

A Welsh Heretic

Dr William Price, Llantrisant

by Islwyn ap Nicholas



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THE FYNNON PRESS

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"DR. William Price of Llantrisant was certainly a figure of high romance. It was as though a composite creature had stepped out of the pages of Old Testament History and, in his passage through the centuries, had enriched his personality from the flow of all the hidden streams of Myth and Legend."



FOREWORD

Fifty-four years after his death, Dr. William Price, dreamer, visionary and weaver of fantasies, received public recognition and the questionable stamp of bourgeois respectability.

On September 17th, 1947, members of The Cremation Society and others from all over Britain, including Mr. P. Herbert Jones of The Cremation Society, Mr. Arthur Pearson, M.P., Mr. Hugh Royle of The Federation of British Cremation Authorities, Alderman G. J. Ferguson, Lord Mayor of Cardiff, Councillor William Jones of the Pontypridd Urban District Council and Councillor Ivor Jacobs of the Llantrisant Town Trust, stood in the steep main street at Llantrisant, and watched the old doctor's daughter, Miss Penelope Price, unveil a bronze plaque on the wall of Zoar Chapel, formerly her father's home.

The plaque read: This tablet was erected by The Cremation Society and the Federation of British Cremation Authorities to commemorate that act of Dr. William Price, who cremated the body of his infant son in Caerlan Fields, Llantrisant. For his act he was indicted at the Glamorganshire Winter Assize on the 12th of February, 1884, where he was acquitted by Mr. Justice Stephen, who adjudged that cremation was a "legal act."

Last year, seventy-eight years after Dr. Price's death, there were more than 355,023 cremations in this country.

It is interesting to note that among those present at this ceremony was Mrs. S. E. Fisher, widow of the Rev. Daniel Fisher, who courageously officiated at the old doctor's cremation. Despite great opposition, and even hostility, he conducted the service, inserting, for the first time, the words "I commit his body to the fire". For this service he was paid two half-crowns.

The turbulent, provocative, old visionary had at last come into his own!

1973.

ISLWYN AP NICHOLAS

A WELSH HERETIC

ON the night of March 4th, 1800, there was born the third son of the Reverend William Price, M.A., and his wife Mary. The clergyman and a few neighbours had gathered together in the front parlour of the little cottage at Ty'nycoedcae, in the parish of Rudry, to offer thanksgiving to Almighty God for bestowing upon him yet another son. Little did they imagine that this son was destined to become one of the most romantic and rebellious characters in Welsh history.

Wales has already forgotten this remarkable man and there are practically no references to his life and beliefs in contemporary literature. His romantic figure and eccentric personality have become almost legendary and are but memories passed down from old to young.

He was a man bold enough to challenge existing beliefs and to defy conventions. He questioned the justice of the social system; he poured scorn on orthodox religion; he despised the law and its administrators; he decried the morality of a puritanical society; he belittled the complicated dogmatism of medical theories and practice; and he advocated the cremation of the dead!

Price was a man of striking physique and he made himself the more conspicuous by the garb he always wore. His dress and head-dress were attempts to imitate the style of apparel which he supposed

an ancient Druid wore. He had an extensive knowledge of Druidic lore and claimed that the Ovate wore green—typifying verdant Spring, the Bard sky blue—typifying the Summer, and the Druid white—typifying old age and sanctity. He allowed his hair to grow in plaits of extraordinary length, and upon his head he wore a huge fox skin, the tail and legs of which dangled like so many tassels about his shoulders. This fox skin head-dress was his emblem as a healer. His dress consisted of a white tunic, covering a scarlet waistcoat, while his trousers were of green cloth.

He was one of a large family of seven children, there being four boys and three girls. It is not quite clear as to how the elder Price earned his living, because although an ordained priest of the Church of England, he never held a living. He was described by his son, with filial appreciation, as "one of the greatest scholars of the day". Evidently, the Price family had at some time or another some social standing in the locality, for there is a family memorial on the north wall of the nave at Bedwas Church.

During the early part of the last century, education was an expensive luxury, and was usually only accessible to the children of the rich. The Reverend William Price was certainly not in a financial position to pay for the education of his children, but as William was of a studious nature and showed a definite liking for learning, it was felt that some sacrifice should be made to send him to school. As the result of financial assistance from an old friend of the family, he was sent to a school at Machen when he was ten years of age. He remained

here for three and a half years, during which time he learned to speak and read in English. At home, the language of the Saxon had by strict practice and precept been forbidden. At school, William displayed unusual brilliance, and within two years had passed through all the cipher books, and had carried most of the examination honours before him.

After completing his term at school he returned home, and for six months idled away his time. He would spend much time tramping the hills, sometimes walking ten or twelve miles a day, reciting poetry aloud as he walked along. That was tolerable, but when he began undressing on the hillside and exposing his naked body to the sun and wind, he not only caused his family grave concern, but shocked the entire neighbourhood. He was admonished and threatened, but on the next fine day, he would again climb the hillside and repeat the performance. Nudism

Such disgraceful conduct and profitless idleness did not commend itself to his father who continually urged him to do something for his living. It was William's wish to become a doctor, and no amount of persuasion on the part of his father could convince him of the futility of the idea. So having attained the age of fourteen, he was forthwith sent to Dr. Evan Edwards of Caerphilly, with whom he resided for five years. What happened in the meantime is uncertain, but his father either died or became incapacitated from taking an active interest in the family business affairs, for six months later, he had entered the state of medical pupilage. Medical Pupilage

His uncle, Thomas Price of Merriott, then came

on the scene, and in virtue of his near kinship, insisted upon his nephew's acceptance of an assistant mastership at a school kept by his friend.

"You are offered twenty pounds a year, and remember that this is more than many a curate receives after spending hundreds of pounds on his education," said the matter-of-fact uncle. "Besides, you will also have five pounds a year advance till you reach the age of twenty-one. You must go, William, and I will get Doctor Edwards to release you. Why, you will be a man at once!"

To support his arguments he also threatened to discontinue the half-crown which he had been giving William occasionally, unless he agreed to accept this post. But these appeals and threats to sensitive adolescence failed to convince or intimidate the boy, and he bluntly replied that he did not want his money or his advice.

In 1820, he left Caerphilly for London, and he had by this time thoroughly grounded himself in English and had acquired a little knowledge of Latin.

During his study in London he shared a room with another medical student named Daniel Edwards, who was a brother of his former tutor at Caerphilly. He describes his fellow lodger as an excellent fellow, and as both were in straitened circumstances, they pooled their resources.

Daniel Edwards had already passed the examinations of the Royal College of Surgeons, but had not passed through the Hall, having no knowledge of Latin. They both devoted themselves, however, to hard and intensive study, and Price passed through with his Latin. In fact, Price passed the

Scholastic
Feat

examinations of both the College and the Hall within twelve months after coming to London—a feat never accomplished before or since. During the following twelve months he attended lectures on anatomy, physiology, surgery and medicine at Bartholomew. After qualifying as a medical practitioner in 1821, he became for a short time an assistant to a Dr. Armstrong, a lecturer on *Materia Medica*.

Soon afterwards he left London and returned to Wales, where he established a practice at Nantgarw, a village situated between Cardiff and Pontypridd. Here he remained for seven years, during which time he gained a reputation as a surgeon, and particularly as a physician. From Nantgarw he removed his practice to the neighbourhood of Treforest and Pontypridd.

He acquired, according to his own statement, a knowledge of the majority of the Western languages, and also a few of the Eastern. Whether he did or not, the fact remains that he was an accomplished linguist. It was during this time that he became interested in Hindu literature and creeds, probably as the result of studying the encyclopaedic studies of Sir William Jones.

For some time, Price's unconventional mode of living and his heretical beliefs had aroused to fury the hatred of the preachers and other pillars of respectability. Gossip, pulpit and press were used to spread lying stories about him week after week. The preachers of his time invented the first real Welsh atrocity story with the idea of discrediting him in the eyes of the "faithful". Having exhumed the body of his father, they seized upon

Establish-
ing a Prac-
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Accom-
plished
Linguist

Welsh
Atrocity
Story

the incident to give vent to their hatred and spite. He had, they said, desecrated the grave of his father, removed the body, and cut its head off! Even people who had previously been tolerant of Price, now turned against him in disgust. The story was believed by a credulous public and the preachers had achieved their object.

