golden Age magicians. Other magicians followed him (c.f. Gregory Absalom) but their reputations are debatable. Pale was certainly the last English magician to venture into Faerie.

Thoroughgood,'' he said thoughtfully, naming a man who sold books and curiosities in Coffee-yard in York. ''Childermass has warned me several times that Thoroughgood is a chatterer.''

Mr Honeyfoot did not quite understand this. If *he* had had such quantities of magical books he would have loved to talk of them, be complimented on them, and have them admired; and he could not believe that Mr Norrell was not the same. Meaning therefore to be kind and to set Mr Norrell at his ease (for he had taken it into his head that the gentleman was shy) he persisted: ''Might I be permitted to express a wish, sir, that we might see your wonderful library?''

Mr Segundus was certain that Norrell would refuse, but instead Mr Norrell regarded them steadily for some moments (he had small blue eyes and seemed to peep out at them from some secret place inside himself) and then, almost graciously, he granted Mr Honeyfoot's request. Mr Honeyfoot was all gratitude, happy in the belief that he had pleased Mr Norrell as much as himself.

Mr Norrell led the other two gentlemen along a passage – a very ordinary passage, thought Mr Segundus, panelled and floored with well-polished oak, and smelling of beeswax; then there was a staircase, or perhaps only three or four steps; and then another passage where the air was somewhat colder and the floor was good York stone: all entirely unremarkable. (Unless the second passage had come before the staircase or steps? Or had there in truth been a staircase at all?) Mr Segundus was one of those happy gentlemen who can always say whether they face north or south, east or west. It was not a talent he took any particular pride in – it was as natural to him as knowing that his head still stood upon his shoulders – but in Mr Norrell's house his gift deserted him. He could never afterwards picture the sequence of passageways and rooms through which they had passed, nor quite decide how long they had taken to reach the library. And he could not tell the direction; it seemed to him as if Mr Norrell had discovered some

fifth point of the compass – not east, nor south, nor west, nor north, but somewhere quite different and this was the direction in which he led them. Mr Honeyfoot, on the other hand, did not appear to notice any thing odd.

The library was perhaps a little smaller than the drawing-room they had just quitted. There was a noble fire in the hearth and all was comfort and quiet. Yet once again the light within the room did not seem to accord with the three tall twelve-paned windows, so that once again Mr Segundus was made uncomfortable by a persistent feeling that there ought to have been other candles in the room, other windows or another fire to account for the light. What windows there were looked out upon a wide expanse of dusky English rain so that Mr Segundus could not make out the view nor guess where in the house they stood.

The room was not empty; there was a man sitting at a table who rose as they entered, and whom Mr Norrell briefly declared to be Childermass, his man of business.

Mr Honeyfoot and Mr Segundus, being magicians themselves, had not needed to be told that the library of Hurtfew Abbey was dearer to its possessor than all his other riches; and they were not surprized to discover that Mr Norrell had constructed a beautiful jewel box to house his heart's treasure. The bookcases which lined the walls of the room were built of English woods and resembled Gothic arches laden with carvings. There were carvings of leaves (dried and twisted leaves, as if the season the artist had intended to represent were autumn), carvings of intertwining roots and branches, carvings of berries and ivy – all wonderfully done. But the wonder of the bookcases was nothing to the wonder of the books.

The first thing a student of magic learns is that there are books *about* magic and books *of* magic. And the second thing he learns is that a perfectly respectable example of the former may be had for two or three guineas at a good bookseller, and that the value of the

latter is above rubies.[5] The collection of the York society was reckoned very fine – almost remarkable; among its many volumes were five works written between 1550 and 1700 and which might reasonably be claimed as books of magic (though one was no more than a couple of ragged pages). Books of magic are rare and neither Mr Segundus nor Mr Honeyfoot had ever seen more than two or three in a private library. At Hurtfew all the walls were lined with bookshelves and all the shelves were filled with books. And the books were all, or almost all, old books; books of magic. Oh! to be sure many had clean modern bindings, but clearly these were volumes which Mr Norrell had had rebound (he favoured, it seemed, plain calf with the titles stamped in neat silver capitals). But many had bindings that were old, old, old, with crumbling spines and corners.

