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The Fire Walkers Of Fiji

Many stories have been told of the fire-walkers of Fiji, but no one has yet been able to explain how these savages are able to walk, bare-footed, over red-hot stones without injury.

The latest European who has witnessed the ceremony is the Rev. George L. Johnson, of Suva Fiji, and he tells the story of what he saw in theWideWorldMagazine as follows:

The ability to walk unharmed over white-hot stones is surely granted to very few people, yet there are natives of the South Seas who can stroll barefooted over stones that have been heated in a roaring fire for several days, their feet subsequently showing not the slightest trace of injury. These people are Fijians, natives of the island of Benga, situated about twenty-two miles from Viti Levu (Great Fiji), and no investigator—and there have been many—has ever been able to discover the secret of their power.

Several traditions are current among the Fijians as to how this gift of fire-walking was first attained. One is to the effect that a native was walking along one day when he saw an elf and succeeded in capturing him. The elf begged piteously to be released, promising many and varied rewards in return for his liberty. These, however, were all refused. At last he offered to give his captor the power to walk unharmed through fire.

This attracted the Fijian, who stipulated, in accepting it, that no only should he be given the gift, but that it should also be conferred on his family and the members of his koro (village). This was duly granted by the elf, who was then released. That is why, the natives say, that to this day the member of that particular tribe can safely walk on white-hot stones.

Part of Harvest Thanksgiving.

Another story is that the fire walking ceremony is part of a harvest-thanksgiving to a certain god, who conferred the power on his votaries. Gifts of yams, taro, pigs, and so forth, are brought to the scene of festivities, and after the fire has been cleared from the stones, certain men are selected to walk round on the heated stones. After this the food is placed on the stones and, when cooked, is taken out, a right royal feast following.

What adds color to this story is the fact that the native way of cooking food is by digging a hole in the ground, kindling a fire in it, and placing the food, wrapped up in leaves of bread-fruit, banana, or taro, on the fire, after which the whole is covered with earth. When sufficient time has elapsed the earth is removed and the food taken out. This method cooks food to perfection; the modern "fireless cooker" is modelled much on the same plan.

Some little time ago I had an opportunity of witnessing the fire-walking ceremony and eagerly availed myself of it. The scene was laid in a natural amphitheatre with a mountain towering in the background. It took place late on a Wednesday afternoon, and I was informed that the fire had been burning continuously since the previous Friday.

The Heat Intense.

Certainly, the heat was intense; it was very unpleasant a few yards away, even on the windward side. The fire was burning in a hole about twelve feet across and circular in shape. Huge logs were flaring away in the midst of the stones, which were obviously white-hot. Before the ceremony of fire-walking began, two mekes (dances) were given on the village green.

The warriors were in full war-paint and dressed in unwieldy sulus (kilts) of grass. It says much for the "march of civilization" in Fiji that the natives were shrewd enough to stretch a rope across the narrow path up the ravine and charge visitors three shillings to pass!

The work of preparing the stones took some time; then long poles and strong ropes made from vines were used to remove the burning wood and also to arrange the stones so as to prevent a fairly even service. This was accomplished of much shouting, and with several stalwart warriors pulling on both ends of a strong vine the great stones were finally hauled into place.

Now came the crucial moment: the very air seemed tense with expectation! Several warriors had been seen to disappear into the jungle while the preparations were going forward. They now emerged with a shout which was echoed by a hundred leather-lunged Fijians.

Plunged Fearlessly on Hot Stones

The men, some nine in number, plunged fearlessly on to the white-hot stones, walked around, and then jumped out. Other men immediately threw bundles of grass which has been placed in readiness, on to the stones. A dense column of smoke arose, into which the men jumped, sat down, and began to chant one of the war-songs.

Shortly afterwards they clambered out and squatted down outside, while others took up the singing. I had a good look at their feet, which they held up for me to inspect and photograph, but could see no trace whatever of burning or even singeing. What the explanation of the immunity from burning is no one seems to know; a medical man who was present could offer no theory whatever. As to the genuineness of the feat there can be no shadow of a doubt; the fire is as fierce as it can be made, the stones obviously white-hot.

It is highly probable that before long the fire-walking ceremony will lapse altogether, as the periods grow longer between each performance.

One wonders if, before it is too late, the natives could be induced to divulge the secret, which might prove to be of great value, especially to men employed in foundries, smelting works and similar industries.

Scientific Explanation.

Some scientists have sought an explanation of the phenomenon in the fact that the island of Benga is very rocky; the continual walking over the sun-heated stones they say, causes the soles of the feet to become unusually hard. This, however, does not account for the fact that only a very few of the Bengans will attempt the fire-walking.

A story is told of a doctor who witnessed the feat on one occasion and, suspecting some trick, tried to walk over the stones with his boots on. He was badly burned—so much that he had to be treated in hospital for several weeks. Since that time no one has attempted to disprove either the heat of the stones or the whiteman's inability to perform a feat which the natives accomplish, seemingly, with complete immunity from injury.

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IN MEMORIAM

In loving memory of my dear father Abram. Davis, Port Union, who departed this life April 5, 1924.

The month of April again is here,
For us the saddest of the year,
God called dear father it was His will,
But in our hearts he liveth still.

The silent grief that is in our hearts,
No human life can trace;
For many a broken heart is hid
Behind a smiling face.