First Law
Case

The true facts concerning this episode were, however, that the Price family were claiming property at Rudry at the time. The defendants were the trustees of the children of Fothergill of Hensol, who it was stated had bought the property from their father—the Reverend William Price. Nominally, his eldest brother was the plaintiff, but it was he who really conducted the case. The estate was in equity for fifteen years, and it became necessary in the course of the proceedings to prove that the father had been incompetent for many years to manage the estate. It appears that the father had had a fall in his youth which left him helpless at times. However, the result of the post mortem examination proved that the father had been *compos mentis*. Lord Chancellor Cotton, who tried the case, was very much in Price's favour, and gave him the verdict, but it was upset on appeal. "I would have succeeded all along," said Price, "if my brother had not taken matters into his own hands. Ultimately he became bankrupt, and I never received a penny of the £4,000 I had spent."

Claim to the
Ruperra
Estate

He hoped, nevertheless, to re-establish the family fortunes by a claim to the Ruperra Estate, which he preferred in the High Court. The Ruperra Estate, he claimed, had always belonged to the Druids, and Hugh Jones of Machen, a person

who was accredited by Price with the ownership of the Estate, had bequeathed it by will to his father, when the latter was a youth. His father, by reason of his mental lapses, had allowed the right to elapse.

Price then took up the case. He affirmed his lineal **Druidic Descent** and argued that as he was able to read the arms of the Druids, he must be an Arch-druid, for no other person can do this. He deposited in the Public Records Office an affidavit of 725 folios in which he traced his right to Ruperra and his claim to the "Authority vested in the primitive bard to govern the world," but nothing came of the matter.

As a Druid, Price would occasionally visit the celebrated Rocking-Stone on Pontypridd Common, where he would perform some ancient rites, and chant the "Song of the Primitive Bard to the Moon." Whenever he performed this ceremony, crowds of local inhabitants would gather to watch him in amazement, but always from a safe distance. Some of them said that he was a pagan paying homage to some idol, while others stated that he was a madman who could not be confined in a lunatic asylum owing to his power of throwing a curse on all his enemies! **Ancient Rites**

Many were the fantastic explanations of these **An Infidel** nocturnal performances, but Price had no illusions about the matter and boldly declared that he was an infidel. "I have not seen anybody or anything greater than Nature to worship," he once said. As one steeped in Druidic lore, he was a worshipper of Nature—of the earth, the sky, the mountains, rivers and seas.

Religion was, in his opinion, the outcome of primitive man's innate fear of the unknown. When man was still completely at the mercy of Nature's elemental powers and could not explain such natural phenomena as change of seasons and weather, storms, thunder, lightning, floods and pestilences, he ascribed them to the work of some supernatural power. Religion was primitive man's first attempt to explain the ever-threatening and incomprehensible phenomena of Nature.

He hated the gloomy religion of the ugly little chapels and despised their sanctimonious preachers. Preachers, he would say, never lead the people except at funerals. They are always on the side of the rich, and are mainly concerned in seeing that the people believe in the divine origin of landlords and masters. In a letter to Hugh James of Liverpool, he stated that "they are paid to teach that the world of thieves and oppressors, of landlords and coal-owners, is a just world. Their theology is always that of the doctrine that 'the powers that be are ordained by God'."

He declared that he did not believe in gods or devils, in heavenly creatures, in virgins, in saints, in pious princes, bishops, nor landlords, all of whom he claimed had been canonised by the crafty priest. He further maintained that throughout the ages religion had been used by kings and priests for the enslavement of their fellow creatures. "Man is greater than God," he said, "for man created God in his own image."

Price considered the Rocking-Stone at Pontypridd to be a primitive Druidic Temple, and in 1838 issued a public appeal for funds to preserve the

Y Maen
Chwyf

monumental reliques by the erection around them of a tower one hundred feet high, at a cost of £1,000. "Let *Y Maen Chwyf*," he appealed, "be the banner of our heritage, around which millions, yet unborn, shall assemble to learn the music and the language of our people."

As a result of his stirring appeal to the Welsh nation for subscriptions towards this enterprise, he received promises amounting to over £130, but in the meantime he became interested in the Chartist Movement, and his enthusiasm for the former project waned.

The
Chartist
Movement

The struggle for the Charter fired his imagination and the militant character of the movement appealed to his rebellious temperament. The Charter embodied many of the principles which he had been advocating for years, such as universal manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, secret ballot, equal electoral districts, salaries for members of parliament, and the abolition of property qualifications for members of parliament. These demands he considered vital and urgent, and so all his other interests were, for the time being, put aside.

At a secret nocturnal conclave, lit up by flickering torches, he was appointed leader of the Pontypridd section of the movement, being "a good, staunch, independent brother." It also appears that he attended, about this time, a local conference of Chartists as the delegate of the Pontypridd, Aberdare, Merthyr and Abersychan sections.

Chartist
Leader

At the meeting at which he was elected leader, Price made a stirring speech lasting over two hours and which concluded with the following words:

"I will repeat that we have tolerated the tyranny

of those who oppress us—landlords, coal-owners and the clergy—too long. We must strike with all our might and power and strike immediately. The time for hesitating is past and the day of reckoning is at hand. Let all cowards go their way, for they have no part to play in this great struggle. Men of the valleys, remember that the principle behind Chartism is the principle which acknowledges the right of every man who toils to the fruits of his labour. The points embodied in this Charter are our immediate demands, but ultimately we shall demand more. Oppression, injustice and the grinding poverty which burdens our lives must be abolished for all time. We must have an understanding of our cause in our minds, the principle of our cause in our hearts, the power of our cause in our conscience, and the strength of our cause in our right arm—strength that will enable us to meet our oppressors boldly, fearlessly, upright on our feet. Remember that freedom is our ‘birth-right’ and for that we are prepared to give our lives. We are the descendants of valiant Welshmen and we must be worthy of the traditions which they have passed on to us. It is far better that we should die fighting for freedom, than live as slaves of greed and opulent wealth. To-day, we are fighting for something more than our own freedom—for that of our children and the children of our children. Every man here to-night must be unafraid to speak his mind, and unafraid to act according to his conscience. I am with you all the way—I, Doctor William Price.”

The concluding words were enthusiastically received, and the meeting disbanded for the night.

On July 12th 1839, the petition for the Charter, with its one and a half million signatures, was rejected by the ruling class in Parliament by 235 votes to 46. The advocates of “moral force” had failed, and so the advocates of “direct action” took control of the situation. It was obvious that all efforts to obtain the Charter by constitutional methods had failed, and it was now necessary to resort to other methods. John Frost of Newport, Taylor of Birmingham, Bussey of Yorkshire, and other leaders met in secret and decided that the only alternative was to emancipate the working class by means of an insurrection. Yorkshire, Lancashire, Birmingham, Sheffield and Wales, were considered as places ready for insurrectionary action, and plans were made accordingly.

Towards the end of October 1839, John Frost, a draper, William Jones, a journey-man watchmaker, and Zephaniah Williams, an innkeeper, decided that the time had arrived to organise a march on Newport. They proposed to take this town by force and proceed to Cardiff, hoping that their victory would be a signal for a general uprising in the country. The Chartists were mobilised and a number were armed with old muskets, pikes, clubs and any other weapons on which they could lay their hands. They converged upon Newport on November 3rd, but for some unknown reason they decided to enter the town in the early morning of the following day, which was a grave tactical error on the part of those in command.

“Inside Newport the authorities had got wind of what was on. They had rounded up a number of Chartists and put them under guard in the

Chartists in
Newport

Westgate Hotel. A number of special constables and a small detachment of soldiers were also put in to guard the hotel, though it seems that Frost knew nothing of the presence of the soldiers. Anyway, when his irregular army, some four thousand strong, marched down Stow Hill and wheeled round to the front of the Westgate Hotel, they behaved as though they suspected nothing.

