

**Fire
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The
Burning
Facts**

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Dr. K. Indra Kumar

Illustrated with photographs

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**FIRE WALKING—THE
BURNING FACTS**

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FOREWORD

This is the kind of book that will be of absorbing interest to students and observers of the phenomena of fire-walking and other controversial physical acts performed on the human body, for which contemporary medical science has not provided rationally acceptable answers.

The Author has presented well documented facts and authenticated reports on the above mentioned exploits which in the past have drawn little more than derision from some scientifically orientated sceptics. Now, however, researchers with an unbiased approach are, with the disciplined caution worthy of research students, beginning to show more open-mindedness in these and other allied phenomena.

Physiology and Anatomy according to the Western School have not been able to provide accurate explanations for conditions like hypnotherapy, acupuncture, hysterical manifestations that include pseudo-cyesis (spurious pregnancy), paralysis and sensory disturbances that do not conform to accepted physiological and anatomical premises, voluntary yogic control over some involuntary somatic and visceral functions of the human body, extra perceptory sensation, occult sciences, to mention a few. Because of the lack of that information, to totally deny their existence and validity is, therefore to limit the ever-expanding frontiers of the human brain and body. As a matter of fact there exists in the human brain areas whose functions have not yet been accurately assessed or clearly defined by Physiologists. Refusal to accept the validity of even one authenticated case of para-normal phenomena merely echoes the nineteenth century conflict between dogmatic materialism and scientific rationalism. A notable case is the materialistic view-point of 19th century science which used to be fundamentalistic, and authoritarian, but this view was exploded by the splitting of the atom. In the words of an eminent philosopher, an ideal scientific approach must take note of all types of experience—emotional, intellectual and scientific. Viewed in this context the facts and observations presented in this book deserve objective evaluation. It therefore claims the attention of unbiassed scientific enquiry.

Dr. P. R. THIAGARAJAH |

F.R.C.S., M.R.C.P. (Edin.),

D.R.C.O.G. (Eng.)

PREFACE

When Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda made a request to me to go around the City of Colombo in the University van (fitted with a public address system) and advertise the Medical Centenary Exhibition, I consented.

I invited two colleagues to join me in the shouting expedition.

I decided that Dr. Carlo Fonseka's fire walking demonstrations should be played up.

It was a few days since the commencement of the Exhibition, but I must confess that up till then I had myself not witnessed even a single demonstration conducted by Dr. Fonseka. However, as a Medical student, the image of Dr. Fonseka — the Physiology lecturer had such a convincing influence over me that I did not for a moment pause to doubt the validity of his theory. I took it for granted.

And so — morning, afternoon and evening, while we drove around the streets of Colombo and its suburbs, I was shouting ebullient eulogies about Dr. Fonseka's splendid discovery.

My first glimpse of his fire walking demonstration was about four or five days before the Exhibition drew to a close.

I was horrified !

What an anti-climax it was !

A mountain had laboured to bring forth a mouse !

That's how I felt about the fire walking demonstration I saw.

However, my advertising sessions in the City continued. But the assignment from then onwards was a battle against my conscience. While my mouth blazoned away the encomium, a great fire was raging in my mind. I felt that I was misleading the Public with my eulogies.

With a heavy mind I completed, up to the last day of the Exhibition, the assignment that I had undertaken. I felt that I had fulfilled my duty towards the Medical Faculty ; that I had justified the trust and confidence placed on me by Dr. Kodagoda.

I shall therefore have no hesitation in saying that I approached the fire-walking controversy with an utterly unbiassed mind ; that I am writing this book " with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right."

Dr. K. INDRA KUMAR.

Colombo North General Hospital,
Ragama.



Devotee Fire Walking
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1

Fantastic Feats of Faith

“The drums suddenly beat even faster and a great hush followed the devotee’s first step into the pit . . . A human being was walking on an oven of embers hot enough to roast him.”

A fire of logs had just been started. It was just before midnight and the pilgrims were slowly swarming into the temple courtyard.

The flames leapt fifteen feet in the air from the pile of thick logs about four feet in height and fifteen feet long. Jets of scarlet sparks spouted into the jungle sky, towards the yellow full moon. So intense was the heat that no one was able to sit nearer than twenty feet from the fire.

Fire-walking, the climax of the annual festival in the jungle shrine of Kataragama, was to commence in a few hours.

Galvanised pipe barricades had been erected around, well wide of the area where the logs were blazing. The logs had been set alight in line with the entrance to the temple where the image of the Kataragama deity (Lord Murugan) was enshrined.

An imaginary line drawn down the centre of the blazing logs and produced through about 25ft. of the courtyard and the inner sanctum of the temple impinged on the image of the god in the sanctum sanctorum.

Later, the devotees were to walk across the middle of the bed of fire, having no difficulty in concentrating on the image.

Thousands of eager, devoted pilgrims were seated around the huge bonfire in that moonlit temple courtyard. Others were still pouring in. Several eager men were precariously perched on the 12ft. wall, hoping to have an uninterrupted view of the proceedings. In the triangular niches in the walls of the courtyard flickered small oil lamps.

The minutes were ticking away. About 3 a.m. the firewalkers left the temple for the holy river, the Menik Ganga, about 50 yards away. They were to take the traditional sacred bath—the last act of purification before fire-walking. For over two weeks they had been abstaining from liquor and non-vegetarian food and had gone through special rites in preparation for the big event.

By now the blazing inferno had been transformed into a conical pile of truculent cinders and sporadic jets of orange flames. Several men, using 15ft. poles and bamboos as pokers, then levered to one side of the fire all the residual stumps of flaming faggots.

Sweat streamed off their bodies in spite of the length of the poles. The fierce heap of embers was spread out to form a bed 18ft. long and 7ft. wide with a thickness of about nine inches.

Though this operation had taken about thirty minutes there was no doubt that the embers were still searingly hot. The air above them shimmered, the heat rising with such intensity that it struck one in the face like a physical blow if one stood within 15ft. of the edge of the bed. It was quite certain that under normal circumstances the embers would scorch and burn any flesh that touched them.

The ' Fire Bath '

The other fire-walkers formed a queue and in an unbroken line they trekked with firm steps across the bed of fire, some dancing as they went. Others paused momentarily in the middle to scoop up some embers with their bare hands and pour them over their head and shoulders in a " fire bath."

All the time the heat waves could be seen rippling above their heads and causing spectators seated 15 ft. away to wince. But no sign of discomfort was visible on the faces of the fire-walkers and no odour of seared flesh emanated from them. None of them even gave a whimper of pain.



THE FLYING KAVADI: With the hooks threatening to tear through the tissues of the back, this devotee propels himself to and fro as if he were on a garden swing.

As the women walked across, their bright red sarees dangled dangerously close to the glowing embers, but the cotton material was not even scorched. As the last devotee (a total of about one hundred devotees must have walked) completed his fire-walk buckets of water were flung on the bed of fire. The ceremony had ended.

Several hours later I had the opportunity of looking at the feet of some of the men who had walked the embers. They were unmarked. Some of them had thick and horny soles while others had soft soles as of those who habitually don footwear.

The fire-walking ceremony was preceded by several astonishing feats of flesh piercing.

A wooden scaffold about 12 ft. high had been erected. A devotee lay on his abdomen on a table below the scaffold, his hands clasped in front of his head in worship. The drummers and pipers got going as the piercing was about to start.

Holy ash was applied on the devotee's back. Then, out of a sack (if anything on earth was unsterile, it was this) several steel hooks, each about 6 inches long and about the thickness of a lead pencil, were taken out.

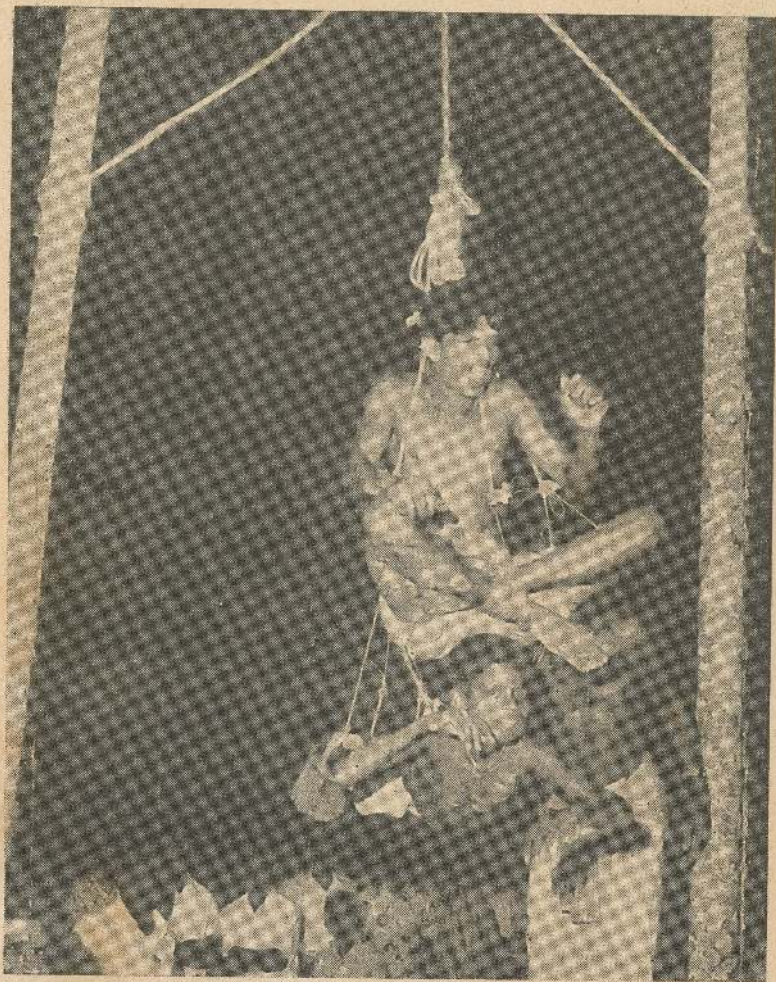
The skin and a certain amount of the underlying tissue on the devotee's back were "pinched up" and one by one eight big hooks were forced through. There wasn't a drop of blood, there was not even any wincing of the face. The devotee, calm and serene continued to be frozen in his earlier pose. Off and on his lips chanted the name of Lord Murugan. The hooking completed, he was in a form of ecstasy, his entire body undergoing fine tremors.

Crazy, Incredible

Through ropes attached to the end of the hooks the devotee was now raised in suspension from the scaffold. As this was done the devotee was even instructing the others to raise him higher and higher. It was crazy, it was incredible, it had to be seen to be believed!

Floating in mid-air like a bird, he began to rock himself forwards and backwards like a child propelling himself lustily on a garden swing! On he went with gathering momentum and it looked as if the hooks would at any moment tear through the tissues of his back under the strain of his weight and the velocity of the motion.

After about an hour the man was lowered and the hooks were pulled out. There wasn't a drop of blood as holy-ash was again applied to the man's back. This phenomenon is called a "flying kavadi."



THE DOUBLE FLYING KAVADI: A youth just out of his teens is hooked up from the scaffold and a boy of ten is in turn hooked up and suspended from the swinging youth.



A METAL SPEAR RUNNING THROUGH BOTH CHEEKS : *The devotee is unmoved as a Doctor examines him.*

Several others took their turn at the scaffold. A youth just out of his teens was hooked up and a young boy of ten was in turn hooked up in suspension from the youth to complete a frightful-looking "double flying kavadi."

Some devotees arrived at Kataragama hoisted on mobile scaffolds erected on bullock carts. They had been in suspension for as long as eight hours as the carts had wended their way through several miles of jungle roads.

Some devotees had numerous small hooks driven in rows through their skin. Others had tridents and spears piercing both cheeks while yet others had their tongues pierced. Some walked on nailed wooden sandals with each sole resting on about twenty-five pointed steel nails. But again—no pain, no blood !

These spears, tridents and hooks were never sterilised, the men never had tetanus toxoid, anti-tetanus serum, anti-gas gangrene serum, surgical excision of dead tissue or doses of prophylactic penicillin.

How is it then that the devotee never bleeds, has no pain, does not develop neurogenic shock, tetanus, gas gangrene or bacterial infection? For years medical science has been baffled by the feats of these devotees.

Self-Mortification

Fire-walking and flesh piercing are acts of self-mortification performed annually at Kataragama and other shrines in Ceylon. Some do these acts in fulfilment of vows.

The deity at Kataragama draws devotees not only from all parts of Ceylon but even from abroad. This deity is Lord Murugan, the son of Lord Shiva, the supreme Hindu god. And so to this jungle shrine, situated 188 miles from Colombo and about 12 miles interior to Tissamaharama, a village in the south-east coast of Ceylon, thousands of devotees flock daily from far and near. At the annual festival held in July-August, this jungle is a surging mass of humanity.

The rich, the pauper, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims—they all come to Kataragama to pay homage to Lord Murugan and to pray for the success of their ventures.

(Excerpts from the author's article in the "Times of Ceylon" Annual—1971)

2

A Fiery Controversy sparked off— in an Air-Conditioned Theatre!

“The Rationalist Ambassador’s claims are thus proved to be nothing but a shameful episode of shamming by no less a person than the Vice-President of the Rationalists’ Association—Dr. Carlo Fonseka !”

The foregoing chapter gives an indication of the position fire walking ceremonies occupy in the religious customs of the Ceylonese.

However, a coterie of individuals claiming to be the last word in anything that is sane, sensible, scientific and rational, decided to disturb the hornet’s nest.

The following excerpts, appearing under the caption “Fire-walking debunked,” from “the Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador 1971 ” would sum up the attitude of these rational men towards an age old ritual :

“ Even from prehistoric times credulous persons, under temporary insanity induced by delusional religious beliefs and fervour, used to mortify themselves by walking on fire or torturing their bodies at Hindu temples and “ Buddhists ” devales. The devotees—the mentally deranged performers as well as most of the spectators believe such feats as miracles performed with the assistance of gods or demons.

“ Dr. Carlo Fonseka, Lecturer in Physiology, Medical Faculty, University of Ceylon, Colombo, a Vice-President of the Ceylon Rationalist Association, has now conclusively proved that gods, demons have nothing to do with firewalking by conducting fool-proof scientific demonstrations twice a day for several days during the Centenary Celebrations of the Colombo Medical School . . . ”

Dr. Carlo Fonseka's **FOOL - PROOF** demonstrations held twice a day had **CONCLUSIVELY PROVED** that gods and demons had nothing to do with firewalking ! That was the rational claim of the Rationalist Ambassador ! Let us proceed to analyse the worthiness of these claims.

The following is an eye-witness account of one of Dr. Fonseka's “ fool-proof ” demonstrations which appeared in the Ceylon Daily News of 6.9.70 :

“ FIREWALKING MYTHS ARE DEBUNKED ”

“ Have a drink Lionel,” said Dr. Carlo Fonseka of the Colombo Medical Faculty pouring out a bumper drink of arrack for his laboratory attendant at the Medical Exhibition last night. Lionel gulped it down and then proceeded to walk on a bed of glowing cinders quite calmly and casually. He walked over the cinders the temperature of which was recorded at 400 degrees Centigrade by a thermo — couple, and there were no burns on his soles.

The idea of the demonstration by the Physiology Department of the Colombo Medical Faculty was to show that fire-walking was not a spiritual phenomenon. Traditional fire-walking, said Dr. Fonseka, demanded certain religious observances such as abstinence from alcohol. This demonstration was to show that no such observances were necessary. In fact, he said, firewalking depended on two factors. The thickness of the soles (nothing to do with souls) and the duration of contact between the soles and the glowing cinders. Observations at the Kataragama firewalking ceremony held recently showed that the period of contact between the soles and the cinders of 100 firewalkers was only three-tenths of a second. This was not sufficient to cause a burn.”

However, this version of the correspondent of the Ceylon Daily News did not appear to have been shared by all those spectators who had witnessed Dr. Fonseka's demonstrations.

Thus it was not surprising that one of the spectators — a Doctor — wrote to the “ Daily Mirror ” giving his own impressions of the demonstrations held by Dr. Fonseka. This article, which appeared in the “ Daily Mirror ” of the 10th of September, 1970, was indeed a hard hitting challenge to Dr. Fonseka.

The caption read : " Doctor ! Do you dare ? Asks Dr. V— Another challenge to fire walking Dr. Carlo Fonseka to do it the real hard way."

The following are excerpts from the article :

" I have followed with great interest your so-called research into the physiological (and not spiritual) basis of fire-walking. I have also witnessed your " great race " across a bed (or rather a small seat !) of cinders (or rather of ash spotted with cinders) at a " second show."

At your show I observed the following :

- (1) Though the metal base was a foot long a single layer of ash and cinders (less than 1 inch in height) was spread over only a length of 4 feet, one foot at either end being free.
- (2) To clear this, your group of fire-walkers had to place only two steps on the ash-cinder bed. That is, the right and left foot each came into contact with this bed only once. In other words this was like placing the foot for an inkling of a moment on the ash and cinder and immediately quelling the heat by transferring the foot on to the cold cement floor of a well air-conditioned theatre.
- (3) Soon after you had finished the " great race " I examined the " bed " and found that not more than 5 or 6 cinders (each about the size of a 25 cts. coin) each heavily insulated at the sides by ash, could have come into contact with the sole of the foot.