Mr Segundus glanced at the spines of the books on a nearby shelf; the first title he read was *How to putte Questiones to the Dark and understand its Answeres*.

[5] Magicians, as we know from Jonathan Strange's maxim, will quarrel about any thing and many years and much learning has been applied to the vexed question of whether such and such a volume qualifies as a book of magic. But most laymen find they are served well enough by this simple rule: books written before magic ended in England are books of magic, books written later are books about magic. The principle, from which the layman's rule of thumb derives, is that a book of magic should be written by a practising magician, rather than a theoretical magician or a historian of magic. What could be more reasonable? And yet already we are in difficulties. The great masters of magic, those we term the Golden Age or *Aureate* magicians (Thomas Godbless, Ralph Stokesey, Catherine of Winchester, the Raven King) wrote little, or little has survived. It is probable that Thomas Godbless could not write. Stokesey learnt Latin at a little grammar school in his native Devonshire, but all that we know of him comes from other writers.

Magicians only applied themselves to writing books when magic was already in decline. Darkness was already approaching to quench the glory of English magic; those men we call the Silver Age or *Argentine* magicians (Thomas Lanchester, 1518–90; Jacques Belasis, 1526–1604; Nicholas Goubert, 1535–78; Gregory Absalom, 1507–99) were flickering candles in the twilight; they were scholars first and magicians second. Certainly they claimed to do magic, some even had a fairy-servant or two, but they seem to have accomplished very little in this way and some modern scholars have doubted whether they could do magic at all.

''A foolish work,'' said Mr Norrell. Mr Segundus started – he had not known his host was so close by. Mr Norrell continued, ''I would advise you not to waste a moment's thought upon it.''

So Mr Segundus looked at the next book which was Belasis's *Instructions*.

''You know Belasis, I dare say?'' asked Mr Norrell.

''Only by reputation, sir,'' said Mr Segundus, ''I have often heard that he held the key to a good many things, but I have also heard – indeed all the authorities agree – that every copy of *The Instructions* was destroyed long ago. Yet now here it is! Why, sir, it is extraordinary! It is wonderful!''

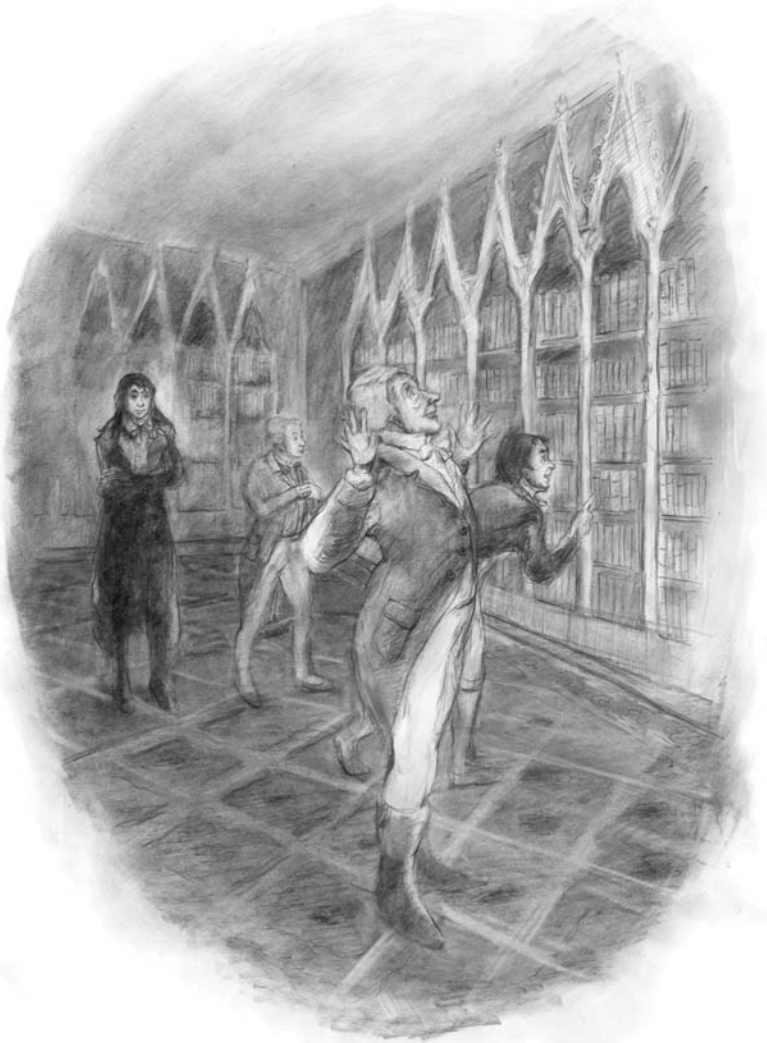
''You expect a great deal of Belasis,'' remarked Norrell, ''and once upon a time I was entirely of your mind. I remember that for many months I devoted eight hours out of every twenty-four to studying his work; a compliment, I may say, that I have never paid any other author. But ultimately he is disappointing. He is mystical where he ought to be intelligible – and intelligible where he ought to be obscure. There are some things which have no business being put into books for all the world to read. For myself I no longer have any very great opinion of Belasis.''