"The windows were shuttered and barred, and nothing was to be seen but a few special constables, who fled inside, after replying, 'No, never!' to a demand that they surrender the prisoners. The Chartists were firing aimlessly into the air, doing no injury if creating alarm. They attempted to follow up the special constables through the front door. Just as they were pressing through, the shutters of the windows opened, exposing the soldiers who had been hidden until then. The military instantly fired a volley into the mass of the crowd. They were in a commanding position; the Chartists were packed into an open square beneath them. Every shot told; there was no possibility of escape; the miners were caught like rats in a trap. The soldiers swore they only fired one volley (and the defence at the trial had good reason for not questioning that), but the ten or more dead and over fifty wounded prove this to be wrong.

"As soon as they could, the outmanoeuvred miners scattered and broke, running down every turning. Those who were trying to storm the front door and had actually broken into the passage, resisted and fought for some while longer. They attempted to rush the room in which the soldiers were several times, but always 'faltered when they

encountered their own dead.' The firing, all told, lasted ten minutes, and by then the passage and street were clear of all but the dead and wounded. For some time the soldiers prevented any aid being brought to the dying."

The insurrection was at an end. Frost, Williams, Jones and four other leaders were arrested and after a notoriously unfair trial were sentenced to transportation for life. Warrants were issued for the arrest of other known leaders, including Price, who decided upon an immediate flight to France.

The authorities knew that it was imperative for them to arrest him, for they fully realised the influence he had among the workers of Merthyr and Aberdare. The problem which now confronted him was how to make the getaway, as all the Welsh ports were closely watched for Chartist leaders leaving the country.

Eventually he decided to disguise himself as a woman, and according to all accounts, this he did very cleverly. Thus disguised he went aboard a Liverpool-laden vessel at Cardiff. Police-Inspector Stockdale was on special duty at the docks that afternoon, and he carried in his pocket a warrant for the arrest of Price and other Chartist leaders. Little did the Inspector imagine as he politely assisted a lady on to the deck, that "she" was Price, for whom he was keeping a special look-out! Having got on board, he immediately went below, and when the vessel was at sea, came up on deck in a man's attire, but still disguised.

The first port of call was Milford Haven, where the vessel berthed for several hours to take on some

Escape to
France

cargo, and Price decided to take advantage of this break in the voyage to see a little of the town, which he had not visited previously. When he got ashore he made for the Nelson Hotel with the intention of having a few glasses of his customary beverage—cider. He had no sooner seated himself, than a stranger entered and began chatting in a most familiar manner. But Price was not easily fooled and immediately suspected this over-genial stranger.

It appears that the captain of the vessel had become suspicious that the passenger who had gone ashore was Price, and had communicated this fact to the master of the port. In a short while, the captain himself entered the Nelson, and chatting amicably, called for drinks. He asked Price whether he was acquainted with the town, and on being informed that he was not, offered to show him around. In the meantime, an urgent request had been sent for a warrant, and all this geniality on the part of the master of the port and the captain was with the object of detaining him. Fortunately, the warrant was too long in coming and the vessel had to set sail in order not to miss the tide.

When the vessel was well out at sea, Price sent for the captain, a Welshman named Edwards, and told him just what he thought of his despicable action at Milford Haven. "You call yourself a Welshman," he roared at the terrified captain, "but you are nothing less than a dirty grovelling worm. You would have me—Doctor William Price, Chartist leader and friend of the people—arrested. If ever I meet you on shore, I shall whip the life out of you." The captain was thoroughly alarmed and

carefully avoided contact with Price during the remainder of the voyage.

Eventually the vessel arrived at Liverpool, and he made his way to London by rail. On arrival there, the first thing he saw was a notice offering a hundred pounds reward for his capture dead or alive. He stayed here for a few days and then proceeded by steamer, still disguised, to Havre, thence to Rouen, and subsequently to Paris. The first thing he did after his arrival there was to write a letter to Captain Edwards reminding him that he would have to pay dearly, sooner or later, for the trick which he played on him at Milford.

Reward for
Capture

He had not been in Paris very long before he had got into touch with several distinguished literary men. He became intimate with a Captain Phelps, whom he described as the brother-in-law of Louis Philippe, the then reigning French monarch. Phelps was, according to Price, half a Welshman and half an Englishman, and had once owned an entire estate in North Wales worth about £20,000 a year, but had been ruined when the Act of 1819 was passed converting all the paper currency into gold.

Phelps seems to have taken a fatherly interest in Price, and during his seven years exile acted most generously towards him. It appears that Phelps had a sixteen year old daughter; a most beautiful and accomplished girl, whose intellectual attainments were only rivalled by her physical charms. Price became attached to this girl, not with any serious intentions, but it was generally assumed that he would marry her. People considered them as being engaged, and this assumed attachment to the

daughter of Phelps, secured for him patronage from people of high social standing, which otherwise he would never have had.

His attachment to this "beautiful virgin girl" was ultimately the cause of breaking up the intimate friendship which had existed between Phelps and himself. It seems that he took a particular delight in taking this girl into the country and within the sanctuary of some quiet nook would have her remove her clothing, so that he could caress her nude young body. Rumours of these escapades reached the ears of Phelps and as a result they parted company for ever.

Friendship
with Heine

During his stay in Paris he frequently visited Heine, the greatest of modern German writers, and one of the strangest characters in the history of literature, a man who battled against extraordinary physical and financial handicaps. Heine was a man after Price's own heart. He was an exile like himself, and had been in turn a Jew, Christian, Atheist, German and Frenchman! Price used to visit him at his dingy tenement apartment and the great poet would be amused to listen to Price's druidic theories and personal reminiscences. It was during this time that the terrible illness which was eventually to kill Heine began to manifest itself.

Coelbren Y
Beirdd

It was about this time that he discovered in the Louvre the precious stone bearing a portrait of the "primitive bard addressing the moon," and a number of hieroglyphics which seem to have non-plussed all, except himself.

"On this stone," explained Price, "the bard is to be seen holding in one hand *Coelbren Y Beirdd*, while in the other he has a mundane egg, the emblem

of immortality. Across the body are inscribed several Greek characters. The stone has been in existence for about two thousand years, but I am the only person who has been able to decipher the inscription, and I spent twenty years of my life doing so."

This extravagant claim reveals a peculiar psychological twist, and as he was the only person able to decipher the inscription on the stone, no one could challenge its authenticity! However, the substance of this story of the hieroglyphics was that he was the elected successor in office of the ancient Druids, and that a son would be born to him who would restore the Druidic system to its ancient glory. The stone itself he termed "The Will of My Father," the Father in this instance being the Druid who had twenty centuries before willed to him, with prophetic foresight, the royal and priestly authority which he now held to be vested in him.

After returning to Wales, Price was involved in an endless number of litigations extending over a period of years. Although he was always denouncing law and lawyers, yet he would go to law over the most trivial matters. He once charged an assistant bailiff to the County Court at Cardiff, Frederick Burns, with owing him tenpence, but when the judge examined the documents he found that an error of sixpence only had been made and ordered a repayment.