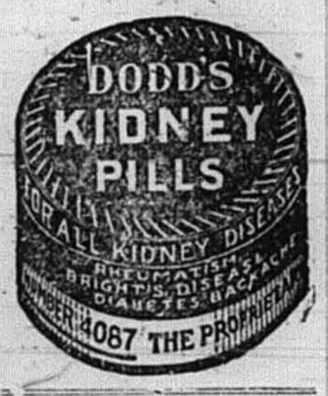
Deep in our hearts there's a picture
Of dear father laid to rest,
In memories frame we shall keep it,
Because he was one of the best.

Our lips cannot speak how we loved him,
Our hearts cannot tell what to say;
God only know how we miss him
As we travel along life's way.

When a father breathes his last farewell,
The blow is more than tongue can tell;
Home is quite another place
Without the smile of father's face,

Do not ask us if we miss him,
No one knows the bitter pain
We have suffered since we lost him,
Life has never been the same.

Inserted by his daughter,
—CARRIE.



Published By Authority

His Majesty the King has been pleased to issue His Exequator, empowering Monsieur Walter Thurneer to act as Consul-General of Switzerland at Montreal with District including Newfoundland.

His Majesty the King, by Warrant and Royal Sign Manual, has been pleased to appoint the following gentlemen to be Members of the Legislative Council of this Colony:

Charles Pascoe Ayre, Esquire, M.B.E.

Frederick Charles Alderdice, Esquire,

John Alexander Robinson, Esquire, LL.D., M.B.E.

His Excellency the Governor-in-Council has been pleased to appoint Mr. George B. Mifflin, to be a member of the Church of England Board of Education for the District of Port Union, in place of Mr. H. W. Quinton, left the District.

Mr. Charles Cramm, jr., (Lower Small Point), to be a member of the Methodist Board of Education for the District of Blackhead, in place of Mr. Josiah Cramm, retired.

Mr. Chesley Morris, to be a member of the Methodist Board of Education for the District of Lower Island Cove, in place of Mr. Hedley Morris, retired.

Mr. William Coles, (Broklyn), to be a member of the Methodist Board of Education for the District of Musgravetown, in place of Mr. Albert C. Pye, left the District.

Mr. Isaac Penney, (Benton), to be an additional member of the Methodist Board of Education for the District of Port Blandford.

Dept. of the Colonial Secretary.
March 24th, 1925.

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Council Doings

The following officers were elected at Winter Brook Local Council for the year 1925:

James Russell—Chairman, re-elected.

Frank Pike—Deputy Chairman, re-elected.

Heber Ralph—Secretary, re-elected.

John Fitzgerald—Treasurer, re-elected.

—o—

The following officers were elected for Trinity East, Local Council for the year 1925:

George Jones—Chairman, re-elected.

George Fowlow—Deputy Chairman, elected.

Colin Evelley—Secretary, re-elected.

James Evelley—Treasurer, elected.

—o—

OBITUARY

(Editor Fishermen's Advocate.)

THOMAS TIZZARD.

Dear Sir,Will you kindly allow me space in your esteemed paper the "Advocate", to record the death of a well known and respected resident in the person of Thomas Tizzard of Friday's Bay, who passed to the Great Beyond on Saturday March 7th.

We believe that he is gone where it is far better, as his life here on earth was one of service for his Master. He was always found where the good work was going on—in the Sunday School, and Cottage meeting. The scholars of the school and Orangemen paid their last tribute to him, affording splendid evidence of the deepest sympathy with the bereaved ones.

The funeral which took place on Tuesday, March 10th, was conducted by the Rev. G. L. Morgan. The deceased reached the ripe old age of 87 years, and was laid to rest in the Methodist Cemetery.

Servant of God well done.
Thy glorious warfares past;
The battle's fought, the race is won,
And thou art crowned at last.

—ATTENTIVE.
Friday's Bay, March 16, 1925.

—o—

ALICE FITZGERALD.

Dear Sir,—Please grant me space in your valuable paper the "Advocate" to record the death of my dear cousin, Alice Fitzgerald, who departed this life and fortified by the rites of the Holy Church on March 19th., at the early age of 18 years. She suffered for a long time with that dread disease, consumption, but bore her sufferings patiently to the end.

Left to mourn their sad loss, are father, mother, two brothers and two sisters, one at home the other residing at Salem, Mass., besides a large circle of relatives and friends to whom the whole community extends its heartfelt sympathy. She was laid to rest in the Roman Catholic Cemetery at King's Cove. May her soul rest in peace.—R. I. P.

Inserted by her cousin,
—NORA D. FITZGERALD.
Keels, B. B., Mar. 19, 1925.

—o—

MARIA BALLETT.

Dear Sir,—Please allow me space in your most valuable paper, for a few remarks concerning the death of Maria Ballett, who was burned to death in her own house on March 10th. She leaves to mourn their sad loss, father, two brothers and one sister. We believe she is gone to be with Jesus.

She was laid to rest in the R. C. Cemetery on the same day.

Thanking you for space,
I remain,
Yours truly,
—SYMPATHIZER.
St. Anthony, Mar. 20, 1925.

The Advocate extends deepest sympathy to all the bereaved ones.

ANNOUNCEMENT.

The marriage of Miss Alice Bertha Butt, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Butt of Bonne Bay, to Mr. Simeon Crocker of Trout River, takes place at Bonne Bay on April 13th.

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