''Here is a book I never even heard of, sir,'' said Mr Segundus, ''*The Excellences of Christo-Judaic Magick*. What can you tell me of this?''

''Ha!'' cried Mr Norrell. ''It dates from the seventeenth century, but I have no great opinion of it. Its author was a liar, a drunkard, an adulterer and a rogue. I am glad he has been so completely forgot.''

It seemed that it was not only live magicians which Mr Norrell despised. He had taken the measure of all the dead ones too and found them wanting.

Mr Honeyfoot meanwhile, his hands in the air like a Methodist praising God, was walking rapidly from bookcase to bookcase; he could scarcely stop long enough to read the title of one book before his eye was caught by another on the other side of the room. ''Oh, Mr Norrell!'' he cried. ''Such a quantity of books! Surely we shall find the answers to all our questions here!''



''I doubt it, sir,'' was Mr Norrell's dry reply.

The man of business gave a short laugh – laughter which was clearly directed at Mr Honeyfoot, yet Mr Norrell did not reprimand him either by look or word, and Mr Segundus wondered what sort of business it could be that Mr Norrell entrusted to this person. With his long hair as ragged as rain and as black as thunder, he would have looked quite at home upon a windswept moor, or lurking in some pitch-black alleyway, or perhaps in a novel by Mrs Radcliffe.

Mr Segundus took down *The Instructions* of Jacques Belasis and, despite Mr Norrell's poor opinion of it, instantly hit upon two extraordinary passages.[6] Then, conscious of time passing and of

[6] The first passage which Mr Segundus read concerned England, Faerie (which magicians sometimes call ''the Other Lands'') and a strange country that is reputed to lie on the far side of Hell. Mr Segundus had heard something of the symbolic and magical bond which links these three lands, yet never had he read so clear an explanation of it as was put forward here.

The second extract concerned one of England's greatest magicians, Martin Pale. In Gregory Absalom's *The Tree of Learning* there is a famous passage which relates how, while journeying through Faerie, the last of the great *Aureate* magicians, Martin Pale, paid a visit to a fairy-prince. Like most of his race the fairy had a great multitude of names, honorifics, titles and pseudonyms; but usually he was known as Cold Henry. Cold Henry made a long and deferential speech to his guest. The speech was full of metaphors and obscure allusions, but what Cold Henry seemed to be saying was that fairies were naturally wicked creatures who did not always know when they were going wrong. To this Martin Pale briefly and somewhat enigmatically replied that not all Englishmen have the same size feet.