On another occasion he accused officers of the County Court with having planned a conspiracy against his reputation, because he had exposed an act of extortion committed by the Judge's "satellites, Robert Langley, Frederick Burns and others,

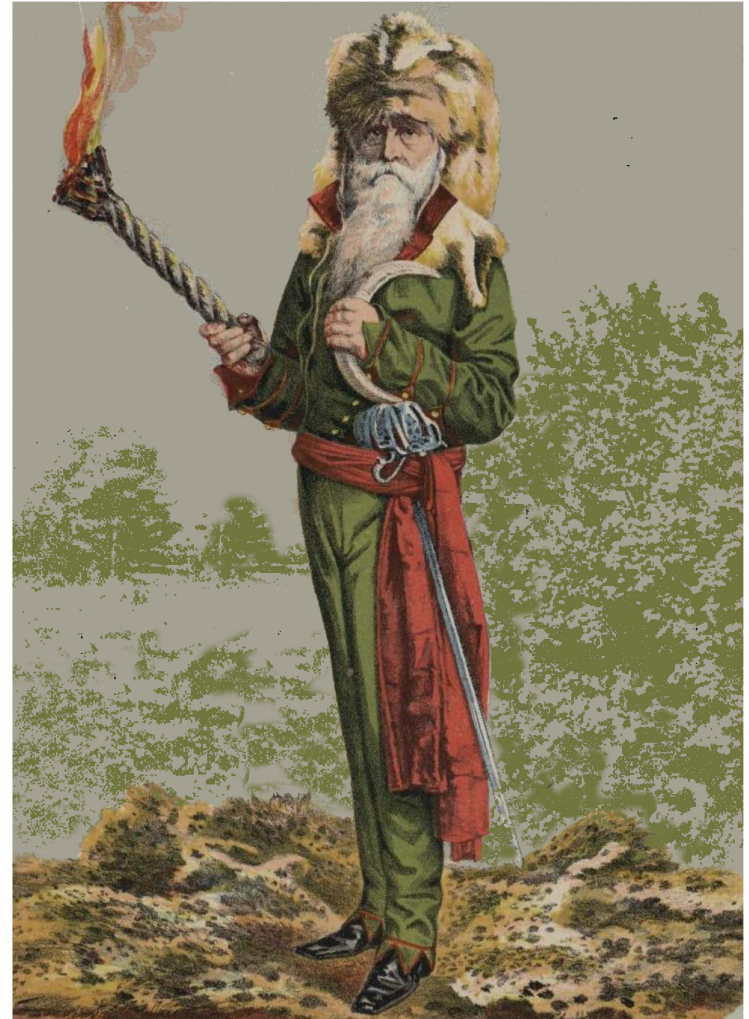
in the Queen's name, under the Seal of Court, by putting an execution into my house on the 1st of December 1852, and plundering therefrom the sum of £5 11s. 4d. which had been paid once by me before, as the receipt proves."

The following is Price's own description of his encounter with the Judge in this particular case:

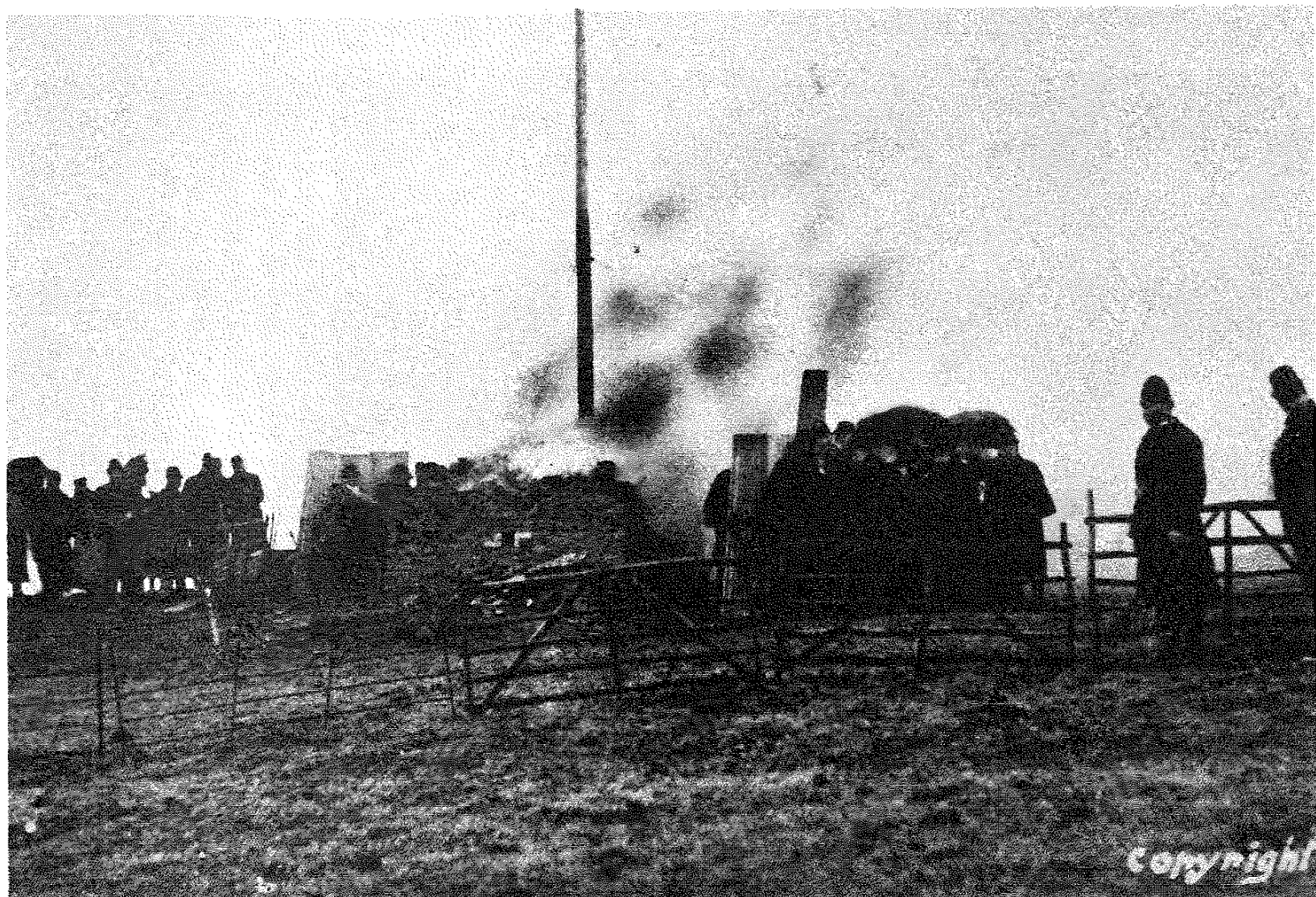
"Let it be borne in mind, too, that the hearing of this complaint of extortion was the first business transacted by the Judge on that day. Having tried in vain to excuse his satellites from this charge of extortion, I observed that his argument was not warranted by the written evidence of extortion before him. 'What,' asked the Judge, 'do you dare to contradict me?' 'Yes, I do contradict you, Sir, but without intending to be discourteous to the authority vested in you. The evidence of the receipts produced is beyond doubt.'

"The Judge then called on Langley to explain away the evidence of the receipts, which he mumbled in some broken sentences which I could not understand, but which appeared to please the Judge. The effect of this explanation on the Judge was to warm his heart, to exculpate Langley by striking again at the soundness of my senses, and denying the evidence of the written documents. This induced me to again contradict the Judge, and point out that the statement made was contrary to the evidence of the receipts and the explanation of the transaction given by the officer of the Court.