Conditions

The conditions that prevailed at a fire-walking ceremony which I witnessed some time back at Kataragama were as follows :

- (1) A trench was dug about .3 feet deep and about 20 feet long.
- (2) The trench was filled with logs and then another layer of logs was piled on top of this to a height of about 1 foot above ground level.
- (3) This was lit at about 5 p.m. and the fire-walking commenced at about 3 a.m. on a red hot closely packed bed of cinders which generated enough heat to keep the people who were watching at least 10 feet away from the bed. (This is in contrast to your show where sophisticated ladies and gentlemen sat in the cool comfort of an air-conditioned room, barely 2 feet away from the bed of ashes and cinders).

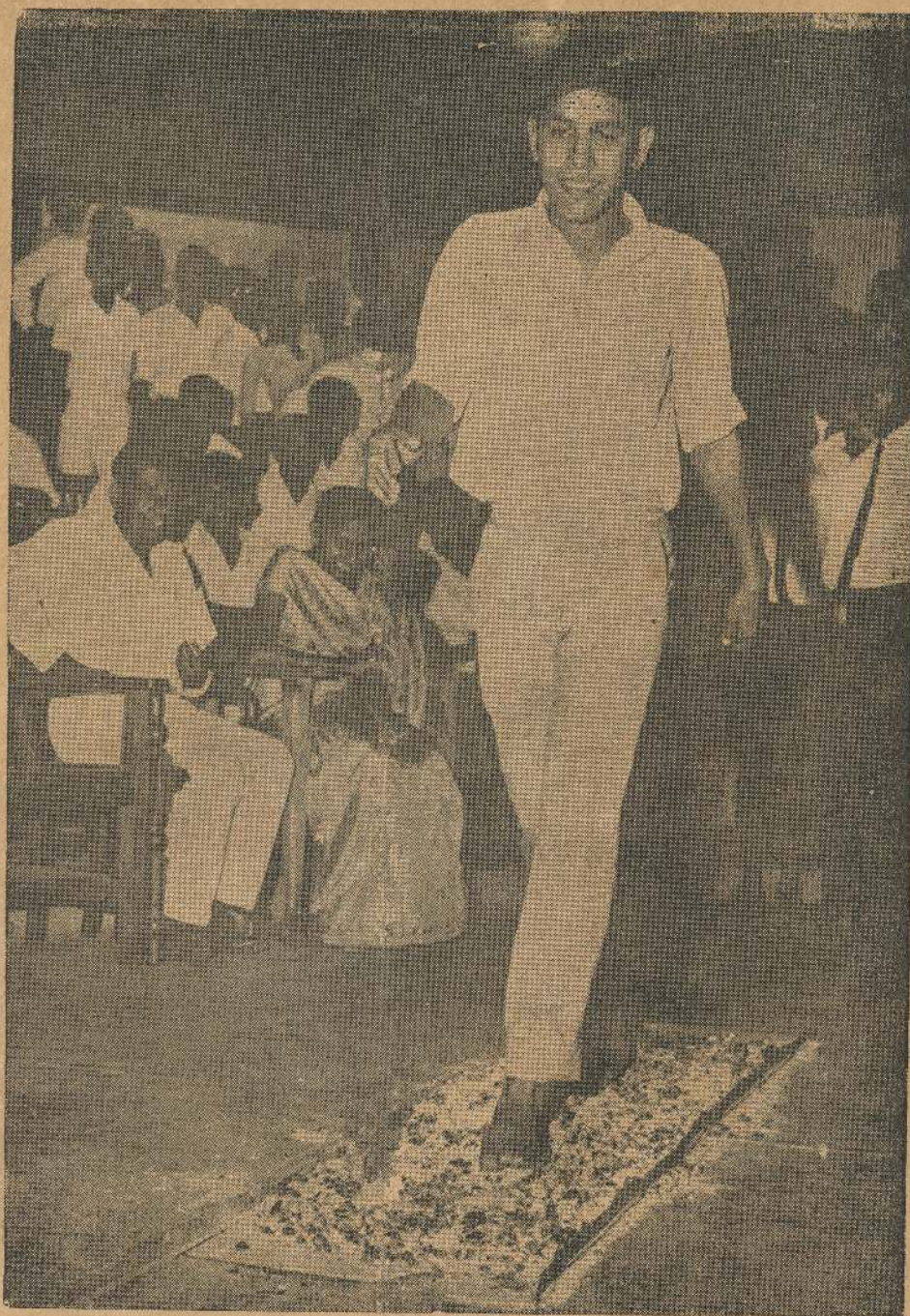
Dear Dr. Fonseka, as a rationalist and a physiologist you will agree that your " show " was conducted under conditions which were remote from those that prevail at a fire-walking ceremony. You conduct a " micro-mini experiment " and expect us to believe that IT IS THE SAME as genuine fire-walking.

In these circumstances, I challenge you to fire walk before the Medical Exhibition is over under the conditions which I have described above.

That would be the most truthful, convincing and conclusive test of your theory than all that complicated timing, counting of steps etc. over which you claim to have laboured. Surely by now your " show " priced at 25 cents per head would have raked-in enough shekels to undertake this venture before the exhibition is over . . . "

Carlo's Confession

Dr. Carlo Fonseka responded to this article by writing personally



The hop, step and jump fire walking demonstrations of Dr. Fonseka's team were held in an Air-conditioned theatre. Note the size of the bed of fire.

to his critic through the Editor of the "Daily Mirror." The following is the full text of his letter :—

UNIVERSITY OF CEYLON, COLOMBO

Department of Physiology
Tel. 96421 - 96242
Ext. 2

Faculty of Medicine,
Kynsey Road,
Colombo 8.
14th September, 1970.

Dr. K. V.,
C/o The Editor,
Daily Mirror,
Times Building,
Colombo.

Dear Dr. V.,

Your criticisms of our fire-walking demonstrations are reasonable. But I am sorry that you should have thought that I expected you to believe that my demonstration was the same as genuine fire-walking. I didn't. All I was concerned to do during the demonstration was to explain the theoretical basis of my explanation of fire-walking.

*You have said that I raced through the bed of ash spotted with cinders. Fair enough. In this connection I would refer you to page 52 of *Paul Wirz's famous book "Kataragama, the Holiest Place in Ceylon."*

I should be delighted if you would drop in to my lab sometime for a chat. I could then explain my hypothesis and the data on which I base it. You are welcome to criticise me as severely as you can.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

(Sgd.) Dr. CARLO FONSEKA.

From this reply the following points emerge clearly :

- (1) That the twice-a-day demonstrations held by Dr. Fonseka were **NOT** the same as genuine fire-walking. Dr. Fonseka did not expect anybody to believe that it was so.
- (2) The demonstrations were merely to **EXPLAIN** the theoretical basis of Dr. Fonseka's explanation of fire walking.

Therefore, as "the Rationalist Ambassador" had claimed, these demonstrations cannot be said to be **FOOLPROOF** or cannot be considered to have **CONCLUSIVELY PROVED** that gods and demons are essential for fire walking !

*See Chapter 11—"The Prostitution of Paul Wirz's Book."

To explain is one matter ! To conclusively prove by fool-proof methods is yet another matter !

“ The Rationalist Ambassador's ” claims are thus proved to be nothing but a shameful episode of shaming by no less a person than the Vice-President of the Rationalists' Association—Dr. Carlo Fonseka !

3

A Footpath in the Bed of Fire!

“ Soon after about five people ran through the fire, there was created in the middle, a footpath about one foot in width running from one end to another. Do you have the audacity to deny that Mr. Dharmasena (after consuming a sausage and arrack) brazenly walked along this footpath—willingly or otherwise ?”

Criticism and ridicule were mounting against Dr. Fonseka's hop-step-and jump firewalks in Air conditioned theatres.

It must have become very obvious to him that if his prestige was to be salvaged, somehow or other he had to wrangle a “ bigger show ” before the exhibition was over.

And so on the last day of the exhibition an attempt was made to prepare a bigger bed of fire in the Medical Faculty quadrangle.

Referring to this show, Dr. Fonseka claimed later on in “ the Proceedings of the Twenty sixth Annual Session of the Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science ” thus :

“ These subjects also walked a bed of glowing embers 15 feet long, 4 feet wide and 2 inches thick without injury”

What really happened? Did Dr. Fonseka's subjects really succeed in walking a firebed of these dimensions without getting burnt?

The following letter from a reader which appeared in the "Daily Mirror" of 28.9.70 bares the whole truth:

**" FIRE-WALKING—OPEN LETTER TO
DR. FONSEKA "**

" A doctor was questioning a patient at a mental Asylum to see whether he was fit enough to be released.

" What are you going to do when you leave this Asylum ? "

" I'm going to get a sling shot," said the patient, " And I will come back here and smash up every blessed window in this place."

The patient was naturally not discharged. After treating him for six more months the Doctor questioned him again, this time confident that he will be fit to go. The same question was repeated.

" Well I'm going to get a job," the patient replied.

" Fine," said the doctor. " Then what ? "

" I'm going to rent out an apartment."

" Very good."

" Then I will meet, a beautiful girl."

" Excellent."

" I will take her up to my apartment and raise her skirt."

" Normal, perfectly natural—Proceed."

" Then, I'll lay my hands on her panties."

" Yes, yes, what next ? "

" Then, I will pull out the elastic from her panties, make a sling shot out of it, come back here and smash up every blessed window in the place ! "

One cannot help recalling this anecdote after having seen your so-called attempt on 12.9.70 at a fire-walking demonstration at the Medical Faculty quadrangle to simulate in some ways the conditions which prevailed at ceremonies held in the devales and temples. For, after having made a " mini-attempt " in this direction (a graduation from your earlier " micro-mini-experiments," to use the words of Dr. V.) you annulled it by using a thermocouple to measure the temperature of the fire and then took steps to bring it down to a degree that was suitable to you.

Is this how one simulates conditions prevailing at fire-walking ceremonies? Are you seriously trying to suggest that the priests and pousaris, theros and kapuralas supervising the fire-walking ceremonies in this country are armed with sophisticated thermocouples to measure the temperature of the fire and try to bring down the temperature by smothering the fire?

This was precisely what you and your assistants did on 12.9.70.

When you entered the barb-wired "arena" the time was 10 p.m. and for the next half-hour your assistants were involved in a process of measuring and re-measuring the temperature; smothering with bamboo sticks and iron rods the bed of embers all the time. The crowd naturally became unruly and even shouted out not to extinguish the fire and stage an "angure paageema" (coal-walk.)

Having converted a red-hot bed of cinders into a bed of ash, charcoals and cinders you got on to a stage and held forth for about 20 minutes, even though the crowd yelled and screamed and demanded you to stop your "kaivaru" (big talk) before the fire went out completely. They were annoyed that the cinders were turning into charcoals. By the time the fire-walk started it was about 10 minutes to 11 p.m.

The temperature had gone down so much by now that your helpers and students were squatting barely 3 feet away from the fire. This is in contrast to fire-walking ceremonies where the heat drives the spectators at least 15 feet away from the edge of the fire.

Your helpers spread out the cinders into a very thin film about 1/2" thick. This is in contrast to fire-walking at temples where often a trench is dug, filled with logs and set ablaze so that when fire-walking commences, at every step taken, the foot gets buried to some extent and even the thin upper surface of the foot comes into contact with the cinders.

Sir, will you confess that you made use of a special type of firewood for your mission—logs from a particular species of tree? This was to make sure that the cinders do not adhere to the soles of the feet. May I put it to you that for fire-walking ceremonies, the wood from any tree is used, there being no such painstaking choice of wood.

At your fire-walking demonstration, soon after about five people ran through the fire, there was created in the middle, a footpath about one foot in width running from one end to another. Do you have the audacity to deny that Mr. Dharmasena (after consuming a sausage and arrack) brazenly walked along this footpath—willingly or otherwise?

May I ask you why you did not have a bed of cinders—18 feet long at this quadrangle demonstration? After all it was your suggestion that the "bed" at Kataragama was 18 feet long. Since you were doing it in a big way, you could have had a bed 18 feet long, isn't it? There was ample space on either end of the "bed" in your quadrangle.

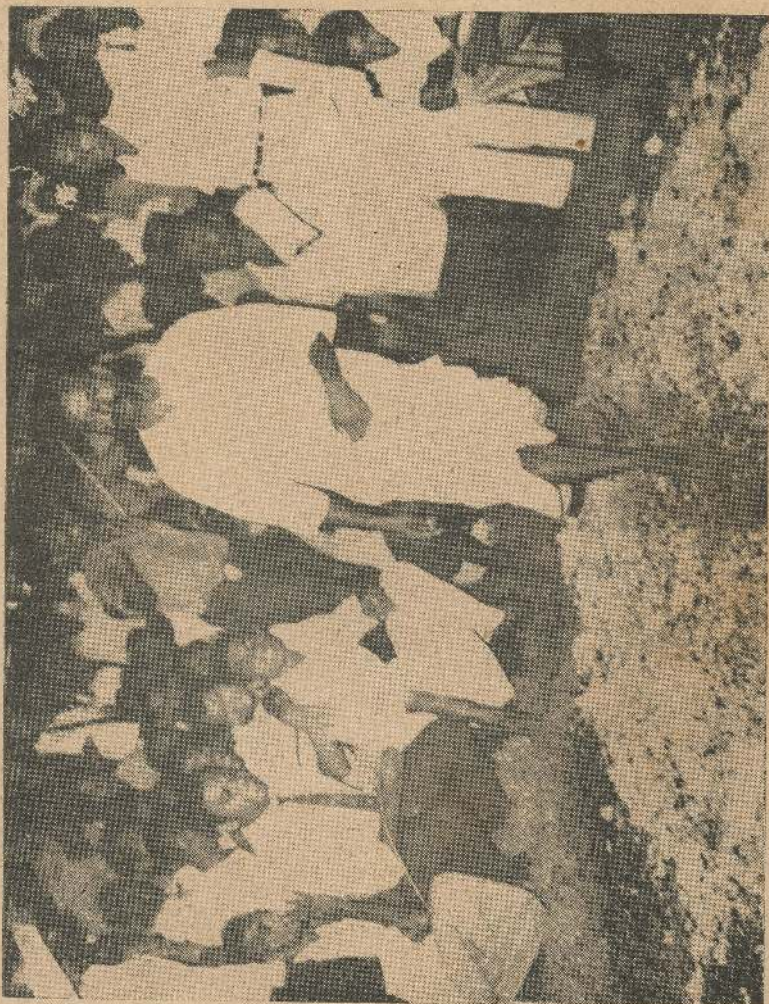
Did you have a team of doctors ready to examine the soles of the fire-walkers after the walk? What then is the guarantee that their soles were not burnt? Am I wrong if I conclude that you kept this quadrangle demonstration for the very last day of the exhibition so that in case the fire-walkers got burnt the question will not arise as to what to do for the demonstration on the following day?

May I also ask you why you did not run at the quadrangle demonstration? After all, you ran so well in the air-conditioned room fire-walks held previously.

You said then: "The thicker the sole, the slower one can walk. Conversely the thinner the sole, the faster one has to run."

Accordingly you ran 6 feet across the cinders in the air-conditioned theatre.

Going by your theory, if you had run at the same speed this time too across the 13 feet long bed you could have cleared it. But you did not walk or run at all. Am I to add the following corollary to your theory—"If one does not walk or run he has no sole (or soul?)?"



Mr. Dharmasena sipped some arrack, swallowed a sausage, tied up his sarong and brazenly walked along the footpath in the middle of the bed of fire. The close proximity of the spectators to the bed of fire (author on the left) suggests that it could not have been very hot.

You will therefore agree with me that the real test will be for you to accept one of the challenges you have received and firewalk or fire-run.

The Junior Minister of Cultural Affairs challenged you to firewalk on 15.9.70 at a temple fire-walking ceremony. This was an excellent opportunity for you to prove your theory. But you have declined to accept this challenge on the pretext that you are tired. May I ask you whether your tiredness will last all the fire-walking ceremonies for the year come to an end ?

You need not be scared of fire-walking at a temple ceremony because God will show mercy even towards a rationalist like you or your boss, Mr. Abraham Kovoov (who sneaked in a show at your exhibition with or without the sanction of the organisers of the exhibition)."

RAJA KANAGASABAI,
(Cultural Secretary,
Vivekananda Society),
Colombo 13.

4

Science or Soap-box ?

“ Should Dr. Fonseka, who put forward a theory to explain fire-walking under the name of Science, descend to such unscientific and crude contests to establish his theory ? ”

In the midst of the fire-walking controversy Dr. Carlo Fonseka announced that the Physiology Department of the Colombo Medical Faculty would accept challenges to prove that fire-walking is not a spiritual phenomenon by walking on a fire-bed prepared by outsiders.

He said that challenges were pouring in and that he would ultimately select one challenge which would satisfy the condition of all the challengers.

Thus, the “Observer Magazine Edition” of 8. 9. 1970 reported under the heading: “Fire-walking: Junior Minister, monk accept doctor’s challenge, ” as follows:

“ Mr. Somaweera Chandrasiri, Junior Minister of Cultural Affairs has accepted the challenge made by Dr. Carlo Fonseka, lecturer of the Medical Faculty to prove that fire -walking is a spiritual phenomenon.