For several centuries no one had the faintest idea what any of this might mean, though several theories were advanced – and John Segundus was familiar with all of them. The most popular was that developed by William Pantler in the early eighteenth century. Pantler said that Cold Henry and Pale were speaking of theology. Fairies (as everybody knows) are beyond the reach of the Church; no Christ has come to them, nor ever will – and what is to become of them on Judgement Day no one knows. According to Pantler Cold Henry meant to enquire of Pale if there was any hope that fairies, like men, might receive Eternal Salvation. Pale's reply – that Englishmen's feet are different sizes – was his way of saying that not all Englishmen will be saved. Based on this Pantler goes on to attribute to Pale a rather odd belief that Heaven is large enough to hold only a finite number of the Blessed; for every Englishmen who is damned, a place opens up in Heaven for a fairy.

the queer, dark eye of the man of business upon him, he opened *The Excellences of Christo-Judaic Magick*. This was not (as he had supposed) a printed book, but a manuscript scribbled down very hurriedly upon the backs of all kinds of bits of paper, most of them old ale-house bills. Here Mr Segundus read of wonderful adventures. The seventeenth-century magician had used his scanty magic to battle against great and powerful enemies: battles which no human magician ought to have attempted. He had scribbled down the history of his patchwork victories just as those enemies were closing around him. The author had known very well that, as he wrote, time was running out for him and death was the best that he could hope for.

The room was becoming darker; the antique scrawl was growing dim on the page. Two footmen came into the room and, watched by the unbusinesslike man of business, lit candles, drew window curtains and heaped fresh coals upon the fire. Mr Segundus thought it best to remind Mr Honeyfoot that they had not yet explained to Mr Norrell the reason for their visit.

As they were leaving the library Mr Segundus noticed something he thought odd. A chair was drawn up to the fire and by the chair stood a little table. Upon the table lay the boards and leather bindings of a very old book, a pair of scissars and a strong, cruel-looking knife, such as a gardener might use for pruning. But the pages of the book were nowhere to be seen. Perhaps, thought Mr

[6] *cont'd* Pantler's reputation as a theoretical magician rests entirely on the book he wrote on the subject

In Jacques Belasis's *Instructions* Mr Segundus read a very different explanation. Three centuries before Martin Pale set foot in Cold Henry's castle Cold Henry had had another human visitor, an English magician even greater than Pale – Ralph Stokesey – who had left behind him a pair of boots. The boots, said Belasis, were old, which is probably why Stokesey did not take them with him, but their presence in the castle caused great consternation to all its fairy-inhabitants who held English magicians in great veneration. In particular Cold Henry was in a pickle because he feared that in some devious, incomprehensible way, Christian morality might hold him responsible for the loss of the boots. So he was trying to rid himself of the terrible objects by passing them on to Pale who did not want them.

Segundus, he has sent it away to be bound anew. Yet the old binding still looked strong and why should Mr Norrell trouble himself to remove the pages and risk damaging them? A skilled bookbinder was the proper person to do such work.

When they were seated in the drawing-room again, Mr Honeyfoot addressed Mr Norrell. ''What I have seen here today, sir, convinces me that you are the best person to help us. Mr Segundus and I are of the opinion that modern magicians are on the wrong path; they waste their energies upon trifles. Do not you agree, sir?''

''Oh! certainly,'' said Mr Norrell.

''Our question,'' continued Mr Honeyfoot, ''is why magic has fallen from its once-great state in our great nation. Our question is, sir, why is no more magic done in England?''

Mr Norrell's small blue eyes grew harder and brighter and his lips tightened as if he were seeking to suppress a great and secret delight within him. It was as if, thought Mr Segundus, he had waited a long time for someone to ask him this question and had had his answer ready for years. Mr Norrell said, ''I cannot help you with your question, sir, for I do not understand it. It is a wrong question, sir. Magic is not ended in England. I myself am quite a tolerable practical magician.''