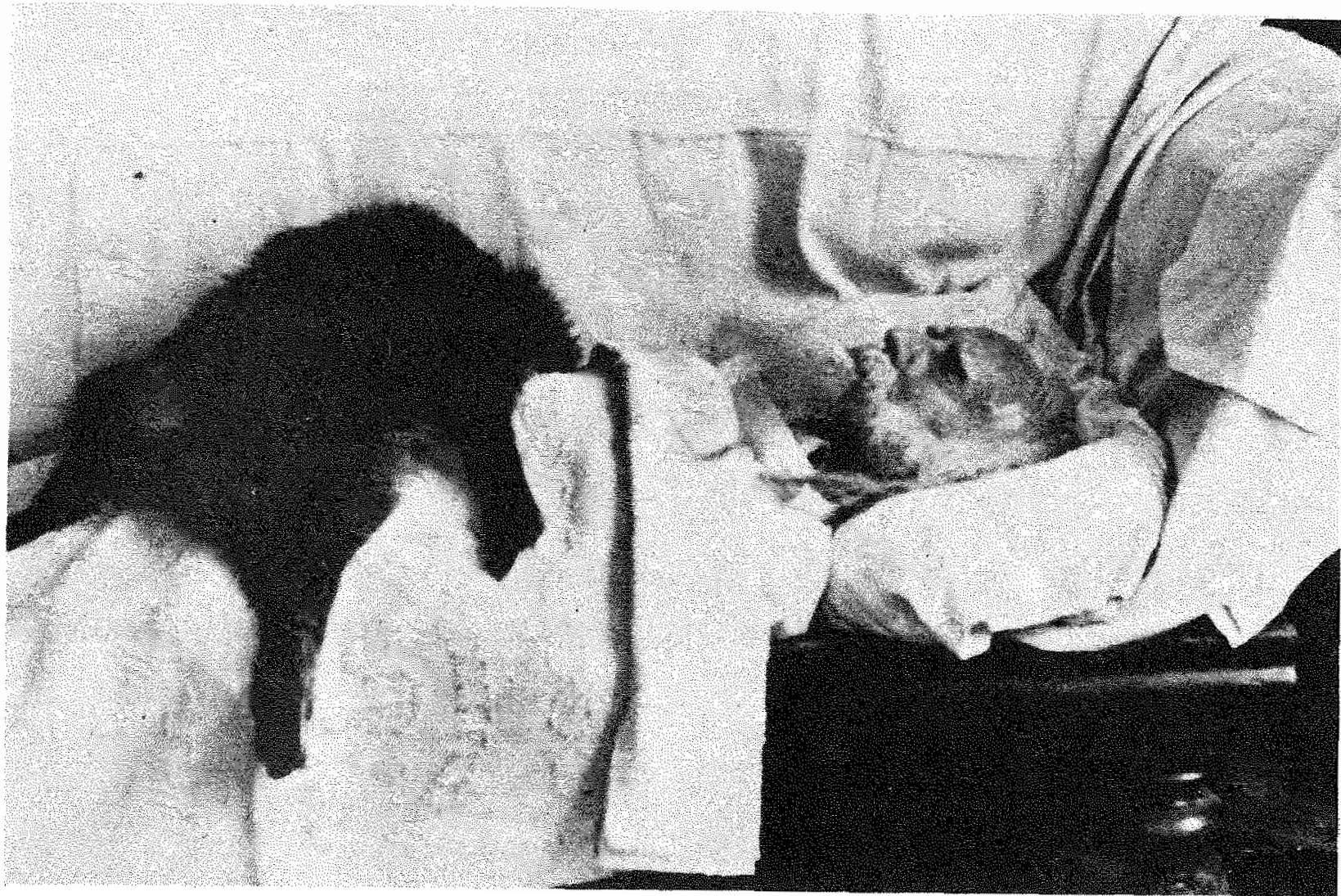
" 'Do you dare to contradict me again?' asked



Dr. William Price, Llantrisant



The Cremation in progress. ©



Dr. William Price lying in state. ©

the Judge, with a threatening countenance and malignant eye.

“ ‘Indeed I do,’ I replied, ‘without meaning any offence or discourtesy to the authority vested in you. There is no man living who has a greater respect for that authority than I have. Nevertheless I charge the officers of your Court for plundering me, in the Queen’s Name, under their Seal of Office, of the sum of £5 11s. 4d.’ ”

“ Robert Langley then got up and threatened me with a prosecution if I dared to repeat the charge against him. But heedless of the consequences of his threats, and the scowling countenance and malignant eyes of Judge Thomas Falconer who endeavoured to back him up, I repeated the charge against Robert Langley, then assistant Clerk of the Small Debts’ Court (a sainted villain, who swears to my meaning, in this Court to-day), for plundering me, in the Queen’s name, under the Seal of his office, of £5 11s. 4d.”

Price concluded his case by asking the Court, “Will her Majesty the Queen, dressed by her officers of State in her white robes, sprinkled with Five Pounds and Half of my innocent blood, plundered by her Cardiff officers in her name, under the Seal of Office, on the First day of December 1852, present herself again at the altar of the Lord her God to partake of the Holy Elements of His Holy Communion, before my plundered blood is ordered to be restored to me, and out of which this malicious ex-officio prosecution was generated here on the 11th day of March 1853, in the Small



Debts' Court at Cardiff, by the conspirators, in the administration of the law of the land?"

Indicted
for Perjury

In 1853 he was indicted for perjury at the Glamorganshire Assizes, before Justice Baron Platt. These famous proceedings, held at Cardiff on July 18th and 19th, 1853, were the outcome of a distress for rent which had been levied on the effects of a man named William Millward, with whose tenancy of a quarry, Price was in some way concerned. It was alleged that he had authorised the bailiff to levy the distress on Millward's goods, but this was denied by Price. It would, however, be typical of him if he had actually authorised the execution of the distress warrant, but had on second thoughts changed his mind. This is probably what did happen, and the result was a prosecution. Mr. Handinge Giffard, who later became Lord Chancellor, prosecuted. Price, as usual, conducted his own case and was accommodated with a seat at the barristers' table. Ever ready to belittle the majesty of the law, he was assisted by his infant daughter Iarlles Morgannwg, whom he designated as his "learned counsel". It was half-past six o'clock on the day of the trial when his Lordship directed the Clerk of Assize to empanel a jury to try Price's case. When the oath was administered, Price was presented with a New Testament, but as there was a map in it, he objected to be sworn on it because he would not swear to the map. A Bible was then given to him, and after inspecting it he again objected to be sworn because the name of the owner was written on one of the blank leaves. After much delay he was sworn on another Testament containing the Holy Evangelists! There was still further

delay because Price challenged a large number of jurymen, but eventually the preliminaries were got through, and the trial proceeded. He cross-examined the witnesses for the Crown with considerable skill, and addressed the jury in a speech which, by its strange vehemence and dissonances of rhetoric, kept the whole court agape with astonishment. The speech for the defence is a most amazing document and the following quotations are from a report of the trial published by Price:

"As my brain has been ploughed and harrowed for the last five months, and sown by the conspirators with the seeds of villainy and malice, I beg you to listen to me patiently and with all the indulgence you can afford, while I, an innocent victim of persecution, mow down their harvest of perjury! I think that I shall be able to prove to your satisfaction that this charge of perjury against me, was born and bred in the brain of Judge Thomas Falconer, and nourished by his sinister influence over the conspirators, John Bird, Robert Langley, Frederick Burns, John Hodgkinson, and other greater and lesser lights in the background plot for the express purpose of taking away my liberty, destroying my reputation, and arresting my right course, because I have repeatedly refused to prostrate my senses in this Court and other places at his dictates and their threatenings of prosecution. Cannot her Majesty," he thundered in conclusion, "as the mighty huntress, in her day, before the Lord, go out like the Sun

Speech for
the Defence

to find beasts of prey enough for her bloodhounds without hunting them to sacrifice the liberty and the life of an innocent man upon her criminal altars with the bloody hands of her priesthood? What! Does the equivalent Queen of Great Britain, the mistress of the civilised world, in her day, fear the light of the Sun, living in a drop of dew, and identified in the name of William Price?

"Observe the common animus of this prosecution for innocent blood, as well as the blood of the innocent, in the name of the Queen of Great Britain.

"These are the facts, the circumstances and connection of the events on which this villainous ex-officio prosecution is based, and the extreme questions I have asked are necessary for a correct solution. I submit them to your serious consideration, and to be answered by your verdict.

"My blood, my liberty, and my life are in your custody this day. I ask you to do me justice. The villainy, conspiracy, and malice of my prosecutors thirsting for my blood have sworn me guilty by perjuring themselves. Truth, justice, and common-sense say: 'No. No.' There is no foundation for it. Not guilty! Remember that my fate is sealed by the word of your mouth. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

The jury, after a deliberation of twenty minutes, returned a verdict of Not Guilty, and the result was received in Court with enthusiastic cheering and clapping. It was obviously a most popular verdict. Although it was quarter-past one o'clock in the

morning, the Court was densely crowded. When Price reached the street, he was again greeted by repeated rounds of applause.