“ Dr. Fonseka’s challenge has a proviso that a fire should be provided by the party accepting it, and that he and other members of the Physiology Faculty will walk the fire after one devotee had trod on the embers.

"The Viharadhipathi of the Lunawa devale, Ven. Galkisse Sri Visuddhananda Nayaka Thera has also accepted Dr. Carlo Fonseka's challenge.

"Mr. Somaweera Chandrasiri invites Dr. Carlo Fonseka to walk on the fire at the Ganevatte Devale, on Poya day, September 15.

"We shall provide Dr. Fonseka with whatever drinks and meat he would require," Mr. Chandrasiri told the 'Observer' yesterday....."

Muthukuda's Challenge Accepted

On 3-10-70 Dr. Fonseka announced through the "Ceylon Daily News" that he had accepted the challenge of one Mr. B. D. Muthukuda.

The "Daily News" reported it as follows:

"The Physiology Department of the Colombo University has accepted the challenge of one of Ceylon's well-known fire-walkers, Mr. B. D. Muthukuda, to demonstrate that fire-walking is not a spiritual phenomenon.

"Dr. Carlo Fonseka of the Physiology Department said yesterday he would allow Mr. Muthukuda to choose the venue and date for the demonstration. Over seventy challenges were received by them since they gave a demonstration of 'Scientific firewalking' at the Medical Exhibition last month but they picked Mr. Muthukuda's challenge because he was one of Ceylon's leading exponents.

"The firewalking ceremonies at Kataragama Maha Devale have been under the leadership of Mr. Muthukuda from 1951 to 1962, Dr. Fonseka said."

Contest Unscientific

One religious organisation styled "The Society of Devotees of God Kataragama" was however very sceptical about the usefulness of such contests. They felt that a contest of this nature would be an absurdity from the point of view of drawing scientific conclusions.

If the devotees were to walk the fire first and Dr. Fonseka's personnel to walk next there would be discrepancies in the temperature of the bed of fire on each occasion. The devotees would be walking at a higher temperature than Dr. Fonseka's men. This has to be expected because a bed of fire glowing at such a high temperature is all the time losing heat to the surrounding atmosphere (which is at normal "room temperature") quite fast.

Furthermore, if it is simply a question of "I can do what you can do", what is the fate of the "thickness of the soles" factor? Isn't that factor being fully ignored? And what about the "duration of contact"? What is the scientific use of such a contest if the speed of walk and the number of steps (from which the duration of contact of the soles with the fire is calculated) are not monitored?



J. D. Kuruppu

... Contests were crude and unscientific ... so he organised the world's largest ever scientific investigation into firewalking.

Should Dr. Fonseka, who put forward a theory to explain fire-walking under the name of science, descend to such unscientific and crude contests to establish his theory?

These were the questions posed by this society which was headed by a fifty year old Accountant—Mr. J. D. Kuruppu.

World's Largest Scientific investigation

This Society decided to investigate on a scientific basis, the capabilities of fire-walkers. They announced their decision to conduct a fire-walking ceremony in Colombo and invite scientists, doctors and prominent men to hold a full scale investigation.

That would give the society a chance to put to the test Dr. Fonseka's hypothesis. It also gave them a chance of accepting a challenge made by Mr. Abraham T. Kovoov, the President of the Ceylon Rationalist Association whose Vice-President Dr. Carlo Fonseka happened to be.

Mr. Kovoov had claimed that "a gullible devotee's delusional belief in a fictitious deity" would "**not protect him from getting burnt if he walks slow or stands still on a surface heated to temperatures above 300 degrees Centigrade.**" (vide Ceylon Observer, 6-10-70).

Can a devotee walk slow or stand still on a bed of fire at 300 degrees Centigrade ?

That was the million dollar question.

The firewalking demonstration held by the Society of Devotees of God Kataragama proved to be the world's largest ever scientific investigation into this field.

It in fact proved to be the turning point of the whole controversy.

5

The Burning Facts that beat the Doctor

“ It was concluded that there was no evidence that repeated fire walking causes undue thickening of the soles of the feet 57% of the fire-walkers had a duration of contact exceeding 0.4 second, i.e., well above 0.3 second.”

The “ Festival of Fire ” was conducted by the Society of Devotees of God Kataragama at the Sugathadasa Indoor Stadium, Colombo on 4.12.70.

The ceremony was performed before a large crowd including some of the country's most eminent medical personalities, foreign diplomats and tourists. Over 50 million people saw the Festival on Television. Filmed by Ceylonese cameraman Mr. W. S. Mahendran for the American Broadcasting Company Inc., the programme was televised on 11 TV Stations in Europe, 6 TV stations in Asia, apart from Japan and several stations in the USA.

Judges : Eminent Doctors

The following eminent doctors were given “ ring side seats ” as judges :

Prof. H. V. J. Fernando, M.D. (Lon.),
Professor of Forensic Medicine,
University of Ceylon (Colombo);

Dr. G. Weerasiri, M.B., B.S. (Cey.), D. T. M. & H. (Eng.),
Superintendent, Colombo Group of Hospitals;

Dr. P. R. Thiagarajah, F.R.C.S., M.R.C.P. (Edin.),
D.R.C.O.G. (Eng.);

Dr. W. D. L. Fernando, F.R.C.P. (Edin.), J.M.O., Colombo;

Dr. T. Visvanathan, F.R.C.S. (Edin.), M.R.C.O.G. (Gt. Bt.),
M.O.G. (Cey.);
Lecturer, Faculty of Medicine, University of Ceylon
(Colombo);

Dr. S. Y. D. C. Wickramasinghe, M.S. (Cey.), F.R.C.S. (Eng.),
Asst. Director of Hospitals, Ministry of Health, Colombo.

Forty six devotees walked the fire (see appendix 2). Amongst them were six women and three boys of 6, 7 and 11 years.

Each devotee wore a disc with an identification number. The judges were provided with stop watches, printed sheets containing the name and number of the devotees with several tabulated columns against each name for the recording of observations by the judges. An interval of time was deliberately allowed between the walks of two devotees to facilitate the judges to record their observations.

The temperature of the bed was continually monitored by technical officers of the Ceylon Institute of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Obviously, the conditions that prevailed were most conducive for the making of scientific observations.

A Crude Summation of Grand Approximations

This is in sharp contrast to the places where Dr. Fonseka made his observations, on the basis of which he formulated his theory.

Dr. Fonseka claimed that he made observations on 100 fire walkers at Kataragama. Thus he would have had to observe for EACH of these 100 devotees — the number of steps and the time taken to traverse the bed.

This is by no means an easy task to accomplish at a place like Kataragama. One reason is that the devotees often walk in an unbroken queue which is usually one or two deep, with the result that at any one moment there are many devotees on the fire. This is well seen in the picture published in the "Daily News" of 13.1.70 under the caption "Devotees walking over the fire at Kataragama."

Under these circumstances, intricate observations like number of steps and time taken can be anything but scientific. Even if

Dr. Fonseka had a team of assistants standing by to help him, anybody who has witnessed a fire-walking ceremony would know how remotely suitable the prevailing conditions are for the making of such observations. Further, there would have been no possibility of examining the soles of the devotees before and after the fire walk. Nor would the devotees have been kind to any doubting Thomas meddling with the fire to ascertain its temperature.

Thus, it could be safely said that Dr. Fonseka formulated a theory from a crude summation of grand approximations. That is where he went wrong. It is a pity that Dr. Fonseka declined an invitation by the Society of Devotees of God Kataragama to make his observations at the Stadium firewalk. That was the place for observations.

Let us make a brief stopover at the moment of climax at this ceremony :

Six Year Old Child Firewalks

Everyone was eagerly awaiting the most diminutive devotee—six year-old Harold Perera. The atmosphere was charged with tension and anxiety as pint-sized Harold took his turn at the end of the 18 ft. long bed of fire. Even the most scornful athiest present there would have wished secretly that little Perera should emerge unscathed. The temperature recorded a frightful 340° C.

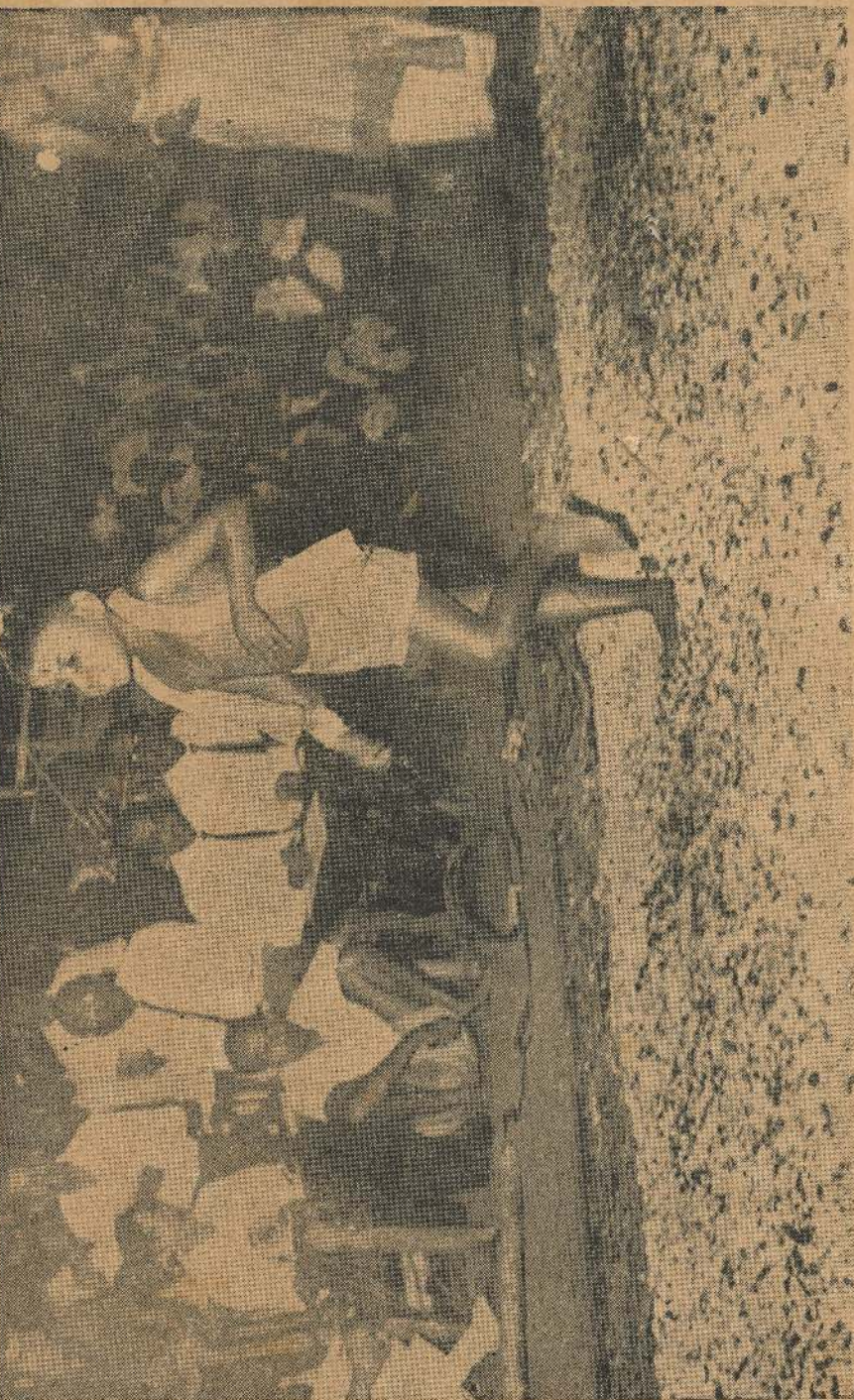
Will he do it ?

The drums were beating at a fast tempo. Little Perera, barely 3 feet in height, stood by the side of the fire without even wincing at the waves of heat which made onlookers shield their faces at a distance of 10 feet.

The leader of this group of fire walkers (J. D. Kuruppu) caught the child by the hand and led him around the fire-bed thrice. As little Harold was in his third round one could observe the fine ripples of tremors in his body. He was going into the state of ecstasy or trance. The chief applied some holy ash on the child's head, patted him on the back and urged him to go.

The audience watched spellbound every step of the child as he walked slowly and steadily across the bed of embers utterly devoid of fear. From the dazed audience broke forth a prolonged round of applause. The six doctors who examined his feet were satisfied that they were perfectly normal.

Not one of the 46 devotees who firewalked showed burns or blisters.



Six year old Harold Perera walks over the fire. On the left background Technical officers of the SISIR are seen monitoring the temperature, while to their right are seen three of the Judges (wearing ties)—Drs. G. Weerasiri, and S. Y. D. C. Wickremasinghe and Professor H. V. J. Fernando.

Judges' Report

A joint-report was issued by the doctors who officiated as judges. (The full report is printed in Appendix I at the end of this book).

Extracts from this joint-report are now considered to shed light on the question of thickness of the soles :

"The fire was of *Palu* and *Milla* wood. It measured 18'×6'. It was about 6" thick. The temperature ranged between 420° C and 320° C during the period of the walk (as measured by technical officers of the CISIR) The texture of the soles of the feet of the walkers was examined immediately before and after they had completed the walk. It ranged from soft to thick as described by the examiners . . . There was no noticeable difference in the appearance of the feet after the fire walking.

"There were 17 devotees the soles of whose feet were described as "normal," "not thickened" or "soft." This related to the appearance and texture of the feet. Of these 17, there were three persons who said that they were regular users of footwear. Some of the devotees whose soles were described as thick were also said to be regular users of footwear. Two of these whose soles were normal in appearance, No. 2 Wimalasena, and No. 8 Jayaweera claimed that they had walked over a hundred times. No. 10 Jayasiri, whose sole was described as **very soft** claimed thirteen walks at Kataragama, besides many others. **It was concluded that there was no evidence that repeated fire-walking causes undue thickening of the soles of the feet."**

Further, six-year old Harold Perera whose soles were described as "soft," fire-walked at a temperature of 340° C, taking 10 steps over a period of 3 seconds—a duration of contact of 0.3 seconds per sole with the fire. Seven year old, soft soled Asokalal Sigera took 18 steps over a bed of fire at 320° C in 6.5 seconds—a duration of contact of 0.36 seconds.

Sigera's Staggering Feat

According to Dr. Fonseka's observations of 100 devotees at Kataragama (18 feet bed of fire), the average number of steps taken by the devotees was 10 (range 5—12), while the average speed of walk was 3 seconds (range 1.5 to 6). **Thus, 7-year old, soft-soled Asokalal with 18 steps in 6.5 seconds and a duration of contact of 0.36 seconds has smashed every MAXIMUM observation**

of Dr. Fonseka. He would have thus accumulated so much heat in his feet that Dr. Fonseka's theory falls drastically short of explaining why Asokalal's feet were not burnt even though they were in contact with the fire to an extent never recorded by Dr. Fonseka.

The weight of all this evidence must surely debunk "the thickness of the soles factor" of Dr. Fonseka.

It is obvious that soft and thick soles, shod and unshod soles, made no difference when it came to fire-walking. It is also clear that constant fire-walking does not necessarily increase the thickness of a person's soles.

Duration of Contact—What The Judges said

Now the question of duration of contact. We shall consider the report of the judges of the Sugathadasa Stadium fire-walk once again :

"Duration of Contact : The minimum period during which the foot was in contact with the fire varied from 0.6 seconds in four walkers to 0.2 seconds It was observed that in most cases, at least one of the feet was in contact with the fire all through the duration of the walk. The only exceptions would have been if the fire walkers took jumps instead of the usual steps. **As a matter of fact, quite often during the walk, more than one foot was in contact with the fire. This would increase the period of contact, but no allowance was made for this or for any possible jumping."**

A duration of contact of 0.6 seconds (actually higher than this because no allowance was made for both feet being in contact simultaneously) is really a **200 per cent increase** on the average of 0.3 second permitted by Dr. Fonseka to escape getting burnt ! It is also clear from the above report that jumping or hopping across the fire was an exception than the rule.

Duration of Contact : Over 0.4 Second in 57%

Considering the individual performances, No. 2—J. M. Wimalasena, whose soles were described as "soft" by the judges, stood out, walking at 420°C, taking 8 steps over a total period of 4 seconds. The duration of contact was 0.5 second.

The duration of contact was again 0.5 second in the case of No. 8, Nihal Jayaweera ("soft" soles) who walked at 410°C, taking 6 steps over a period of 3 seconds.

No. 10, W. G. Jayasiri ("soft" soles) walked at 410° C, taking 6 steps in 2.5 seconds—Duration of contact 0.42 second.

In all, 4 devotees had a duration of contact of 0.6 second, 7 had a duration of contact of 0.5 second, 15 devotees ranged from 0.40 to 0.49 second and 10 devotees ranged from 0.30 second to 0.39 second. Thus 57% of the fire-walkers on this occasion had a duration of contact exceeding 0.4 second, i.e., well above 0.3 second.



W. G. JAYASIRI

... The judges said that his soles were "very soft."



J. M. WIMALASENA

... The judges said that his soles were "soft" ... He walked at 420 C, taking 8 steps in 4 seconds, i.e., a duration of contact of 0.5 seconds.

These statistics are noteworthy and cannot be dismissed as mere "flash in the pan" figures.

