

## The Fijian Fire Walk.

Written for The Western Home Monthly by W. R. Gilbert, Calgary.

There are several variants of the legend describing the origin of the Fijian fire walk, but the chief points in the story are the same in each. The power of walking unhurt through the fiery furnace is confined among the Fijians to the little tribe that inhabit the Island of Mbenga, which lies off the coast of the main island, not far from Sava.

It was Na Galita, a remote ancestor of the present tribe to whom the power was originally given. One day this chief was fishing for eels amongst the rocks off the sea shore. His method was that of the Maories of New Zealand. He had a hook at the end of a stick, and inserted it into the nooks and crannies of the rocks just below low water mark. Several times he pulled out a fish; but on one occasion he was astonished to find that there was on the hook, not an eel, but the god of the island. The captured deity begged for mercy. "I shall make you so strong," he said to Na Galita, "that in war no one will be able to withstand you."

"I am already the strongest man in the island, and I fear no one," was the reply. "Then," said the god, "I shall make your canoe the fastest that sails in the sea." This bribe too was ineffectual, for, said the chief, "there is none now that can pass my canoe." "Then I shall give you as wife the most beautiful woman on the island." "She is mine already," said Na Galita. "I am very fond of her and desire no other." Further offers were made and rejected, and the chief was about to slay the god, who, finally in despair, said, "Oh, Na Galita, if you will only let me go, I will give you and your descendants the power to walk through the 'masawe oven' unharmed." To this Na Galita agreed, and since that time

this wonderful power has remained in the tribe.

The "masawe" is one of the cabbage trees. Throughout the South Sea Islands its succulent sugary rhizomes, or roots are cooked, and eaten by the natives. To the Maories it is known as Ti, and I have seen it growing in some deserted plantations in Auckland, New Zealand. The oven in which it is cooked is known to the Fijians as "love," and it is similar to the Maori "umu." The fire ceremony is known as "vilavilavevo." The oven is usually circular in shape and from 25 feet to 30 feet across, and 6 feet to 8 feet deep. Preparations for the ceremony are commenced three days beforehand, for the stones with which the bottom of the oven is paved must be made white hot. An immense fire is kindled upon them, and kept burning for a day or two before.

It is some years since I first witnessed the ceremony, of which I will attempt to give a description.

Having been taken in charge by one of the head men, and led towards the oven, suddenly and as if pandemonium had been let loose, the air was filled with savage yells, a throng of natives surrounded the oven, and in a most ingenious and effective way proceeded to drag out the smoldering and unburnt logs, and cast them some distance away.

Large loops of incombustible lianas attached to long poles were thrown over the burning chunks, much after the manner of the head hunters of New Guinea, when securing their prey. A twist or two around the loop securely entangled the logs, which were then dragged out by the united efforts of scores of natives, who all the while were shouting out some wild rhythmic

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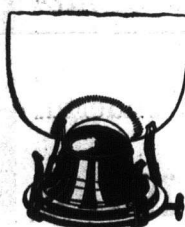
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