Some years later he decided to build a larger house, higher up the mountain side, and chose a well wooded site for that purpose. Near the Rockingstone, Pontypridd, may be seen the two round towers which were intended as an entrance for this new house. No sooner had the work of excavating a site in the rock been commenced than the landlord instituted an action which resulted in his ejection, with heavy costs against him. He definitely refused to pay, and so a warrant was issued for his arrest. The following day his house was surrounded by policemen, but Price was not to be caught so easily. As an officer approached the front door, Iarllles suggested that he should hide in a huge old trunk. Into this he scrambled and his daughter locked him in. When the police entered, they could find no trace of Price anywhere, and so they left, but kept the house under observation. The problem now was to get the trunk through the cordon, and so it was arranged that it should be carried to a safe hiding place by two trusted friends, on the pretext of its containing clothes. Having again escaped, he made his way to Paris where he remained for six years, thereby availing himself of the Statute of Limitations.

Escape to
Paris

His last visit to the French capital was in 1860, where he went pending an appeal, which proved successful, against the decision of an arbitrator mulcting him in £2,000 damages for refusing permission to a company to construct a tramway over his Treforest property. From time to time he was

involved in a number of other litigations, for which he seems to have had a mania.

Charged
with Man-
slaughter

In 1873, he was committed for trial on a charge of manslaughter, as the result of an allegation that he had maltreated Thomas Price of Penydarren, one of his patients who had consulted him regarding a swelling on his knee. Price emphatically denied the allegation and demanded that the body of the man be exhumed. This patient had not, he submitted, carried out his instructions after a surgical operation at Bridgend, and instead of going home had dilly-dallied about the streets hawking goods. This demand that the body be exhumed was more than the prosecution had bargained for, as exhumation was at that time considered little less than deliberate sacrilege, and Mr. Bruce (afterwards Lord Aberdare) demurred before granting the request. Ultimately the body was exhumed and a post mortem examination made, the results of which proved, according to Price, that the patient had died as the result of a lung disease. Several other doctors were placed in the witness box and differed in their opinions. Price, who conducted his own case, was found Not Guilty.

Renowned
Healer

He was renowned as a healer throughout the length and breadth of the country, and many were the stories told of his wonderful cures. He was ever ready to offer his professional services gratuitously to the poor and needy, and he endeared himself to thousands who had benefited by his skill. On the other hand, he had no compunction in charging exorbitant fees to any well-to-do patients who happened to consult him.

Views on
Medical
Profession

His views on the medical profession and medical theories were as unorthodox as were his opinions on the other problems of life and living. Doctors, he asserted, should be paid according to their efficiency in keeping people healthy. They live on ill-health and it is to their economic advantage to have people ill as long as possible. They depend on a disease-ridden community for their livelihood. People should only pay the doctor as long as they are well, and when they become ill the doctor should have to bear the expenses of their ill-health. The economic interests of doctors would then be in keeping people well, and not in having them ill.

His theory as to the causation and cure of disease is definitely revolutionary. Price believed that impurity is the primary cause of disease and the removal of that impurity the only cure. "All disease," he said, "is the result of an impure bloodstream caused by wrong and faulty habits of living."

Orthodox medicine, he held, simply attacked the symptoms of disease without paying any attention to the causes thereof, but the true science of healing is that which is concerned with removing the causes of disease, rather than tamper with its symptoms.

"Medical science," he said, "has of all the sciences been the most unscientific. Its professors, with a few exceptions such as myself, have always sought to cure disease by the magic of pills and potions and poisons that attacked the ailment with the idea of curing the symptoms instead of attacking the real cause. Medical science has always believed in the superstition that poisons which are

harmful and destructive to human life will prove an efficient substitute for the violation of natural laws. This money-making profession has always taught that mankind can be absolved from physical disease by prescribing a few pills, or injecting a poisonous vaccine or serum.

"We are suffering under the curse of the past mistakes of our profession. We have been educating the public into the false belief that poisonous drugs can give health. This belief has become such a deep-rooted superstition, that those of us who know better and who would like to adopt more rational methods, can only do so at the risk of losing our practice and reputation. The average doctor is at his best but a devoted bigot to this damnable teaching which we call the medical art, and which alone in this age of science, has made no perceptible progress since the days of its earliest teachers. Some call it recognised science, but I call it recognised ignorance!"

His methods of healing were closely allied to those of the modern Nature Cure School, and it is possible that he had come under the influence of such famous continental healers by natural and drugless methods as Father Kneipp, Vincent Priessnitz and others.

Vegetarian

He advocated and practised natural living and rational healing, and was a vegetarian for over forty years. "Human beings," he said, "ought not to eat animal food. The Cymmerian teachers and the bards forbade it. The flesh of dead animal corpses is unnatural food for human beings, and those who eat it descend to the level of the brute and will in time acquire the habits and passions of a beast."

Price was also a surgeon of great skill, but he would never undertake to perform an operation until all other methods had been tried and had failed, except, as he once admitted, when he was exceptionally hard-pressed for money. His most remarkable surgical operation, still talked about in the valleys, was that of successfully grafting a piece of bone taken from the leg of a calf, on to a collier's leg which had been crushed in the pit.

Skilled
Surgeon

He was always a staunch opponent of vaccination. He could never understand the mentality of the parent who would allow the putrid pus and corruption scraped from the foulest sores of smallpox that had been implanted in the body of a calf, to be injected into the pure blood stream of a little child. On one occasion, at least, he came into conflict with the law on this question.

Opponent
of
Vaccination

Although Price did not take an active part in the political and social movements of the last half of the century, he would occasionally raise his voice to champion the cause of the down-trodden and oppressed. That he recognised the existence of the class struggle, there is no doubt. "There are two worlds," he said. "The world of the mansion and the world of the cottage; the world of the master and the world of the slave; the world of the exploiter and the world of the exploited, and between these two worlds there is being waged a relentless and grim struggle. There can never be peace in society until the world of the mansion, the master, and the exploiter is abolished. Then and only then will the toilers come into their own and all men shall enjoy the fruits of their labour."

He was always ready to support the workers in

their struggle for better conditions of life, and he hated with all his heart the relentless tyranny of the master class. During the great strike of the miners in 1871, he hurled some bitter diatribes against the mine-owners. "You are the Welsh Pharaohs who think you can suck the life-blood of the colliers for ever," he told them. "You have grown fat and prosperous; you own the big houses; you wear the finest clothes; your children are healthy and happy; yet you do not work. How then have you got these things by idleness? Let me tell you. You have been stealing the balance of the low wages which you have been paying them! Take heed, you men whose bodies and souls are bloated by the life-blood of the poor, take heed before it is too late. Remember that the oppression of the Pharaohs of Egypt did not last for ever, and neither will the oppression of the blood-sucking Pharaohs of Wales."

On Thursday night, January 10th, 1884, his five months old son died. This child was his offspring by his intimate Gwenllian Llewelyn, and was named Iesu Grist. In this child was centred all his hopes and aspirations. This was the son whom he believed was destined to restore the Druidic system to its former magnificence, and as he asserted, whose birth and functions had been foretold from ancient days.

On the following Sunday night, he took the body of his beloved child reverently to the summit of the hill on Caerlan fields, where he had a large cask containing half a barrel of paraffin oil. He then gently placed the body, well covered with napkins, into the cask and set it alight. People returning home from chapel were astonished to see a great

fire burning fiercely on the hillside, and hurrying to the scene, stood mystified by this weird spectacle. Soon afterwards the police arrived on the scene and immediately beat down the flames. The partly consumed body was snatched from the burning cask, while the crowd, frantic with rage, threatened and hustled Price. A number of the mob wanted to throw him alive into the burning cask, and were only prevented from doing so by the timely action of the police. This crude attempt to burn the body of a dead child was considered the height of blasphemy and paganism, and the whole country was roused against him. He was placed under arrest and locked up at the local police station. In due course, an inquest was held, and the jury found that the death of the child was due to natural causes, and not as had been rumoured, foul play.