Under the weight of all this evidence Dr. Fonseka's 0.3 second duration of contact factor should also collapse. Thus each of the two factors which constituted Dr. Fonseka's theory has failed in the light of the results of the "Festival of Fire" held by the Katarama devotees.

With the failure of the two factors of Dr. Fonseka, his theory too cannot be held valid any longer.

Kovoor's Contention Cauterized

Earlier on, an interim report issued by the judges soon after the fire walking festival was published in the "Ceylon Observer." It said *inter alia* :

"The youngest devotee, Harold Perera, aged 6, walked slowly taking ten steps in three seconds and had normal soles of a child of that age.

"The temperature at the time he walked was 662 degrees Fahrenheit (350 degrees Centigrade). He had no trace of burns."

This meant that a challenge thrown out earlier by Mr. Abraham Kovoor, the President of the Rationalists Association (of which Dr. Fonseka is a Vice-President) had been accepted and won.

Kovoor's contention was that at temperatures above 300 degrees Centigrade one cannot firewalk without getting burnt.*

The firewalk of Harold Perera, who notched a duration of contact of 0.3 second, was described as "slow" by the Judges. But 26 devotees (i.e. 57 % of those who participated) had durations of contact ranging from 0.4 second to 0.6 second. Their walks could therefore fall into a description ranging from "slow" to "very slow."

This means that Kovoor's contention has been convincingly debunked.

Another challenge thrown by Kovoor on that occasion was that at temperatures above 300 degrees Centigrade one cannot stand still without getting burnt.

This contention has also been torn apart by a statement contained in the interim report :

"... L. P. Dissanayake from Kalubowila, Dehiwala aged 22 stood at the centre of the carpet of fire for a moment. The temperature at that time was in the region of 662 degrees Fahrenheit (350 degrees Centigrade)."

Several astonishing feats of flesh piercing similar to the type seen at Kataragama also took place at the Festival of Fire.

* See Chapter 4, page 30.

6

Cornered Don Keeps Mum

“ At the demonstration of the Medical Exhibition on the 5th of September you raised to the view of the audience a bottle of arrack and said, “ This is my God Kataragama ”; at the Press Conference held afterwards you are alleged to have said that you know who God Kataragama is and that he has had two wives.”

Soon after the Sugathadasa Stadium firewalk was over and the interim Report of the Judges had been issued, Dr. Carlo Fonseka made a feeble attempt to pooh pooh the achievement of six year old Harold Perera who took 10 steps in 3 seconds. (CDN 16.12.70).

Dr. Fonseka claimed that Harold Perera had walked with a duration of contact of 0.3 second and that this proved his theory.

This provoked a sharp retort from Mr. Kuruppu who accused that Dr. Fonseka had “ purposely attempted to mislead the ordinary layman by taking the feat of the slowest walker as an example to prove his theory, as to have the highest duration of contact.” He went on to show the feats of 57% of the firewalkers who had a duration of contact exceeding 0.4 second, i.e., well above 0.3 second.

“ I'll Teach you Mathematics ”

“ I am afraid that I have to teach you mathematics,” the angry Accountant charged in an open letter (17.12.70) to Dr. Fonseka.

"You should know that neither the highest speed of walk nor the highest number of steps **alone** will give the highest duration of contact. The speed of walk in **relation** to the number of steps placed will only give a correct assessment of the duration of contact."

Dr. Fonseka replied through the "Daily News" on 24.12.70. He said that it was not his contention that the highest speed of walking and the most number of steps alone would give the longest duration of contact.

The Daily News said further :—Dr. Carlo Fonseka says : "I commented on certain statistics shown to me by the Daily News representative." (These statistics were released by Dr. N. Kodagoda, one of the judges of the panel).

Dr. Fonseka said that he would give a complete reply to Mr. Kuruppu once the report of the panel of judges was released. The full report was not yet ready and would be released in due course.

The full report was ultimately released in January 1971 and even published in the newspapers. But up till today Dr. Carlo Fonseka's complete reply has not come. The reason is obvious.

Misleading The Masses Under the Name of Science

Mr. Kuruppu's open letter to Dr. Fonseka of 17.12.70 also contained several other charges to refute which Dr. Fonseka never made an attempt. Here are some extracts from that letter :

"At the demonstration of the Medical Exhibition on the 5th of September (a) you raised to the view of the audience a bottle of arrack and said "This is my God Kataragama," (b) at the press conference held afterwards you are alleged to have said that you know who God Kataragama is and that he has had two wives.

"(a), above displays your aversion to religion so much so that you dared to be sacrilegious and (b), above displays your lack of knowledge in symbolism in faiths and further proves that you are biased. In the good name of science you are misleading the masses.

"Your demonstration at the Exhibition is deceptive. You claimed that the temperature of the carpet of fire of the dimensions of 4' x 3' x 1" was 400°C, which we say is false. In the alternative there would have been a severe default in your thermo couple. The embers were brought in a tin of the capacity of about 1/2 cu. ft. (Empty tin of 7 lbs. Plaster of Paris) and was spread sparsely over the asbestos sheet.

"Lionel walked first and you followed a little later and you gave the impression to the audience that you were walking when the temperature was 400°C (752°F). Will you and your firewalkers dare repeat this performance before a panel of Judges in the open (not in an air conditioned room)? If you do not, your firewalking demonstration at the Centenary

Exhibition of the Medical College will go down in history as an act of prostitution of science, as the only loathsome feature of the Exhibition and appears as a cheap stunt staged to attract visitors to the Exhibition. Please take it from me, Doctor, that you cannot discredit religion and spread atheism so easily in this country merely for the reason that science has not been able to provide scientific answers.

“Ever since your demonstration at the Exhibition, you have carried out malicious propaganda to humiliate the devotees. We repeat that these were inspired by you to prove your ill conceived theory. At none of your firewalks the temperature and dimensions were anywhere equal to the temperature or dimensions of the carpet of fire at Kataragama. You have deceived the people and still continue to deceive them.

“You are now making an attempt to prove your ill conceived theory by demonstrating at a firewalking ceremony under dissimilar conditions compared to our Festival with neither medical-check ups nor assessment of temperature.* The method that you propose to prove your theory, let me say in no uncertain terms, is most unscientific and is a disgrace to science. You are attempting to lead the firewalkers along the garden path and prove your false theory by hook or by crook I demand you to prove your theory before a panel of Judges similar to that of ours.”

Child Challenges Carlo

As if to add insult to injury, six year old Harold Perera wrote to Dr. Fonseka challenging the Doctor to firewalk with him (Harold).

The kid wrote :

හලෝ කාලෝ අංකල්

4 වෙනිද හැරල් මල්ලිපි මායි ගිනි පාගනවා බලන්න අංකල් ආවනම් දේව බක්තිය බලාගන්න තිබුනා හැරල් මල්ලිගේ උස අඩි 3යි. වයස අවුරුදු 6යි. මගේ වයස අවුරුදු 7යි. අපි ගිනි ගොඩෙ යනවිට මිනිස්සු සන්තෝෂයෙන් කැගැට්වා. මා පියවර 13ක්ම ගිනිමැලයේ ගියා. ඒ වෙලාවේ රස්තේ අංගක 662ල. අපි පොඩිලං අපේ යටපතුල් සිනිඳුයි. අංකල්ගේ යටපතුලුත් සිනිඳුලු. ලොකු ඇයෝ ගිනිපාගන්න අබියෝග කළාම අංකල් බයවෙලා වෙන අයදලා ඡේප් උනා. මේ සැරේ බොරු ගණන් දන්නේ නැතිව අංකල් ගිනි පාගලා පෙන්න්නත්ත. අංකල් ගිනි පාගන්න බය පිට්ටෙයි කියලද? අපි නම් බය නැ.

මීට,

අශෝකලාල්,

හැරල් පෙරේරා.

* see chapter 7

English Translation :—

Hello Uncle Carlo,

Had Uncle come on the 4th to see Harold and I walk across the fire Uncle would have seen what faith in the Gods was like. Harold's height is 3 feet. He is 6 years old. I am 7 years. When we walked across the fire people shouted with joy. I took 13 steps on the bed of burning coal. The heat at that time was 662 degrees. We are small ones. The soles of our feet are soft. The sole of Uncle's feet are also said to be soft. When grown ups challenged Uncle to walk the fire Uncle got frightened and sent substitutes. This time instead of evading please walk the fire and show us. Is Uncle afraid of getting burnt? We are not frightened.

Yours

ASOKA LAL

HAROLD PERERA.

7

Fire racing— as if Chased by a Tiger!

“In my opinion while the devotees walked the fire with full confidence, the Ace fire walker of Dr. Carlo Fonseka’s team—Lionel Fernando made a mad dash across the fire, panic stricken. This is not fire walking but may be called Fire Racing . . . Dr. Carlo Fonseka’s man ran as if he was being chased by a tiger while the devotees walked the fire one following the other with full confidence and least scared.—Judges.”

The theoretical basis of Dr. Fonseka’s theory having received a sound bashing at the hands of the Sugathadasa Stadium firewalkers, the stage was now set for a “practical test.”

As mentioned earlier, Dr. Fonseka had accepted the challenge of Mr. B. D. Muthukuda to demonstrate that firewalking is not a spiritual phenomenon.

This was fixed for February 8th, 1971. The Daily News, which was meanwhile fast becoming Dr. Fonseka’s vociferous mouthpiece, reported this exclusively on 27.1.71.

Entitled "Devale firewalk may end controversy" the report read :

"The firewalking controversy will reach a grand climax on February 8 when 'spiritualists' led by one of Ceylon's ace fire-walkers, Mr. B. D. Muthukuda takes on the challenge thrown by the Colombo University's Medical Faculty personnel who claim that there is no spiritual element in firewalking.

Both teams will walk on a bed of cinders at the Kataragama devale in Attidiya. The Medical Faculty personnel will violate the traditional observances by consuming liquor and pork before their firewalk.

The faculty's team will be led by Dr. Carlo Fonseka who contends that the secret of firewalking lies in the thickness of one's sole and the duration of contact between the soles and the cinders. Mr. Muthukuda will lead the firewalkers who believe that the blessings of the gods are necessary to come out unscathed.

The firewalking contest is the result of an open challenge made by Dr. Fonseka who claimed that no traditional observances were required to walk on glowing cinders. More than 80 men who dispute Dr. Fonseka's hypothesis accepted his challenge but Dr. Fonseka picked on Mr. Muthukuda's challenge since the latter is regarded as one of Ceylon's foremost firewalkers.

The two teams will work out the conditions for the contest and an impartial board of judges selected from both teams will pronounce judgement."

It was not made clear whether Dr. Fonseka was going to lead his men on to the fire or whether he was going to be non-playing captain. On the side of the devotees, Mr. Muthukuda had announced that he was going to lead his men over the embers.

Pseudo-Scientist's Bluff?

This 'faux pas' of Dr. Fonseka was spotlighted in a letter to the Editor of the "Daily Mirror" which was published on 3.2.71, just five days before the contest.

The letter entitled "DR. FONSEKA SHOULD FIREWALK HIMSELF TO PROVE HIS BELIEF" is reproduced in full below :—

It has been reported that Dr. Carlo Fonseka has accepted the fire-walking challenge of Mr. B. D. Muthukuda and that the doctor's men would firewalk with Mr. Muthukuda and his men at Dehiwala on the 8th of February 1971.

Who are Dr. Fonseka's men?—they are Messrs. Lionel Fernando and Dharma-sena, who firewalked for him at the Medical School exhibition. They are men who have done this feat umpteen times at temples and devales before. On all those occasions they were not enlightened with "Carlo's thoughts" and they believed that it was religious faith that helped them to firewalk.

Dr. Fonseka cannot prove anything by fire-walking these "experienced veterans of faith." If firewalking is merely an act of skill and science as Dr. Fonseka claims, then any blessed member of the Hominids should be able to do it. And this includes him as well. Since Dr. Fonseka is the author of the theory, he must first show the country he believes it himself!

For this, he must stop this nonsense of being "non-playing captain" and pluck up courage to come forward and firewalk himself. He can surely draw some inspiration from the courage and boldness of six-year-old Harold Perera who walked a fire 18 ft. long, 6 inches deep and burning at 350 degrees Centigrade.

If Dr. Fonseka fails to firewalk, then he will go down in history as a pseudo-scientist who tried to perpetrate a big bluff on the country by hook or by crook and his act will go down as one of prostitution of science. Moreover, he will end up by

proving—not his own theory, but the words of that famous scientist Louis Pasteur—
 “The greatest derangement of the mind is to believe in something because one wishes
 it to be so.”

Dr. W. I.
 Polgahawela.
 Dr. S. R.
 Colombo—8.
 Dr. K. V.
 Chavakachcheri.

Dr. Carlo Fonseka nominated as Judges Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda, Lecturer in Forensic Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo and Dr. K. Wijesinghe, a Plastic Surgeon attached to the General Hospital, Colombo. Dr. P. Jayapal, D. M. O., Homagama and Dr. T. Munasinghe, C.M.O.H., Kalutara were nominated as Judges by Mr. Muthukuda.

Crowds estimated to be well over 10,000 had assembled at the venue to witness the contest.

Dr. Carlo Fonseka arrived at the *devale* at about 9 p.m. Soon after he arrived, the *poojas* preceding the lighting of the fire were commenced.

At about 11 p.m. the fire was lit. A platform of wood 20 feet in length, 6 feet in breadth and about 6 feet in height was set ablaze and as the fire kept on raging, the furious flames leapt to a height of about 25 feet. More and more wood was added from time to time. In all, four lorry loads of *milla* wood were used.

Fonseka's team develop cold feet to Firewalk

The events that followed from then onwards up to the time of the commencement of the firewalk are best described in the words of the “Chinthamani” (a National Tamil Weekly) of 24.2.1971 :—

“... It was 3 a.m. in the early hours of the 9th inst. ‘I am ready to firewalk. Is your team ready?’ Mr. Muthukuda inquired from Dr. Fonseka. Dr. Fonseka said that Muthukuda's people had burnt firewood far in excess of what was actually required and that since the bed of fire was at a temperature at which humans could get nowhere near it, they could consider it (Muthukuda's challenge) one hour later.

“At the same time he also said that even though the agreement stipulated that five people were to walk from his team, he had now decided to send only one. He also suggested that from Muthukuda's team, Muthukuda alone should walk with the man he was going to send. When this transpired one of the Judges—Dr. R. Jayapal (D.M.O.—Homagama) was present.”



LIONEL FERNANDO

..... making " a mad dash across the fire panic stricken "

“ Muthukuda’s supporters flared up. Why this hesitation at the last moment ? Why this change ? While the ‘ *golaya* ’* is to firewalk on behalf of one team, should the ‘ *guru* ’ † fierwalk from the other side ? They argued that either the ‘ *guru* ’ should walk with the ‘ *guru* ’ or the ‘ *golaya* ’ should walk with the ‘ *golaya* ’.”

“ At this stage Mr. Muthukuda challenged Dr. Fonseka : “ Let’s leave the others out. Come on, you and I alone will walk the fire. I will firewalk with the help of my God. You firewalk on the basis of your scientific hypothesis. Are you prepared ? ”

“ Dr. Fonseka flatly refused. For no reason whatsoever was he going to firewalk.

“ At this stage, it was decided that Mr. Muthukuda would send three people from his team and that in return Dr. Fonseka would send his men. The Judges also accepted this position.

“ It was 4 a.m. in the early hours of the ninth inst. The one hour’s grace requested by Dr. Fonseka ended. Mr. Muthukuda invited the Doctor to firewalk. Dr. Fonseka said that it looked as if it would be dawn before the fire would be fit for any human to go near it. He wanted to wait for another half an hour.”

“ The time was now 4.30 a.m. Mr. Muthukuda did not make a request to Dr. Fonseka any more. He commenced the prayers, *poojas* and *kavadi* dance preceding the fire walk.”

Lionel’s Grand Prix Over the Fire

The burning embers were then spread out into a bed 30 feet long, 12 feet wide and 10 inches deep.

The rest of the events which followed should better be heard in the words of two judges—Drs. P. Jayapal and T. Munasinghe. The following excerpts are taken from a joint statement issued by Dr. P. Jayapal (and endorsed by Dr. T. Munasinghe) to the newspapers : (for full report see appendix 3).

‘ The fire-walking itself started at about 5.30 a.m. Mr. Muthukuda led his team all dancing while they went. After testing the fire with his feet thrice, he signalled his team members to go across the fire. Three members ‡ quickly strode across the fire one following the other. **NONE OF THEM RAN, BUT CROSSED THE FIRE-WALKING BUT FAIRLY QUICKLY** and all members continued to dance the *kavadis*.

“ Now came Dr. Carlo Fonseka’s team to walk the fire. Dr. Carlo Fonseka lead the team. They went to one end. Then I saw them all arguing and there was considerable delay. I understand that Dr. Carlo Fonseka insisted that the feet of

* Pupil † master

‡ Nahoor (a Muslim), Ariyawansa (a Buddhist) and Chinniah (a Hindu).