After the inquest, the police made an application to the coroner for permission to bury the child, but Price strongly objected. He demanded that he be handed back the body of his own child. The coroner was unable to give the police the permit they asked for, and so the authorities were reluctantly compelled to hand him back the body. Before doing so, however, they made every possible effort to extract from Price a promise that he would not attempt to burn the body again, but he refused to give any such undertaking. He bluntly told them that he was not asking them to return to him the body of his child, but that he was demanding it. Fearless and determined, he succeeded in carrying out his intention on March 21st unmolested, and the body was burned in half a ton of coal at the

Caerlan fields. The prejudice against him continued and he had now become a most unpopular figure in the neighbourhood. Sermons were preached from pulpits throughout Wales denouncing his paganism and emphasising the unchristian character of his act.

Attacked
by Mob

One very dark night, several weeks later, a mob attacked his house. That night, Gwenllïan Llewelyn was alone in the house, Price having gone out for his customary walk. She was sitting before the fire waiting for Price to return, when she was suddenly startled to hear the loud howling of an infuriated mob outside, and just as she was getting up from her chair, several huge stones were hurled through the window, narrowly missing her. Fortunately, the door was locked and she had four of Price's wolfish-looking half breed dogs with her in the room. The dogs barked furiously, and no doubt, would have torn to pieces any man that would have dared to enter the house. Several pistols were always kept in the house, and Gwenllïan quickly loaded two of them. Standing behind the dogs, holding a pistol in each hand, she shouted a warning to those who were hammering at the door. By threatening to shoot the first person who tried to force an entry, she managed to keep the mob at bay until the police arrived and dispersed them. It was eleven o'clock that night when Price returned home, having spent most of the night eluding his pursuers.

Indicted for
Cremating
Body of
Child

At the following assizes at Cardiff, he was indicted for cremating the dead body of his child. The case was heard by Justice Stephens. Price, as usual, conducted his own defence in a most brilliant manner, both as regards legal knowledge and

eloquence. Clad in a white smock of fine linen, with scalloped collar and cuffs, with a shawl of royal tartan over his broad shoulders, he made a striking figure with his forceful eloquence, his fine features, picturesque attire, and long white hair. He was acquitted. Justice Stephens, in his judgment, maintained that the cremation of the dead was not illegal provided it was carried out in such a manner as not to constitute a nuisance. "I am of the opinion," said the judge, "that a person who burns instead of burying a dead body does not commit a criminal act, unless he does it in such a manner as to amount to a public nuisance at common law."

During this trial, which was followed tensely throughout the world, Price received thousands of letters from all parts of the country, some from distinguished personages, others from humbler folk, but all commending his courage in giving effect to his convictions. After this trial, he would from time to time, out of sheer bravado, create a stir in the neighbourhood by cremating his dead cattle.

As a result of this legal triumph, he next conceived the idea of erecting a public crematorium in the vicinity of his home, and made a public appeal for subscriptions. The project, however, was not carried out; age and an attenuated exchequer being insurmountable obstacles. He decided to commemorate the cremation by having an oval shaped medal struck in bronze, and over three thousand of these were sold at threepence each.

Public
Crema-
torium
Project

His next move was to institute legal proceedings against Police Superintendent Matthews of Pontypridd, and Sergeant Hoyle of Llantrisant, for false imprisonment following the cremation of his child.

Proceedings
Against
Police

He again conducted his own case at the Swansea assizes before Justice Bowen. The action against Matthews was non-suited, but he recovered damages in respect of Hoyle.

In his ninetieth year, paternal honours again crowned his head, and great was his rejoicing at the birth of another son, who would inherit all the Druidic privileges and prescriptive rights of his dead son, Iesu Grist.

Views on
Marriage
and
Morality

Although Price was the father of several children, he was never legally married. Most men propagate theories, but few have the moral courage to put them into practice. But here was a man who was an exception to the rule, and who feared neither law, religion, nor custom. He believed in free love, and lived with the woman of his choice in a free union.

"Marriage itself," he explained, "is of no importance; rather is it the desire to mate which Nature has endowed in us which makes people complete the union which we call marriage. I have found it unnecessary to enter into any legal marriage, because I do not, as an evolved being, require any law or religious ceremony to compel me to love the woman I have chosen as my mate. The artificial thunder of the Church and the State on marriage cannot frighten me to live with any woman under compulsion. No law made by god or man can compel a man and a woman to love each other, but it can and does compel them to live with each other, which is quite another thing."

He considered that lovers should live together for a time in order to prove the genuine character of their love and devotion, because only thus is it possible to find out whether it is moral for them

to live together, and whether their union will have an elevating influence on themselves and their generation.

He despised the Christian moralists, whom he once described as old men who had exhausted all the pleasures of living and who in their old age and impotency, deemed it their duty to impose their priggish morality on the young. He even went so far as to question the idealism and morality of legalised monogamic marriage, so loudly praised by these old men. He held that legal monogamy was a property relationship, and that its main object is the regulation of succession and the division of property.

"I want to see marriage become a union freely accepted, freely maintained, and freely dissolved by mutual consent," he said. "The community should only intervene in order to safeguard that which is of vital interest to it, namely, the children."

His championship of the cause of the unmarried mother made him very unpopular. He condemned without any mercy the law and the conventional morality which combine in making the lives of unmarried mothers a martyrdom. The unmarried woman who becomes a mother is defamed by public opinion, despised by friends, excommunicated from the chapel, and denied any rights. Many an unfortunate woman turned to him in their hour of need, and found in him a real friend.

For many years, Price had lived in an ancient looking dwelling called *Ty'r Clettwr*, which was situated on the road-side midway up the hill upon which stands the old town of Llantrisant. It was here that he died shortly before nine o'clock on the

His Last
Days

evening of Monday, January 23rd, 1893. Had he lived until the following March, he would have attained his ninety-third birthday.

It was the custom of almost all visitors to the town to take a walk past *Ty'r Clettwr* in the hope of catching a glimpse of the renowned old doctor. Occasionally, even up to a comparatively short time before his death, he made hurried visits to Cardiff and Pontypool, and his hoary figure, extravagantly and curiously attired, never failed to attract the wondering gaze of all who beheld it.

A year or so before his death, he had an accident, and as a result became seriously ill, but with his powerful constitution and recuperative powers, he made a complete recovery. He had, however, lost that elasticity and buoyancy which had previously characterised his old age. When he was laid on his couch after his accident, he exclaimed: "Well, you have laid me on my couch at last. It is unlikely that I shall ever rise again." He would not, he added, die that night, or even that week, but he did not think he could survive a fortnight.

A week or so before he died, he was well enough to attend scores of afflicted patients who flocked to him from all parts of Wales, but each day found him weaker, and little by little his iron constitution yielded to the ravages of time, and he was eventually forced to take to his couch.

Although he did not suffer physical pain, being merely weak, a doctor who lived across the road was frequently in attendance upon him, and everything possible was done to ensure his comfort and peace of mind. No one realised that the end was approaching, except possibly himself.

On the previous Saturday, he was raised to a sitting position on his couch. He seldom spoke, but retained his faculties to the end. Once his interest was aroused, his intellect became clear, and he became as sharp and quick as ever.

On Monday, the old man appeared composed and easy, lying full length on his couch. He had fallen into a deep and refreshing sleep, and awoke shortly before nine o'clock complaining of thirst. His daughter, Iarlles Morgannwg, asked whether he would take some cider, whereupon he answered in a steady and clear voice: "No, give me champagne." He always drank champagne whenever he felt unwell. These were the last words he uttered, for shortly afterwards he passed away peacefully, as in a sweet repose.

He had no fear of death, for he considered dying, like birth, to be a mere natural physiological event. He did not fear the superstitious babble and terrifying threats of preachers; he did not fear the darkness of the unknown; he did not fear the myth which had enslaved his people for centuries. On his death-bed, he did not cringe and whine for a last sacrament to ensure celestial bliss, but demanded champagne. He died as he had lived—fearlessly.

The news that he had passed away spread rapidly throughout the country, and there was great excitement at the prospect of another cremation. It was well known to most people by this time that the old doctor held very definite views on the disposal of the bodies of the dead. He considered earth burial to be wrong from every point of view—scientific, hygienic and aesthetic. "It is not right that a carcass should be allowed to rot and decom-

pose in the earth," he said. "It results in wastage of good land, pollution of the earth, water and air, and is a constant danger to all living creatures."

His Will

Some months before he died, it is said, he made a will giving explicit instructions regarding the method of disposing of his body. He directed that there should be no sorrowing and that no mourning should be worn; that his body should be consumed by fire on Caerlan fields at a spot which he had previously marked by putting up a pole sixty feet high, surmounted by a crescent-shaped representation of a new moon; that the body should be attired in the clothes worn at the time of his death; that no strangers should be allowed to revel in gazing at his dead body, as was the usual custom; the fuel upon which the body was to be burned should consist of a core of timber and two tons of coal, and that no attempt should be made to preserve the ashes of the body, but that they should be scattered to the four winds, "thus helping the grass to grow and the flowers to bloom." Gwenllian and her two children were appointed executors to the will.

First Welsh Cremation

It was decided that his wishes should be strictly observed, as far as was humanly possible, and arrangements were made for the first pre-arranged cremation in Wales to take place on Tuesday, January 31st, 1893. A few days before the funeral, hundreds of admission tickets to the ceremony had been issued to friends and other persons who had applied by post and telegraph. On these tickets it stated that the ceremony would take place at noon on Tuesday, but the arrangements were altered at the last minute, and it was decided that it should take place at 7 a.m. instead.

People who had heard of the altered arrangements began to arrive in Llantrisant as early as 4 a.m. on Tuesday morning, many having walked there, while others arrived in brakes and other vehicles. Before the day was over at least twenty thousand people had arrived. Never had they known such a day in the village; every road leading to it was congested with traffic, public houses exhausted their supplies of beer, and many of the villagers took advantage of the occasion for providing the visitors with light refreshments.

In the little front parlour at *Ty'r Clettwr* lay the body of the valiant old heretic in his iron casket. This was the room which had served him so long as a study and consulting room. The casket had been constructed of sheet iron and encircled by several strong iron bands, and had been draped with white muslin. It had been specially designed by Price, and was constructed by Thomas Jones, Talbot, a local blacksmith. Price had carefully thought out every detail, and in choosing that particular metal he had anticipated that when placed in the fire it would become red-hot, thus materially assisting the process of cremation, while at the same time ensuring that there would be no possibility of the body itself becoming exposed.

The Iron Casket

The family and a number of friends had remained up all night, so that when the undertaker arrived at 7 a.m., everything was ready. The undertaker, Ebenezer Davies, was accompanied by four assistants and twelve other men to help as bearers. Immediately they arrived the casket was placed on a bier, lent for the occasion by the local church-

The Funeral

wardens. Before the casket was sealed by means of strong iron bands, nuts and bolts, the relatives were escorted into the room. Gwenllian and her two children—Iesu Grist and Penelope—went in first, and they were later joined by Iarllles, who cut off a lock of her father's flowing hair and kissed his face for the last time.

A few moments later, the heavy casket was covered with a white pall and carried by the bearers outside the house, where a funeral procession was formed. The casket was followed by the two younger children, the boy being dressed in a garb similar to that worn by his father. His head-dress consisted of an entire fox-skin, and his suit was made of a green cloth, braided red, and scalloped at the neck and around the knees. The little girl wore the traditional Welsh "pais a betgwn," and a red shawl. The children were followed by Iarllles, his eldest daughter, also dressed in the traditional costume, and leaning upon the arm of a friend. Then came Gwenllian, wearing a black cloak, and escorted by Mr. John Spannon, a neighbour, and Dr. Anderson of Carmarthen.

It was nearly eight o'clock when the procession approached the Caerlan fields, part of some freehold property owned by Price, and where nine years earlier he had shocked the world by cremating the body of his son. It is ironical that at the last scene in the life of this old infidel, those responsible should have thought it necessary to call upon a Christian priest to officiate. Nevertheless, one cannot but admire the moral courage of the Rev. Daniel Fisher, curate of Llantrisant, in consenting to officiate at this most unorthodox ceremony.

It was Fisher who met the procession as it entered the Caerlan fields, read the burial service, and led it to the centre of the field where the crematorium had been erected a few yards to the right of the exact spot marked by Price. When the procession reached the crematorium there was a pause in the service, while the bearers lifted the casket off the bier and placed it in position. The service, which was the orthodox Church of England service read in Welsh, was then resumed. The phrase "consigned to the earth" had been changed to "consigned to the fire."

Exactly at 8.15 a.m. all was in readiness for lighting the pile. This task had been entrusted to Dr. Anderson who applied a lighted torch to the shavings. Simultaneously, Daniel Richards, an old servant of the family, did the same at the other end of the pile, while several men poured quantities of paraffin on to the mass of combustibles. In a few moments the whole structure was enveloped in high flames and dense volumes of smoke. A strong south-westerly breeze greatly facilitated the burning.

The news that the cremation had actually taken place seemed to have spread very quickly, for by noon thousands of people had poured into the village from all directions. When Gwenllian returned home after the ceremony, *Ty'r Clettwr* was besieged by hundreds of people clamouring for admission tickets to the field. She complied with their requests as far as was possible, while other members of the household were busy selling photographs and souvenirs of Price at a modest price to all who cared to buy.

The
Cremation

In the meantime, many thousands of people had gathered around the crematorium to watch the proceedings. The fire still raged furiously, and the stokers declared that by peering through a square aperture in the masonry they could see the casket, which was red hot and that long tongues of flames issued from the several holes in its side, indicating that the body must have been reduced to ashes. Three tons of coal and one ton of wood were intended to be used for the cremation, but a considerable amount of coal was left unused.

Shortly after four o'clock preparations were made to withdraw the casket from the furnace, where it had been for over eight hours. It was believed, even as early as mid-day, that the fire had done its work, so it was then decided not to add any more fuel, but to allow the burning mass gradually to extinguish itself. The work of the stokers in withdrawing the casket by means of long iron hooks was greatly hampered by the thousands of spectators who had broken through the wooden barrier surrounding the crematorium. The police attempted to clear the field, but only succeeded in clearing sufficient space for the stokers to proceed with their work.

When the casket was withdrawn, it was found that it had been almost totally destroyed by the heat, there being huge rents in both the sides and the lid. The shattered casket was then placed on a bier and allowed to cool, after which it was shouldered by the bearers, who slowly made their way back to *Ty'r Clettwr* escorted by police and followed by a huge crowd. On arrival at the house, the remains of the casket were placed on the couch in the front

parlour, prior to scattering the ashes, although it is doubtful whether any ashes still remained in the casket.

The people who had remained behind on the Caerlan fields scrambled among the debris and still smouldering fire searching for souvenirs, but towards evening they began setting out for home on foot and in vehicles, and the village of Llantrisant once again began to assume its usual quietude and orderliness.

Thus ended the last scene in the life of Dr. William Price, the remarkable man whose foibles and eccentricities had startled and perplexed Welshmen for three parts of a century. His personality had remained changeless through an age of change and development, and he had succeeded in withstanding every attempt to expose his most extravagant claims and pretensions.

His invincible belief in himself, his open defiance of all orthodox ethics and usages, and his unconcealed contempt of the world, served to secure for this most extraordinary compound of the egotist, bombast, fanatic and dreamer, an indefinable place in the hearts of many of his countrymen.

They viewed his professional skill and daring as priceless, even uncanny. As the old man stalked abroad, attired in a manner which would have made even an ancient Briton stare, his face withered and bloodless, his small sensitive hands thin and bony, his flesh shrivelled, his eyes keen as ever, and his step as bounding and lissom as though he were a youth, and not an old man who had weathered ninety-two years—those who happened

to see him looked and looked, half in marvel and half in awe.

In the person of William Price was to be found a connecting link between almost three centuries. Time had failed to paralyse the vivacity of his mind, or to temper the energy of his resolution. Each year he seemed to have taken on a fresh lease of life, but at last the remarkable man who appeared never to have known what fear was, had been laid low. The "magician" was dead!