"Dr. Carlo Fonseka's man ran as if he was being chased by a tiger."—Judges.

the devotees must be examined before their (Dr. Carlo Fonseka's) team walked the fire. This request was conveyed to the Judges. **WE * EXAMINED ONE DEVOTEE AND FOUND THAT THE FEET WERE NOT BURNT.** At this stage Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda† said that examination of the feet of devotees will take a lot of time by which time the fire will be cold and Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team should walk the fire immediately. **But we found that this was not forthcoming.** The crowd was becoming restless. There was lot of hooting at this stage. Then suddenly one of the members belonging to Dr. Carlo Fonseka raised his sarong and tied it above his knees and ran across the length of the fire. Unlike the devotees he did not walk but ran. **He ran very fast as if somebody was chasing him. This was seen by the entire crowd. Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda too saw and made the following comment : ' The begger ran no man.'**

“ Because this man ran and not walked the fire the crowd started jeering and hooting and a lot of them broke the barricades and entered the enclosure. Now there was confusion.

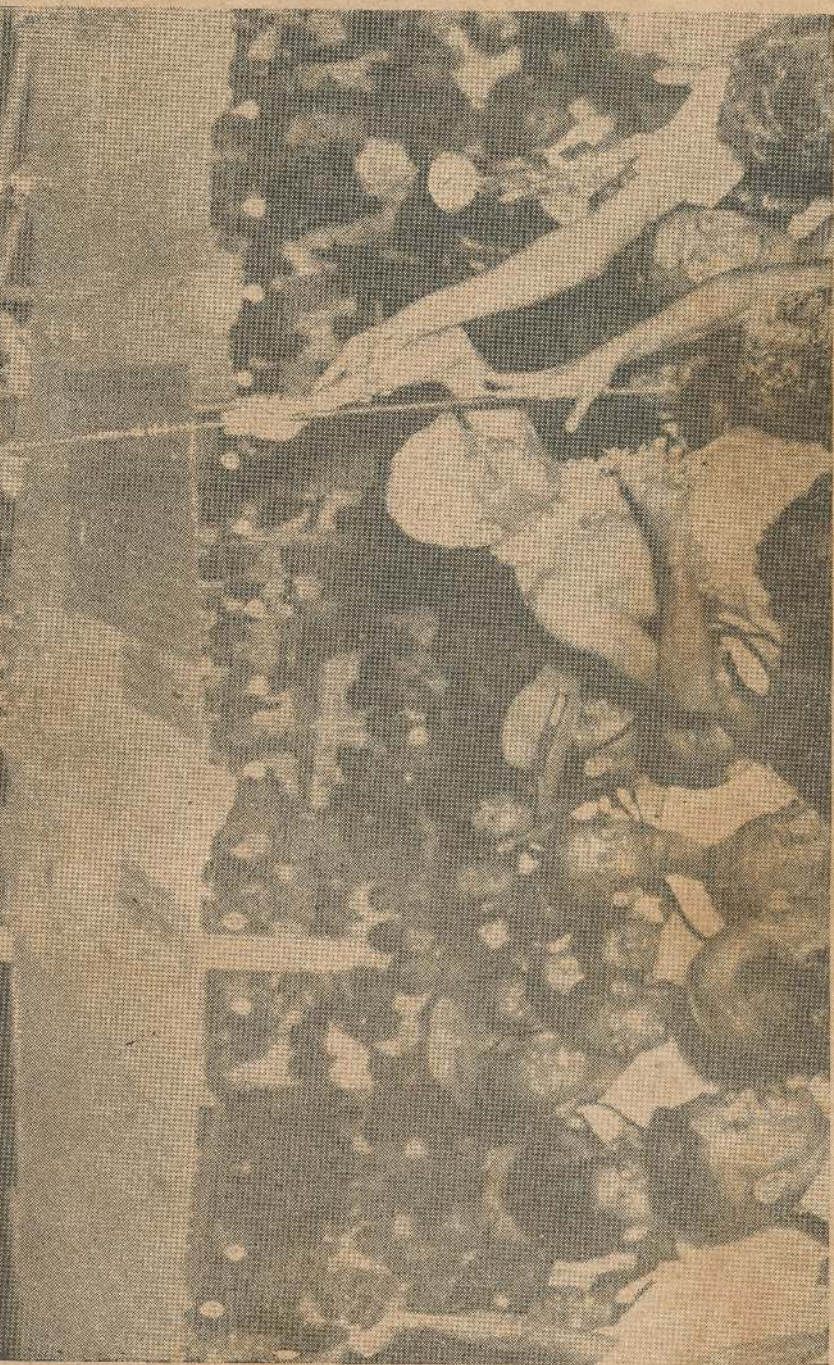


DR. CARLO FONSEKA

*He was non-playing Captain
at Attidiya*

*Note by author:— it refers to all four Judges:

†Dr. Fonseka's nominee as Judge:



The Aftermath of the Attidiya Contest :

Two pictures which very aptly and graphically summarize the outcome of the Attidiya firewalk.
(Above) : A jubilant Muthukuda is chaired by the spectators who claimed that it was a "walk over" for his team.
(Below) : Dr. Fonseka, panic written all over his face, is escorted out by a posse of Policemen.



Some people carried Mr. Muthukuda shoulder high crying 'Api Dinuwa.'... Some others poured water on to the fire, and from there onwards there was confusion."

"In my opinion while the devotees walked the fire with full confidence, the ace fire walker of Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team—Lionel Fernando made a mad dash across the fire panic stricken. This is not fire walking but may be called Fire Racing. Had Dr. Carlo Fonseka's man walked just like the devotees then the contest could be called equal. But here there was no comparison because **Dr. CARLO FONSEKA'S MAN RAN AS IF HE WAS BEING CHASED BY A TIGER** while the Devotees walked the fire one following the other **WITH FULL CONFIDENCE AND LEAST SCARED.**"

"I feel that Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team needs further training or even more alcohol to get over the panic."

It is very significant that the above statement issued to the Press by two of the Judges was never contradicted by either of the other two judges or even Dr. Carlo Fonseka.

Rationalist Ambassador Blacks out Judges' Report

There was not even a hum from the Rationalist Brotherhood of Ceylon about the statement of these two judges in their annual magazine—"The Ceylon Rationalist Ambassador—1971." They go into great details about their distorted version of the Attidiya incident but however, thought that it was very rational indeed to black out the statement of two of the judges! Is selective myopia the latest *modus operandi* of this group of individuals who believe that Ceylonese minus them equals gullible fools!!

The Rationalist Ambassador had adopted the same attitude towards the Report issued by the Judges of the Sugathadasa Stadium firewalk. This also was blacked out because the findings there were unpalatable to the beliefs of the Rationalists.

In passing judgement upon the fire walking controversy, that the reports and statements of judges who officiated at the fire-walking ceremonies and contests are a *sine qua non* is a roaring fact which even a fool would have realised!

But the self-styled High Priests of Reason in Ceylon thought that they could throw an effective smoke screen over these reports and hoodwink the Public into believing that the Rationalists had won the day.

8

The Mystery of the missing Fire-Racer!

“After all the attempts to conceal the fact that Lionel’s feet were burnt proved futile, Dr. Fonseka was virtually forced to let the cat out of the bag.”

Exactly one week after the Attidiya firewalking contest a meeting of the Rationalists Association was held at the Thurstan College hall. Dr. Fonseka admitted there for the first time that Mr. Lionel Fernando sustained burns after his “fire walk”. Blisters had appeared on Lionel’s feet **four hours after his firewalk**, when Dr. Fonseka had examined him.

Lionel ran on the fire at 5.50 A.M. on 9.2.71. Thus, going by Dr. Fonseka’s claim, the blisters should have appeared before 10 A.M. on 9.2.71.

On 9.2.71, at 1 P.M. in the afternoon, Mr. Siri Perera, a journalist of the “Lankadipa”, had met Dr. Fonseka at his Narahenpita residence. When Mr. Perera questioned Dr. Fonseka whether Lionel’s feet were burnt, an emphatic “NO” was the answer. If Dr. Fonseka had seen blisters on Lionel’s feet at 10 A.M. why did he deny it three hours later?

Carlo did not know Lionel's Address !!

Mr. Perera inquired from Dr. Fonseka about Lionel's whereabouts. Dr. Fonseka said that since Lionel had received anonymous letters threatening his life he (Dr. Fonseka) had dropped Lionel at the home of a relative of his at Ratmalana! When Mr. Perera persisted that he be given the address of his relation Dr. Fonseka claimed that he did not know the address!!

On the morning of 10.2.71, Mr. J. D. Kuruppu, Accountant of the "Times" Group of Newspapers, twice rang up the Physiology Department of the Colombo Medical Faculty where Lionel was working. Lionel could not be contacted on the telephone on both occasions. The excuses which were offered on his behalf on each occasion were found to be contradictory. Where was Lionel? The mystery deepened.

11.2.71, 2.30 P.M.—Mr. S. Logeswaran, an ex-Editor of the "Naveena Vignani" (a Tamil Science Weekly) and presently a Law student, met Dr. Fonseka at the Physiology Department. Mr. Logeswaran informed Dr. Fonseka that there were rumours that Lionel was missing and that his feet were burnt. Mr. Logeswaran told Dr. Fonseka that he wanted to meet Lionel to verify for himself whether these rumours were true.

Even at this stage Dr. Fonseka did not admit that Lionel's feet were burnt. Dr. Fonseka said that Lionel had received an anonymous letter threatening his life and as a precautionary measure he had gone to some outstation! Dr. Fonseka did not know Lionel's address!! It might take three or four days for Lionel to return.

The "Dinapathi" (a National Tamil Daily) of 12.2.71 carried a news item on its first page entitled "Where is Lionel?"

The "Virakesari" (a National Tamil Daily) of the same day too carried on its first page a statement issued by Mr. J. D. Kuruppu asking "Where is Lionel?" (All these exposures are documented in the 11.3.71 issue of the "Chinthamani"— a National Tamil Weekly).

After all the attempts to conceal the fact that Lionel's feet were burnt proved futile, Dr. Fonseka was virtually forced to let the cat out of the bag at the Rationalists' meeting on 17.2.71.

Devotees did not hide

In reporting the Attidiya firewalk the "Daily News", which for quite some time had been giving wide publicity only to the point of view of Dr. Fonseka, went out of its way to try to save face for Dr. Fonseka.

Thus the "Daily News" of 10-2-71 tried to give the impression to its readers that the three devotees who had firewalked "disappeared into the devale" soon after the walk. The "Daily News" reported on 18.2.71 that at the Rationalists' meeting "Dr. Fonseka said that all three devotees who walked across the fire, ran into the devale."

Of course, the innuendo was that the devotees hid in the devale because they were burnt.

One of the Judges at the contest—Dr. P. Jayapal in a personal communication with the author has scotched this innuendo. He explained that not one of the devotee firewalkers did go into hiding soon after the firewalk and that they were all available for examination by the Judges. It was the Judges who decided after examining the first devotee that the examination of the other two devotees could be taken up after Dr. Fonseka's men firewalked. (This has also been published in the "Chinthamani" of 11-3-71).

CDN reporter's slow motion vision!

The Daily News of 10-2-71 carried on its first page a three column photograph (see page 46) of Lionel running across the embers with his arms flying in the air. The caption reads: "The only member of the Medical Faculty team to walk the fire of Attidiya Lionel Fernando caught in mid-stride on the firebed. Note stick (at left) which the medical men allege was thrown in his path as he walked."

Any sensible person looking at the picture could say that Lionel was running and not walking. With reference to Lionel's feat, two of the Judges—Drs. P. Jayapal & T. Munasighe had the following to say:

"...the Ace fire walker of Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team Lionel Fernando made a mad dash across the fire panic stricken...."

"...Dr. Carlo Fonseka's man ran as if he was being chased by a tiger...."

These two judges claim that a third judge—Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda (nominated by Dr. Fonseka) made the following comment: "The beggar ran no man."

The "Sun" of 10-2-71 reported that Lionel "ran across" the bed of fire. The "Dinapathi" of 10-2-71 reported that Lionel crossed the firebed running all the way.

Baffling then isn't it how the eyes of the Daily News reporter (Mr. Gamini Weerakoon) managed to see this fire racing (as if the racer was being chased by a tiger) in slow motion!!

The Daily News picture clearly shows that the stick does not lie across the bed of fire but lies outside the bed touching on its left border. The breadth of the bed of fire was over 11 feet. How on Earth could this stick have been responsible for Lionel's blisters, as Dr. Fonseka had also claimed later at the Rationalists' meeting?

"Dr. Fonseka said that while Mr. Lionel Fernando was walking across the fire some one threw a pole and Mr. Fernando had to check his walk. That was why he was burnt, Dr. Fonseka said."
(CDN 18-2-71).

The stick seen in the picture is nothing but one of the long poles that had been used before fire walking commenced to lever out the flaming faggots!

Lake House Boss Keeps a Promise

That was the role played by the "Daily News" in the coverage of news about fire walking. Thus it is not surprising that the prestigious Vivekananda Society lodged a protest with the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Lake House about the "Daily News". This protest was duly acknowledged.

The protest and the acknowledgement are published in full below:

Mr. Ranjit Wijewardene,
Lake House,
Colombo.

Vivekananda Society,
Vivekananda Hill,
Colombo. 13.
27-2-72.

THE UNETHICAL ATTITUDE OF THE "DAILY NEWS" IN THE COVERAGE OF "FIRE—WALKING"

Dear Sir,

I am forced to write this letter to you to lodge a strong protest on behalf of our Society at the manner in which the "Daily News" has been manoeuvring the publication of news pertaining to the fire walking controversy.

Ever since this issue started in the last quarter of 1970, we have been getting in the "Daily News," only the views of one side—that of Dr. Fonseka. It appeared as though Dr. Fonseka was directing his blows at

a vacuum . To that extent, the views of his contenders in the dispute—the devotees were not published in the “Daily News”. We were thus compelled to subscribe to the “DAVASA” and the “TIMES” group of Newspapers to get the other side of the story. In fairness to these newspapers, we must say that they published both points of view adequately.

What was most shocking was that, leaving aside the two parties in the dispute, even the reports of judges (eminent doctors) who officiated at firewalks were not published in the “Daily News”. But we read these reports in the other newspapers and found that these reports had in fact “demolished” Dr. Fonseka’s theory. That is therefore the reason why even statements of learned Doctors, even more eminent and qualified than Dr. Carlo Fonseka, were blacked out in the “Daily News”.

There was a demonstration in fire - walking arranged by devotees at the Sugathadasa Stadium in December, last year. At this occasion, several eminent Doctors participated as judges to make their own studies and observations.

We noticed that news about this occasion was published in a very inconspicuous way in an inner page in the “Daily News”. The other papers gave this occasion greater publicity. We have also observed that EVERY news item concerning Dr. Fonseka was prominently displayed on the front page.

At this particular fire-walk, a 6 year old lad walked the bed of fire. This received the widest publicity in the other newspapers while it was blacked out in the “Daily News”. We also read from other newspapers that this fire-walking demonstration was watched by over 50 million people from Europe, Asia, Japan and the U.S.A. on television. As for the “Daily News”, the news value of this occasion was zero.

Letters written by our Society members in support of Dr. Fonseka’s antagonists were never published in the “Daily News” while they were published in other newspapers.

We are sure that this type of mischievous manipulations are going on at “Daily News” without your knowledge. We are writing this to you in the hope that you will personally intervene in this matter and restore the prestige of the “Daily News.”

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) Kanagasabai Rajapuvaneeswaran,
Cultural Secretary,
Vivekananda Society.

And now the reply:

LAKE HOUSE
COLOMBO

February 28, 1971.

K. Rajapuvaneeswaran, Esq.,
Cultural Secretary,
Vivekananda Society,
34, Vivekananda Hill,
Colombo—13.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of the 27th instant, the contents of which I have carefully noted.

If there are any statements you wish published in future in our group of papers, please send me a copy of the statement which you would be addressing to the Editor of any particular paper.

I shall endeavour to ensure publication, provided the statement is reasonably brief in view of the current size of newspapers. I may mention that publication is also generally subject to legal opinion supporting such publication.

Yours faithfully,

(Sgd.) R. S. Wijewardene.

Mr. Ranjit Wijewardene kept his promise and the change in the attitude of the "Daily News" thereafter was obvious.

He saw to it that the "Daily News" published both sides of the story thereafter. Thus readers of the "Daily News" would have got a rude shock to see a feature article entitled "Don's theory debunked?" appearing on the 10th March, 1971, because this was the first time the paper ever indicated to its readers that there was an other side to the whole story!

9

Carlo's theory— a 35 year old mummy!

“Let us proceed to analyse the experiments described in the British Medical Journal. In all, Kuda Bux fire walked thrice and was never burnt. . . . 400%, 375 %, 358%—Such was the per cent increase Kuda Bux had secured on three consecutive occasions over Dr. Fonseka's postulated duration of contact of 0.3 second . . . Isn't this staggering evidence against the duration of contact factor?”

This is not the first time that fire walking has come under close scrutiny by science.

Significant scientific investigations into this field have been carried out in 1935 at Carshalton, Surrey (U.K.) in 1935. This is perhaps the pioneering scientific investigation into this field. The experiments were conducted by the University of London Council for Psychological Investigation.

For these experiments the Cambridge Instrument Co. Ltd. adapted special apparatus for measuring the temperatures. Many other scientific devices (for timing etc.) were also used.

Kuda Bux, a Kashmiri Indian fire walker, was specially taken to the U. K. for these experiments. The experiments were conducted on September 9 and 17, 1935, the first of these being a rehearsal.

The results of these experiments are very significant in the present fire walking controversy as one look at them would show that these experiments conducted in 1935 have long ago conclusively debunked Dr. Fonseka's theory. Thus the theory Dr. Fonseka put forward 35 years later is nothing more than a mummy.

British Medical Journal on Fire Walking

The following is an account on these experiments by Mr. Harry Price, Honorary Secretary of the University of London Council for Psychological Investigation in the British Medical Journal of September 26, 1935 (Page 586):

"The trench used for the first test (really a rehearsal) was 25 feet long, 3 feet wide and 12 inches deep. The combustible material burnt consisted of two tons of small oak logs, one ton of broken packing cases and half a load of oak charcoal. The fire was laid in the usual manner, with a layer of newspapers at the bottom of the trench. Over the paper was placed the firewood, on top of which were piled three hundred logs. This completed the fire. As some difficulty was experienced in lighting the fire, ten gallons of paraffin were poured over the logs. A match was applied, and in five minutes the trench was in flames. The mass was ignited at 11.20 a.m. At 11.50 a.m. the firewood was nearly consumed, and the logs were burning well and settling down. The remaining logs were now added. It was impossible to stand closer to the trench than three feet. At 12.10 p.m. one could not stand within six feet of the fire without feeling uncomfortably hot.

"At 12.45 the trench was so hot that assistants were compelled to use wooden shields when raking the fire. Kuda Bux said he would "test" the heat. He placed one bare foot in the middle of the embers and stepped across the trench. He complained that there was too much unburnt wood and not enough red embers. A sheet of writing paper thrown into the trench ignited in three seconds. At 12.55 p.m. Kuda Bux again stepped into the trench and said that the fire was more satisfactory. The charcoal was then spread more evenly over the fire. At 1 o'clock another piece of paper was dropped into the trench and ignited on contact. The logs were now reduced to fiery large embers. At 2.30 p.m. the red embers covered the bottom of the trench to a depth of three inches. Kuda Bux said there was not enough fire. He asserted that it was more difficult to walk on a thin layer of embers. In order to increase the depth of the fire a portion was raked from one end into the middle.

Four steps in 4.8 seconds

"Kuda Bux was now examined by Dr. William Collier of Oxford who was accompanied by Prof. G. A. Gunn. In

addition, Mr. C. R. Darling and Dr. T. E. Banks (both Physicists. were present. Swabs were taken of Kuda Bux's feet, one of which was thoroughly washed. No signs of preparation were apparent). His feet were photographed both before and after the "walk". After fanning the ash from the embers Kuda Bux stepped into the trench four times, with a maximum of four steps during the first walk, which lasted 4.8 seconds. He hurried but did not run. His feet were examined and found to be uninjured. He complained that the fire was not deep enough and the trench too narrow.

"After the walk a wooden shoe last was covered with calico and placed in contact with the portion of the trench traversed by Kuda Bux. The calico scorched in one second and was burnt into holes in two and a half seconds.

Medico Firewalker Burnt

"After the "cotton test", a Medical student from Bart's Mr. Digby Moynagh removed his shoes and socks and stepped into the trench, taking two paces. In thirty minutes his feet were blistered, and he had to receive medical attention.

"Dr. Collier considered that the epidermis of Kuda Bux's feet was rather thick, though this opinion was not shared by the hospital nurse who assisted the doctor in taking the swabs or by me. In my opinion Mr. Moynagh's feet were rather harder than those of Kuda Bux. In a letter to me Dr. Collier stated that these swabs had been handed to a pathologist, who had pronounced them negative. They were examined for both organic and inorganic substances."

That was what happened at the rehearsal held on the 9th of September. Let us see what happened at the "real" test on the 17th of September.

"In order to meet Kuda Bux's wishes in the matter the trench was widened from three to six feet, and the depth increased to nine inches. On the day before the test Kuda Bux visited the site and made a "platform" of each, 3 feet across, in the centre of the trench, which was now divided into two portions or "wells", 11 feet by 6 feet. He stated that he wanted the platform in order to rest his feet after "walking" the first portion and traversing the second.

"For the second test seven tons of Oak logs, one ton of fire wood, ten hundred weight of Oak charcoal, ten gallons of paraffin, and fifty news papers were used in making the fire, which was lit at 8.20 a.m. All the firewood and about half the logs were in the trench before lighting. The whole was then soused with the paraffin and a match applied. No trouble was experienced in lighting the fire, which blazed instantly, in spite of showers of rain. The fire was gradually fed

with the remaining logs, and by 2.30 p.m. the red hot embers were just level with the ground (that is, nine inches deep). The heat was very intense, and even on the leeward side of the trench the heat could be distinctly felt sixty five feet away. Those who were stoking the fire were compelled to wear goggles.

Kuda Bux's feet get colder after fire walking at 800°F!

"At 2.30 p.m. Kuda Bux pronounced the fire satisfactory, and ordered the charcoal to be put on. This was applied evenly as a top layer. At 3 0' clock the charcoal was red hot, and Professor Pannett examined Kuda Bux's feet, took the temperature (93.2°F), and remarked that they were very cold. His feet were also washed. Everything was quite normal. Professor Pannett stuck a 5/8 inch square of surgical plaster to the sole of Kuda Bux's right foot, in order to see whether it would burn.

"At 3.14 p.m. Kuda Bux had the first walk, making four strides. He was in the trench 4.5 seconds. Professor Pannett took the temperature of the feet within ten seconds, and found a slight decrease (93.0°F). The plaster was not scorched in any way and the man's feet were not blistered or injured.

At 3.17 p.m. Kuda Bux had the second walk making four steps (in 4.3 seconds). His feet were again examined and found to be uninjured. Forty eight minutes later Professor Pannett again examined his feet, which showed no reaction to being in contact with the fire. After the second walk Mr. C. R. Darling (Physicist) tested the surface temperature of the fire: it was just over 800°F.

"When Kuda Bux had finished his walking Mr. Digby Moynagh, as at the previous test, entered the trench and took two paces. He was in the trench 2.2 seconds. His feet were again blistered. Then a Mr. Maurice Cheepen jumped in and also made three quick paces (2.1 seconds). He was badly burnt, and three blisters were bleeding when he came out of the trench.

"Professor Pannett stated that the epidermis of Kuda Bux's feet was soft and not at all thickened or tough. The times mentioned in this respect were from the moment of contact with the embers until the last foot was removed from the trench. The stop watch used was a new one and was calibrated with a second watch immediately after the test. The weather was fine, with a high wind which blew the ash off the trench and sometimes fanned the charcoal into almost white heat."

Let us now consider how Dr. Fonseka's two factors, viz., thickness of the soles and duration of contact apply in the above experiments described in the British Medical Journal.

“Thickness of the soles”—factor debunked

Professor Pannett who examined Kuda Bux's feet at the experiment proper declared that the epidermis of his feet “was soft and not at all thickened or tough.” But Dr. Collier who examined Kuda Bux's feet at the rehearsal experiment felt that the epidermis of his feet “was rather thick”, although the hospital nurse who was assisting Dr. Collier on that occasion or Mr. Harry Price who examined the feet of Kuda Bux had both disagreed with Dr. Collier. Mr. Price was of opinion that Mr. Moynagh's feet “were rather harder than those of Kuda Bux.”

In all, Kuda Bux firewalked thrice and was never burnt. Mr. Moynagh had his feet blistered on both occasions that he firewalked. Mr. Cheepen firewalked once and his feet were badly bleeding from the blisters caused.

This is strong evidence against Dr. Fonseka's “thickness of the soles” factor.

Duration of contact factor debunked

It is also remarkable that Kuda Bux's rehearsal fire walk—four steps in 4.8 seconds—recorded a duration of contact of 1.2 seconds! This is a 400% increase on Dr. Fonseka's postulated duration of contact of 0.3 seconds!

At the experiment proper Kuda Bux's first firewalk—four strides in 4.5 seconds—recorded a duration of contact of 1.125 seconds! This is a 375% increase on Dr. Fonseka's factor!

With four steps in 4.3 seconds his second walk notched a duration of contact of 1.075 seconds! This again is an increase of 358% on the 0.3 seconds factor!

400%, 375%, 358%—Such was the per cent increase Kuda Bux had secured on three consecutive occasions over Dr. Fonseka's postulated duration of contact of 0.3 second.

Isn't this staggering evidence against the duration of contact factor?

Incredible, inexplicable observations

The Kuda Bux tests also focus attention on two other incredible and inexplicable observations. Firstly, how was it that not only Kuda Bux's feet but also the surgical plaster applied to his feet did not get scorched?

Secondly, how was it that within 10 seconds of his first fire walk the temperature of his sole dropped paradoxically from 93.2°F to 93.0°F, when one should really expect an increase in temperature? Needless to say, the Kuda Bux scientific experiments have very conclusively debunked Dr. Fonseka's hypothesis.

The fall of temperature of Kuda Bux's soles baffled the scientists of the day. Dr. Wilfrid Garton of Canterbury wrote as follows in the *British Medical Journal* of October 26, 1935 (page 824):

"..... This abnormal power of causing the apparent disappearance of heat has been observed in experiments with metagnomes. I prefer the term "metagnome" to the more usual "medium" because the latter suggests a channel of communication for discarnate spirits. Fire walkers are generally also metagnomes.

"One instance is recalled by the same careful investigator, Mr. Harry Price, in his experiments with Rudi Schneider, when the temporary fall of temperature in the room during a demonstration of telekinesis was checked by a thermometer.

"Similarly, the fall of temperature was checked by a thermometer by Sir William Crookes when observing the abnormal phenomena associated with Daniel Home. Daniel Home also possessed the power of handling red-hot coals without injury to his skin."

In view of these facts could it not be said that Dr. Carlo Fonseka has made a futile attempt to resurrect a theory which had been buried as far back as 1935?

10

That Radio Discussion on fire walking— a Post Mortem

“You don't need the sort of doctorate Carlo Fonseka attaches to his name to be able to say that if you touch a redhot thing for less than the duration of time it will take to burn you, why, then you will not be burnt! ...In trying to reduce the whole mystique of Kataragama to a simple exercise like curry tasting—by a process of deduction rather than by actual experiment—Dr. Fonseka has been guilty of some highly unscientific practices.”

A panel discussion on “Fire-walking” was broadcast by the CBC in June 1971 in its feature “Forum of the Air.” The participants were :

- Mr. George Ondaatjie—(Moderator), Member, Ceylon Rationalist Association.**
- Dr. Carlo Fonseka, Vice-President, Ceylon Rationalist Association.**
- Mr. J. D. Kuruppu, President, Society of Devotees of God Kataragama; Fire-walker.**



"In trying to reduce the whole mystique of Kataragama to a simple exercise like curry tasting Dr. Fonseka has been guilty of some highly unscientific practices."—Everyman's notebook, Ceylon Daily News, 14-6-71.

Rev. Fred de Silva, President, Methodist Mission.

Mr. S. Harihara Iyer, LL.B. (Lond.), Lecturer & Examiner, Ceylon Law College.

It is very questionable how the CBC thought it fit to assign as the Moderator for this discussion, a member of the Rationalist Brotherhood!

A post-mortem on the panel discussion was published in the "Daily News" of June 14th, 1971 under the caption "The feet are not for burning—Everyman's notebook: Mind and matter."

It is reprinted below:

"Firewalking has become a particularly heated subject ever since a university scientist began to take a clinical interest in these proceedings. It is of course an ancient and symbolic ritual which still finds many adherents in our part of the world. Devotees of the God of Kataragama have been walking the fire at annual festivals as a public act of faith and purification, attracting no more than their due quota of western sightseers and cinematographers.

CARLO AND HIS GUINEA PIGS

"Theories about firewalking are doubtless as old as the ritual itself, but few among the countless thousands who are fascinated by the spectacle have been tempted to kick off their shoes and have a go themselves. That would be a minimum first step in any scientific investigation of the phenomenon. Or you could hire a guinea-pig like the old-fashioned vivi-sectionists.

"Dr. Carlo Fonseka has laboratory assistants to stand in as guinea-pigs. He makes up his fires, too, under laboratory conditions. He has been experimenting with this material for some time now, and has come to the conclusion that anybody can walk the fire barefooted so long as the person doesn't allow the soles of his feet to touch the embers long enough to burn them.

"As a scientific theory this would seem to be unexceptionable. Even elementary. In fact it is self evident. You don't need the sort of doctorate Carlo Fonseka attaches to his name to be able to say that if you touch a redhot thing for less than the duration of time it will take to burn you, why, then you will not be burnt! Surely, any housewife who has placed a drop of boiling gravy on her palm and licked it up will tell you the same. Dr. Fonseka only elaborates this homely experience with a lot of stopwatch and thermometer readings.

CARLO GUILTY OF UNSCIENTIFIC PRACTICES

"BUT WHO WILL say that firewalking is as easy or as uncomplicated as tasting curry? This is where the scientist has slipped up. In trying to reduce the whole mystique of Kataragama to a simple exercise like curry-tasting—by a process of deduction rather than by actual experiment—Dr. Fonseka has been guilty of some highly unscientific practices. For instance, he took part in a radio forum in the company of a firewalking devotee and made several pronouncements based on the aforementioned stopwatch and thermometer readings.

"Since the validity of the so-called experiments at which these readings were taken is not admitted by the other party, it was difficult to see the point of the exercise. Dr. Fonseka confounded his audience further by quoting from the observations of a foreign visitor who, in the course of an account of a firewalking ceremony he had witnessed, had recorded that many of the participants hurried over the embers, and, mirabile dictu, concluding from this remark that those who walked quickly over the fire were evidently the ones who didn't suffer burns.

“ Logical minds might boggle, but Dr. Carlo Fonseka pressed on regardless on his self-imposed major premise that the object of fire-walking is to avoid getting one’s feet burned. There are of course simpler methods of achieving Dr. Fonseka’s objective, of which his own personal choice—that of never stepping on the fire at all—is the most effective. Our scientist sits on the side-lines instead and comes to all manner of startling conclusions from the time taken by other people to traverse the fire-bed and the number of steps involved in the process, making some hitherto undisclosed allowance for the thickness of their soles—not souls about which he confessed he knew nothing.

“ THERE ARE A lot of other things that Dr. Fonseka doesn’t seem to know or care about that are equally relevant to his calculations : not esoteric things like the state of the firewalker’s soul, or the degree of his faith, or the receipt of divine assistance, but elementary things like the consistency of the fire-bed, the weight of the walker, his capacity for mental and physical relaxation or his individual resistance to heat.

“ Without departing one tittle from the scientific stance that Dr. Fonseka intends to assume, it is possible to compare a man’s ability to walk on fire with his ability to float in water. Is it possible, therefore, by measuring the displacement of water and the weight of the body to predict that it will float ? A dead body, perhaps. Live bodies unfortunately have a notorious habit of sinking in a volume of water that should naturally keep them afloat. Only a properly relaxed body will float and find its proper centre of gravity in water, not one that is tensed up with anxiety and fear. Confidence begins in the mind, though it is later acquired by the muscles and becomes second nature.

CARLO’S EXPERIMENTS AMATEURISH

“ Couldn’t the art of fire-walking be similarly acquired ? Surely, confidence is of supreme importance in the act of wilfully placing a naked sole on burning coals—whether that confidence is induced by faith in god or in the necessity for purification. That the mind plays a vital role in the feat of firewalking was evidenced by the personal testimony of Mr. Kuruppu, the fire-walking devotee who participated in the radio discussion. What he contributed to the debate was irreproachably “ scientific.” He only spoke of what he knew by experience. He felt he was in a trance when he walked the fire. His sight and hearing were diminished. He barely noticed the burning embers under his feet. He came out unscathed from his act of devotion. He withstood the scientist’s cross-examination with equanimity.

“ WHAT IS Dr. Fonseka trying to prove or disprove ? At one point he explained that in introducing arrack and pork into the equation, he had merely intended to show that there was nothing spiritual about firewalking. That the abstinence practised by devotees was so much hocus-pocus. Even if such an exhibitionistic method could establish beyond reasonable doubt—and it has by no means been established by the amateurish experiments carried out by Dr. Fonseka’s assistants so far—that abstinence from meat and liquor is quite unnecessary for successful firewalking, how does that disprove its spiritual efficacy or the possibility of divine involvement ?

SEMI-EDUCATED’S INVINCIBLE FAITH IN THEIR OWN INTELLIGENCE

“ If, on the other hand, a state of mental equipoise is conducive to the performance of such feats as walking on fire or floating on water (as already suggested above), abstinence from strong meat and drink recommends it self as a simple preparatory discipline. The mind is indeed a sensitive instrument, and not an

altogether reliable one. Which makes it all the more inexplicable that so-called scientists and rationalists continue to rely so heavily on its unaided findings in explaining all the riddles of the universe.

Fortunately for such people, there are as yet no devices to measure the feats or performance of the human mind, which is no less susceptible to the diseases and delusions that all flesh is heir to. And the worst of these are not the superstitions of simple folk but the invincible faith of the semi-educated in their own intelligence."

In contrast to what Dr. Fonseka had to offer as a theory to explain firewalking let us see what a very eminent psychiatrist had to say on the subject.

Dr. A. L. Abeywardene, M.R.C.S. (England), L.R.C.P. (London), D.P.M., R.C.P. & S. (England), former Medical Superintendent of the Mental Hospital, Angoda spoke on the psychological aspects of fire-walking at a meeting of the Rotherfield Society at St. Michael's Church hall, Kollupitiya on 18.8.71.

Hypnosis Not The Explanation—Psychiatrist

After discussing the possibility of hypnosis being the factor behind firewalking, "he however conceded that the above theory did not completely explain away the mystery of firewalking for he did not believe that even hypnosis could prevent the blistering of feet at the temperatures of 400 and 500 degrees Centigrade as for instance recorded at Kataragama. This element of doubt he said could not be cleared in the light of existing medical knowledge." (Ceylon Daily News, 21.8.71).

11

The Prostitution of Paul Wirz's book

“It is thus very evident that Dr. Fonseka attempted to mislead and prejudice the people by putting out for public consumption shrewdly edited excerpts from Paul Wirz—He tried to establish the exception as the rule.”

Right throughout the firewalking controversy Dr. Carlo Fonseka and the Rationalists had a habit of quoting, or rather misquoting, the book “Kataragama — The Holiest Place in Ceylon” written by a German — Paul Wirz to lend support to their weak theory.

This canard has to be nailed once and for all.

Quoted below is an excerpt from an article entitled “Firewalking” written by Dr. Carlo Fonseka in the “Saiva Neethi 1970-71” published by the Ceylon Law College Hindu Students’ Maha Sabha. This is a classic instance of an attempt at mischievous misquoting and misleading by Dr. Fonseka :

“ For the benefit of those who have not watched a real firewalking ceremony here is Paul Wirz’s description of one he observed at Kataragama :

“ dry logs and branches are brought and piled up When the pile of wood is ready the head kapurala lights it Slowly the pile of wood burns down and this takes at least two hours. Finally the time comes when there is a pile of embers and a few still burning pieces of wood left. Now the men start to spread the embers evenly with their poles so that they cover a rectangular space from three to four meters in length and about two meters in breadth. The glow is so strong that one can stay close to it for only a short time . . . Among the approximately twenty people whom I saw walk over the fire were several who had blisters caused by burns on their feet . . . The way these twenty people . . . walked across the fire was very different. Most of them ran or hopped with maximum speed and therefore touched the fire at the most twice with each foot. Others went quite leisurely . . . (p. 51 and 52, Kataragama The Holiest Place in Ceylon).

Having given the above description Paul Wirz went so far as to say :
“ It almost seems as if the “ mystery ” (of fire-walking) will never be solved.”

“ Consider the following facts culled from the above descriptions :

1. Approximately 20 people walked over the fire.
2. Most of them ran or hopped with maximum speed.
3. Others went quite leisurely.
4. Several had blisters caused by burns on their feet.

“ Thus, most of the 20 i.e., at least 15 of them, ran or hopped with maximum speed. Therefore, only a few would have walked in a leisurely way. And only, a few (several) had blisters. Paul Wirz does not say which ones had blisters, but one possibility which must be seriously considered is that the several who had blisters were the few who walked the fire in a leisurely way. After all, even little Alice (of ‘ Alice in Wonderland ’ fame) had heard of children who had got burnt all because they would not remember the simple rule that “ a red-hot poker will burn you, if you hold it too long.”

First of all Dr. Fonseka says that he has quoted this excerpt from Paul Wirz for the benefit of those who have not watched a real firewalking ceremony. Thus any fair-minded and rational person should choose a description which is **adequately typical** of a fire-walking ceremony. Care should be taken to choose a description of a ceremony which **is the rule and not the exception.**

Otherwise one could be held guilty of attempting to mislead those who have not watched a fire-walking ceremony.

Was the description of the fire-walking ceremony chosen by Dr. Fonseka the exception or the rule ?

Adverse Facts

Let us analyse Dr. Fonseka’s chosen description. Three adverse facts can be spotted which could undermine the capabilities of devotees who firewalk. Firstly, the length of the bed of fire was only three or four metres ; secondly, of the 20 odd devotees who firewalked several developed blisters from burns ; and thirdly, most of the devotees ran or hopped with maximum speed and therefore touched the fire at the most twice with each foot.

The only conclusion which someone who has never seen a firewalking ceremony would draw is that the whole affair is a big sham, a big joke and that there is nothing fantastic about it.

Dr. Fonseka has done a mischievous editing of Paul Wirz's description to prejudice those who have never seen firewalking before. While quoting Paul Wirz he has broken off the description at a point most suitable to him. In fact he has broken off the description IN THE MIDDLE OF A SENTENCE. Had he completed the sentence his bluff would have been exposed.

Quoted below is the description which Dr. Fonseka chose to omit :

“ Most of them ran or hopped with maximum speed and therefore touched the fire at the most twice with each foot. Others went quite leisurely, (Dr. Fonseka broke off here) several stamping their feet and some went straight back and then for a third time over the fire. The fire was in fact spread over a very small area. I once watched a similar religious fire-walking ceremony in Burma where the pile of wood reached six meters in length. Not a single person was hurt and there were no prior preparations needed.”

Favourable Facts

Let us now analyse the description that Dr. Fonseka chose to omit. Two favourable facts can be spotted, which could spotlight the capabilities of devotees who firewalk.

The first fact is that though the fire was spread over a small length (three or four metres), some devotees went straight back and then for a third time over the fire. This would mean that these devotees would have fire walked an effective distance of about ten metres !

The second fact is Paul Wirz's reference to a fire-walking ceremony at Burma. Paul Wirz's book is essentially devoted to a description of Kataragama and its rituals. Of the 57 pages of description contained in the book, only two pages deal with the firewalking at Kataragama.

Thus one should address his or her mind to the question why Paul Wirz decided to make a reference to the firewalking ceremony at Burma.

Is it because Paul Wirz himself was quite surprised that at the PARTICULAR fire-walking ceremony he witnessed, several people ran across the fire and were burnt ? He had witnessed, a fire-walking ceremony at Burma where though the length of the bed of fire was much longer (six metres) than what he saw at Kataragama in that particular year, yet NO ONE was burnt.

Exception or Rule ?

Is Paul Wirz trying to drive it into his readers that what he saw in Burma is the rule and what transpired at Kataragama in that particular year is the exception ? Is it why soon after describing what he saw at Kataragama he rushed on to the scene at Burma ? This is a strong possibility which should be seriously considered.

Dr. Fonseka urges his readers to consider the possibility that the several who had blisters were the few who walked the fire in a leisurely way. A better example of "begging the question" or assuming what has to be proved would be hard to find !

Let us see some more of Paul Wirz's description Dr. Fonseka chose to omit :

" . . . Now as before the psychologists, or rather the parapsychologists, are far from able to explain the phenomenon. It almost seems as if the "mystery" will never be solved. We only know this much—that the person who is in trance or in the condition of auto-suggestion at the moment he steps onto the fire is surrounded by a mantle, which completely insulates and protects him. The same applies in the case of the dress, which he wears on his body and which does not catch fire. But we are far from having even an idea of the nature of this protective invisible mantle. But we have to accept its presence if we do not want to just attribute it to a miracle, in which case there is nothing further to be said."

It is thus very evident that Dr. Fonseka attempted to mislead and prejudice the people by putting out for public consumption shrewdly edited excerpts from Paul Wirz. He tried to establish the exception as the rule.

Is selective myopia the latest "modus operandi" of the Ceylon Rationalists' Association ?

12

Fire walking— a global round up

“ He stood for a short time with his face towards the fire, and entered the blazing fire pronouncing some incantations. The flames covered him up to the waist and the spectators were struck with amazement at the wonderful sight.”

The Encyclopaedia Britannica provides immense details on firewalking and fire ordeals.

It says that firewalking is a religious ceremony practised in many parts of the world, including the Indian sub-continent, Malaya, Japan, China, Fiji Islands, Tahiti, Society Islands, New Zealand, Mauritius, Bulgaria and Spain. It was also practised in classical Greece and in ancient India and China.

Fire-walking may take several forms. The commonest practise is to walk over a bed of embers which is prepared at the bottom of a shallow trench. Sometimes the devotees or priests or oracles walk through a blazing log fire. In Fiji and Mauritius, the devotees walk on a bed of red-hot stones. At times the devotee has a “ fire bath ” by pouring the embers over the head. Another practice is for the devotee to lash himself with a flaming torch.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says :

"Fire walkers believe that only those who lack faith will suffer from injuries from fire, while the faithful are spared. Devotees also undertake fire-walking in fulfilment of vows. While injuries from burns do occur, they seem on the whole to be much less frequent than would be expected. This fact also needs to be explained, especially as devotees do not apply any artificial preparation before the ordeal to protect their bodies."

Fire Ordeals

History also records details of fire-ordeals where a person who is accused of a crime or of uttering an untruth may be asked to undergo the ordeal of fire to prove his or her innocence, and if the person emerges unscathed innocence is proved.

Thus in the Hindu Epic—Ramayana, the virtuous Sita proves her innocence to her husband Rama and the world, after being rescued from her captor—King Ravana of Ceylon. In European law and chronicle, Richardis, wife of Charles the Fat, proves her innocence by going into a fire, clothed in a waxed shift, and is unhurt by the fire.

Another ordeal well known in old Germany and England was the walking barefoot over glowing plough shares, generally nine. The lawcodes of the early middle ages show this as an ordinary criminal procedure. Queen Emma, mother of Edward the Confessor, accused of familiarity with Alwyn, Bishop of Winchester, triumphantly purged herself and him by the help of St. Swithin. Each of the two when acquitted gave nine manors to the church of Winchester, in memory of the nine ploughshares, and the King was corrected with stripes.

To dip the hand in boiling water or oil or melted lead and take out a stone or ring is another ordeal of this class. Some of these fiery trials are still in use in regions of Africa or Asia—the negro plunging his arm into the cauldron of boiling oil while the Burman does feats with melted lead.

In a Scandinavian law it is prescribed that the red-hot iron shall be carried nine steps. In Anglo-saxon laws the iron to be carried was at first only one pound weight, but this was later increased to three pounds.

Fire-Walking in North Greece

Fire-walking (or rather fire dancing) is still practised in North Greece in a village called Langoda, 20 miles north of Thessaloniki on St. Helen's and Constantine's Day. This is in the month of May and the inhabitants of this village who are called Anástenarides

take part in the festival. It is understood that this fire-walking ceremony commenced in Greece even before Christianity spread there.

The leader of the Anastenarides, who is called the Archinastenaris, presides over the fire-walking ceremony. On the day of the fire-walking a public ground is cleaned up by the ladies of the village. The priest then pours "holy water" and lights the bed of Oak logs. Once the bed of embers is ready the Archinastenaris leads his men to the fire, bearing the figureheads of St. Constantine and Mother Helena.

They first dance around the fire and then shift over to the bed of embers. As they dance, they sing to the music of a simple type of bagpipe, a curious string instrument like the old fashioned violin and drums. When they dance over the fire they emit a deep sighing noise. It is for this reason that the tribe is called Anastenarides (Greek—Anastenazo—to sigh).

It is said that very often the spectators are also quite unconsciously drawn to fire-dance. As they do so they keep on chanting—
"Uphold Justice, or else you will incur the wrath of the God."

From here the Anastenarides move over to St. Mary's Church where they sacrifice bulls. These bulls, which are always black in colour and under three years in age are sacrificed after the mark of a cross is made on their foreheads.

French Professor on Fire-Walking

French born Professor Mircea Eliade of the University of Chicago, an internationally recognised authority in comparative religion and who has done valuable work in several major Universities, including those of Sorbonne, Rome, Munich, Frankfurt, Uppsala and Chicago has the following to say on fire-walking in his book "*The Forge and the Crucible*":

"As 'masters of fire,' shamans and sorcerers swallow burning coal, handle red-hot iron and walk on fire . . . These powers indicate access to certain ecstatic state or, on another cultural plane (in India, for example), to an unconditioned state of perfect spiritual freedom. The mastery over fire and insensibility both to extreme cold and to the temperature of burning coals, translated into ordinary terms, signify that the shaman or yogi have gone beyond the human condition and achieved the level of spirits."

Oxford Anthropologist on Immunity to Heat

Dr. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, an anthropologist from Jesus College, Oxford says in his scholarly masterpiece "*Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines*":—

“ At Rikhikesh, on the Ganges, I once witnessed a demonstration of the yogic immunity to extreme heat. A naked yogin at midday in the hot season sat on the shimmering sands of the river-shore surrounded by four glowing fires of heaped up wood and dried cow-dung within only a few feet of his naked body, each fire being in one of the four cardinal directions. The unclouded midsummer sun, directly over his uncovered head, constituted the fifth fire in the yoga, called the *Pancha-Dhuni* ('Five Fires'), which he was practising. Similar feats, proving yogic immunity from heat and from fire itself, have been witnessed and attested by Europeans, not only in India and Ceylon, but throughout the South Sea Islands and elsewhere, in connection with the fire-walking ceremony. And in some of the *Tovil* (Devil-Dancing) Ceremonies of Ceylon fire is trodden upon and grasped by the devil-dancers without harm, in virtue of the use of mantras called 'fire cooling mantras' (*Sinhalese—gini-sisil*). ”

Fire-Walking in Pakistan

A letter on Fire-walking by Mr. W. G. M. Nissanka Silva of Chilaw which appeared in the "Times of Ceylon" of 18.2.71 describes an amazing feat of firewalking at Dukshin, Maisandi (Pakistan). The letter is reprinted below :—

I HAVE followed with much interest the correspondence in many newspapers regarding fire-walking and I wish to give below some facts which I found in a book entitled " Life Beyond Death " by M. K. Ghosh, life member and treasurer, Calcutta Psychical Society, for your readers' perusal.

It is said that fire-ordeal is a very ancient institution to be found in their mythological works as well as the history of the ancient Romans, Greeks and Babylonians and it was long looked upon as an infallible test for finding out the truth regarding a person's innocence or guilt.

This book says that in modern times fire-walking has been exhibited by Mr. D. D. Home and Miss Suydan in 1880 in Chicago and London.

It mentions two wonderful feats of fire-walking by Thakur Tarani Kanta Saraswati at Dacca. The first of these was on April 12, 1909, in the compound of the Ukil Institution at Dacca in the presence of many Indians and Europeans of education and position.

The second exhibition was at his own home at Dukshin, Maisandi on July 3, 1909.

It goes on to say that the following account was published by Babu Pra Kumar Ghosh, M.A., Deputy Magistrate, in the Bengal Monthly, The Bharati.

" There assembled a large crowd to witness this great psychic event in Maisandi. At first a square of 8 cubits with half a cubit deep was dug out in the compound in which two mounds of fuel-wood were strewn and then fire applied to them. When the wood had caught fire the disciples began to arrange them in such a way that the fire might burn with equal strength on all sides. After an hour or so half the wood kindled and the square was ablaze.

The heat was so intense as to make one uncomfortable even at a distance of 9 or 10 cubits.

"About this time the venerable Thakur appeared on the scene, barefooted and clad in silk, with a scarf of the same stuff on his shoulders. He stood for a short time with his face towards the fire, and entered the blazing fire pronouncing some incantations. The flames covered him up to the waist and the spectators were struck with amazement at the wonderful sight and the whole place resounded with shouts of "Haribole." The Thakur crossed the fire four times from south to north and from north to south, again from west to east and from east to west and then came out of it by a side. After this his disciples, touched his feet with their hands in reverence and crossed the fire one by one.

"The feat was no doubt extremely doubtful, but there was a lurking suspicion in our mind that they must have had their bodies and clothes besmeared with some substance that neutralised the effect of the fire The Thakur addressing the spectators said : "If any of you wish to cross the sacred fire, then come along, leaving your shoes behind." When we (a friend of mine, myself and two other spectators) had advanced a little, Thakur came up and touched our heads with his hand. At his touch we were conscious of a pleasant cooling sensation in our body and a comfortable feeling in our minds. We then stepped into the fire and gently crossed it twice or thrice We were in the midst of a fire whose heat was unbearable even from a distance. Could it be that the burning power of the fire had been completely destroyed? One of my friends tested it. He had some scraps of paper in his pocket. One of these was thrown into the fire and instantly reduced to ashes. After this all doubts were entirely dispelled from our minds and we came out of the fire."

Fire-Walking in The Fiji Islands—The Mbengga Way

There are two completely different forms of fire-walking practised in Fiji. One of them, however, is not a Fijian but a Hindu ritual which was brought to the Island by the Indians. In this form of the ceremony, the devotees walk barefoot along a trench filled by glowing charcoal.

The other version, however, is truly Fijian and this is very different, for the performers walk, not on charcoal, but on huge boulders that have been heated for many hours in a great fire of logs. Only one tribe in the whole of Fiji performs this type of firewalk and they live on the tiny island of Mbengga, some twenty miles south-west of Suva.

David Attenborough, a zoologist and T.V. personality, who filmed this firewalk of the Mbengga tribe, has given a vivid description of it in an article entitled "Ordeal by Fire" in the "Wide World" magazine of October 1961. The following are excerpts from his article :

"Pre-Dawn Preparations

The *lovo** had been excavated at the back of the village. It was a circular pit some fifteen feet in diameter and four feet

* A kind of earth oven

deep. Around it lay piles of heavy logs and blackened boulders of stone. That evening, the men of the village began to stack the timbers in the *lovo*. Many of the logs were so heavy and bulky that two men were needed to shift them. They threw a few boulders into the lower layers, but most of them were heaved on to the top of the finished pile, six feet above the ground.

"Henry explained that the fire must be lit exactly eight hours before the ceremony was due to take place and, as it had been decided that the performers should enter the pit around noon the next day, it would be set alight some time before dawn.

"We slept that night in the chief's *mbure*. Henry woke us at three o'clock and we stumbled through the darkness to the *lovo*. Three men, holding torches of blazing palm leaf stems, came down to the *lovo* and thrust the flames down the side of the pit to reach the small sticks that formed the foundation of the pile. Soon these caught alight and then, as the flames licked up around the big timbers, the bonfire began to roar. Jets of scarlet sparks spouted upwards towards the yellow moon, and the stones, as they heated, began to split with cracks as loud as pistol shots, fragments of them coming spinning out of the fire to land at our feet.

"We watched this impressive blaze for some time and then, as the night sky began to bleach with the dawn, we went back to bed.

"Five hours later, in mid-morning, we found that the fire was still burning. Most of the timbers had been reduced to ash and their burden of stones had sunk below the level of the ground, but there were deep red glows between the flakes of white powdery wood ash and the pit was still so hot that when a few more logs were thrown in they burst into flame almost immediately.

"We seated ourselves on the steep grassy bank at the back of the *lovo* and just before noon the ceremony began. A column of men, led by the chief and the tribal priest, silently filed towards the pit from the centre of the village.

"They were wearing full traditional costume—long kilts of *pandanus* leaf strips dyed red, green and yellow; sashes of black and white bark cloth; garlands of flowers around their necks and chaplets of shredded *pandanus* leaves in their hair. Their brown bodies glistened with *coconut* oil.

"They walked quietly past the pit, keeping their eyes averted from it, for it is forbidden for any performer to look on the fire

before he enters the *lovo*. They strode past us towards a small leafy hut standing beneath a *breadfruit* tree.

"Those men who were merely assistants in the ceremony continued past the hut, circled and returned towards the *lovo*, but the men who were to walk on fire left the column and stooped into the hut. The last of them shut the door behind him.

"The tribal priest, an elderly, heavily-jowled man with bushy greying hair, gave the instructions for the preparation of the pit. First the unburnt timbers had to be removed. The men noosed them with loops of vines on the end of poles and then, whooping and cheering, dragged them far away beyond the trees.

Unflinching Steps

"Next the jumble of boulders had to be levelled to provide a roughly even surface on which to walk, and this they did by first placing the trunk of a tree fern across the *lovo* and then using it as a fulcrum against which they could use the poles as levers to shift the huge hot stones.

"Finally, bundles of freshly-gathered green leaves were placed in a ring around the margin of the *lovo*.

"All this had taken some twenty minutes but although the stones must have cooled slightly, there was no doubt whatever that they were still searingly hot. The air above them shimmered, the heat rising with such intensity that it struck you in the face like a physical blow if you stood within five feet of the edge of the pit. I was quite certain that under normal circumstances the stones would scorch and burn any flesh that touched them.

"The men who had prepared the pit squatted around it by the bundles of leaves. The priest, standing alone, turned towards the hut where the men who were to walk still sat in darkness, and called a single word of command, "*Avuthu*."

"There was a pause ; then the door of the hut opened and the men, in single file, came running towards the pit at a jog trot. There was absolute silence except for the rhythmic swishing of their *pandanus* kilts.

"Without any hesitation, the leader entered the *lovo*. Slowly, deliberately, his head bent forward and his eyes upon the stones, he walked round the pit. The other men followed behind him.

"They did not flinch from the stones. They did not tread lightly or quickly. They placed their full weight on every step.

It took the leader about twenty paces to complete the circuit of the pit.

"Suddenly, as he reached the point at which he had entered, the attendants crouching in a circle round the *lovo*, leapt to their feet and threw the bundles of leaves into the centre of the pit. The walkers turned towards the middle, stepped on to the bundles and stood in a tight knot, their arms round one another's necks, and as the steam from the scorching leaves swirled round them, they burst into a droning yet passionate chant.

"Two of the helpers dragged into the pit the long brown masawe vine that had been lying nearby. Frantically the rest of the attendants began to shovel earth into the pit. The men grouped in the centre continued their wild song, treading the soil beneath their feet.

"Within a few minutes, the stones, the masawe vine and the leaves were all buried. Slowly the men drifted away and soon all that was left was a wide patch of freshly turned earth from which wisps of steam still rose.

"The ceremony would not be complete, however, until four days had passed. Then the masawe vine would be dug up and made into puddings which all the villagers would eat.

Is This The Answer ?

"As soon as the men left the pit, I examined their feet. They were, of course, covered with thick, calloused skin, as are the feet of any people who go barefoot most of their lives ; but calloused skin will scorch and there was no sign of any burning whatever. Furthermore, they were not insensitive, for the men flinched from the touch of a lighted cigarette on the sole.

"One of the men who had walked was the local medical assistant, an educated man who had received his medical training in Suva. I asked him what he had done in the twenty minutes he had spent in the darkness of the hut before the ceremony, expecting to be told that he had prayed or had, in some way, induced in himself a trance. But he said that they had done nothing except talk in low voices about the ritual they were about to perform.

"Nonetheless, he did say that when they ran out into the bright sunlight, he had felt as though a new strength had come into his body. A man sitting next to him expressed it slightly differently, saying that he had felt as though a God had entered his belly. A third said that everything had looked strange

and misty. All of them agreed that when they walked upon the stones they had experienced little sensation of heat and none of pain.

"I asked the medical assistant why he had performed the walk. He did not seem to be very sure. It was not to prove that he was strong and brave, neither was it because he thought the ceremony might have some purging power. Perhaps, he said in a pensive objective way, he had done it because no man was truly a Mbengga man until he had practised the strange ability given him by the gods, and proved that the story of Tui na Moliwai was a true one.

"I asked him if I, too, could have walked on the stones without being burnt. He replied I could have done so provided that I had entered the pit with him and had observed all the taboos beforehand—that I had not eaten any coconut and had remained in a state of purity for the four days preceding the ceremony.

"Many people have witnessed the firewalk. The Mbengga men have performed it in Suva on several occasions, and have even gone to New Zealand, where they have trodden on the stones in front of great audiences. Once they did so before a committee of doctors who carried out a scientific examination of the ceremony.

"Many explanations have been put forward to account for their strange ability. Because the men insist on taking stones from their own island wherever they perform, some people have suggested that these boulders are of a curious stone which possesses the property of losing heat with great rapidity, but in fact the rock proves to be an andesite, a perfectly normal fine-grained igneous rock, which retains heat for a very long time.

"Others have said that the walkers smear their legs with some solutions or ointment which protects them from the heat, but no one could produce any ointment that has this odd power, and the doctors who examined the walkers' feet were unable to find any sign of such treatment."

Fire-Walking in The Fiji Islands—The Indian Way

So much for the fire-walking traditions of the Mbengga tribe of the Fiji Islands. A description of the Hindu oriented fire-walking practised by the rest of the Fijians is given by George and Helen Sandwith in their book "The Miracle Hunters," Published below are excerpts from this book :

“At the lighting of the fire, a small boy of about eight years of age was standing near us, enthralled by the details of the ceremonial ; he wore the sacred thread *Kanganam* on his right wrist showing that he had made a vow to walk over the fire on the morrow. I wondered how he felt at the thought of such a prospect until he saw me looking at him, and he gave me the clear smile of a child who does not know the meaning of worry, a state of mind which is abhorrent to the Divine Mother (i.e., Goddess Kali) and her followers

“ We saw the little boy who had watched the lighting of the fire standing at the far end awaiting his turn to cross the pit. Before he stepped on the ashes, a flame shot up in front of his toes ! But, without faltering the little fellow strode boldly across the fire-pit with an eager look of anticipation on his face, like a child who sees his mother holding out her welcoming arms.

“What faith ! Was the beautiful Goddess of Nature waiting at the far end to receive her small worshipper ?

“The crowd applauded, as several young fathers carried small children in their arms over the fire-pit. I watched the children closely, and so far as I could see, **not one of them even winced at the waves of heat rising from the pit, yet we had to shield our faces at ten feet from the side !** Another thing I noticed was that **a man who carries a child is apt to sink up to his ankles** in the hot ashes.”

The fire pit described above, measured about 25 ft. length, 6 ft. in width and 1 ft. in depth. 40 tons of *dogo* wood blazed away for about 16 hours before firewalking commenced.

From the foregoing, we see that an eight year old child, who is apt to have soft soles, has walked 25 feet of fire without even wincing his face at the waves of heat rising from the pit which however forced observers standing ten feet away to shield their faces ! We also have to note that it is not the relatively thick sole alone, but also the very thin skin on the upper aspect of the foot extending up to the level of the ankles that came into contact with the fire as men carried children across the bed !

Let's go back to “The Miracle Hunters”:

“ For a moment he (the High Priest) stood praying on the brink, before stepping barefoot on the ashes and walking across with great dignity balancing the *Khalasam* on his head. The marvellous expression of serenity on the High Priest's face indicated that he was in an ecstatic state. As he was crossing, I held my breath while I watched his feet because a fold of his robe was drooping dangerously near the glowing embers ; surely, the cotton material must scorch or ignite ; if not, why not ?

"The High Priest was followed by the other fire-walkers; some of them were so eager that they had to be restrained by the committee members from leaping on to the pit before the High Priest reached the far side. A wild fellow, stripped to the waist, thickset and powerful jumped with both feet placed together on the hot ashes, then waving a branch of the neeb tree he danced with such joyful abandon that a roar of laughter rose from the on-lookers. An old woman with hair hanging down her back strode across the fire pit with a look of intense concentration on her face; was she less immune to the heat than those who walked more slowly? There were youths who sauntered and others including small children ran across.

"When they had all passed over—there may have been thirty—I was too enthralled to count them, the High Priest crossed the second time. It seemed to me, his feet sank deeper into the ashes than on the first occasion; the fold of his cotton robe was still drooping, apparently unscorched. I was deeply interested in the problems raised by the High Priest's performance, so I went to observe him at close quarters. He did not raise any objection to me looking at either his robe or his feet; his thin cotton robe showed no sign of scorching; and to many, this may appear more miraculous than the fact that his feet were not blistered or burnt.

"When I returned to my hotel, I became involved in a discussion with banker who was on a visit to Fiji. Like me, he had just returned from the fire-walking, but the experience had seriously upset him. Very grudgingly he admitted the fire-walking was genuine, for he had thrown something on to the pit and it had caught fire—at once, but he was strongly of the opinion that the Government ought to stop it!

"When I asked why Government action was called for, he became very annoyed, replying that fire-walking ought to be abolished because it does not conform with modern scientific discoveries. And, when I put forward a suggestion that something of value might be learned from the fire-walkers, he was so furious that he turned on his heel and left me."

History repeats itself—how true! For, soon after the theory of the Vice-President of the Rationalists (Dr. Carlo Fonseka) had its Waterloo at the Sugathadasa Stadium fire-walking demonstration and at the Attidiya contest, Mr. Abraham Kovoor, the President of the Rationalists advocated that the Government should ban fire-walking! Afterall, if a phenomenon cannot be scientifically explained, it must be banned! If the disease of a patient cannot be diagnosed, the "beggar" must be killed! Modern rationalism demands it! Rationalism indeed!

Fire-Walking in Polynesia

An interesting account on fire-walking in the South Seas is recorded in the *Signet Mystic* paper back publication—"True Experiences in Exotic ESP," edited by Martin Ebon. The chapter on fire-walking is written by Wilmon Menrad, a veteran writer on people and events of the Pacific area and a resident of Hawaii.

The following are some excerpts from this chapter ("I Walked an Fire"):

"My interest in man's strange experiments in fiery tortures was aroused some years ago when the late Robert Ripley of "BELIEVE IT OR NOT" fame, sponsored a fire-walking

Hindu mystic by the name of Kuda Bux in a public demonstration. Bux strolled barefooted across two separate fire pits in a parking lot at Rockefeller Center in New York City. It is a matter of official record that three cords of oak and five hundred pounds of charcoal burned for eight hours before Kuda Bux made the walk across the two separate ovens, whose temperature a pyrometer registered at 1,220°F. Attending physicians peered and smelled at the soles of the firewalker's feet, but found only one small burn, where a coal had stuck to his instep. But their nostrils detected no odour of burned flesh. I was one of the astounded spectators, and I was deeply impressed.

"Just a short time ago, I was in Papeete, Tahiti, when word reached me that an *umuti* (FIRE WALK) was to be held on the island of Raiatea, one hundred and thirty-five miles away. I lost no time in booking passage on an inter-island trading schooner

"A native friend took me at dawn to the valley where the oven heaped high with large rocks, was blazing. It was thirty feet long, fifteen feet wide and four feet deep. It had been burning for two days. The huge rocks, which were settling to the level of the ground, glowed bright red in the faint light of the South Pacific dawn. Now and then, between us and the oven, the coconut-oil smeared bodies of the Polynesian fire tenders passed briefly, as they raked out the last of the log cinders and levelled the hot rocks. It was not unlike a scene from Dante's *Inferno*. Now as I watched holding my hand in front of my face to shield it from the intense radiated heat from the *umu*, or oven, I thought of man's superstitious dread and awe of fire, coupled with his instinctive, practical usages, which have combined to produce so many fantastic fire ordeals. The American Indians, during certain rites, danced in the live coals of their campfires; devotees of the *Sinsyu Shinto* sect of Japan walk barefooted over glowing coals. In Hawaii in the early days, the priests and priestesses of the fire goddess Pele strode across the molten lava on the broad bosom of Kilauea Volcano. In some parts of Africa, new-born children are held briefly over a flame. In India cremation of the corpse is supposed to be the soul's only passport to life beyond death.

"Now the Firewalk of Polynesia was to be performed before my eyes. Chief Terii-Pao, the young and hereditary firewalker of Raiatea, had suddenly decided to call an *umuti*, primarily, of course, to pay homage to the two great goddesses of ancient days—HINA-NUI-TE'A'ARA, the Goddess of the the Moon, and TE-YAHINE-NUI-TAHU-RA'I (The Great-Woman-Who-Set-Fire-to-the-Sky)—but also to earn a few

francs with which to buy a bottle of rum and a few yards of calico cloth for his woman.

"As I watched, Terii-Pao stepped from his nearby coconut-palm temple, and several attendants, similarly garbed in native *preu* and sacred *ti*-leaves, followed. I could feel the crackling excitement that swept the clearing upon his appearance. The laughter, singing and loud talking ceased instantly. All eyes were fixed upon the handsome chief, a splendid figure standing at the head of his assistants. He turned, caught my eyes and smiled. Once we had sailed aboard a trading schooner to the pearl-diving atoll of Anaa in the Dangerous Archipelago; I had given him a case of foodstuffs, and we were friends.

"The many tourists who had voyaged on the inter-island schooner from Papeete surrounded Terii-Pao and began a careful inspection of his feet. He submitted indulgently, grinning broadly at their thorough examination. I saw one of the tourists turn, walk to the edge of the fiery pit, and look full into the center of the oven for a few seconds. With a groan he backed away as he clapped his hands over his face. I could see that his neck and face were badly seared and tears streamed from his glazed eyes, another visitor, with the aid of a long stick, dropped a handkerchief upon the rocks and it turned almost instantly to a grey powder. The oven was certainly hot! The tourists withdrew from Terii with baffled expressions.

"Chief Terii, his head held high and his eyes uplifted to the opalescent sky, walked toward the end of the oven, a branch of *ti*-leaves in his hand. There he stopped, striking the rocks three times with the *ti*-wand. He began to chant in Tahitian the ancient fire walking prayer. I knew the language, and I listened closely.

"These were the words :

"O Being who enchants the oven, let it die out for a while!
O dark earthworms! O light earthworms! Fresh water and salt water, heat of the oven, darkening of the oven, hold up the footsteps of the walkers and fan the heat of the bed.
O cold host, let us linger in the midst of the oven. O Vahine-nui-tahu-ra'i, hold the fan and let us go into the oven for a little while!"

"Finally came Terii's loud and exultant shout of: "O VAHINE-NUI-TAHU-RA'IE! All is covered!"

"I shall never forget the great sigh and then the hush that followed the chief's first step upon the pit. He hesitated a moment as if to be sure that the stones would not shift under

his weight, and then, with an almost hypnotic expression, he walked onto the glowing bed of rocks. The tourists gave a gasp of dismay; the natives sat stiffly, unmoving, as if mesmerized. I watched wonderingly. This was no sham. A human being was walking onto an oven of rocks sufficient to roast him! Terii crossed the pit and then turned and retraced his steps. Upon his return, his assistants formed in a straight line behind him. Again Terii struck the edge of the glowing rocks with his *ti-wand*; then he and his followers marched with firm steps across the *umu*.

"I could see the heat waves rippling above their heads, but there was no odor of seared flesh, as one might expect. I stared fixedly until they had traversed the oven, expecting every second that one of them would leap with a scream of agony from the line. But each one passed safely. The last firewalker stepped from the oven, and Terii raised his *ti-leaves*, took his place at the head of the column, and led them back across the fiery expanse. This was repeated three times.

"With the third crossing, Terii raised his *ti-leaves* and cried: "Atira! Enough!" Then, unexpectedly, he turned quickly and crawled across the thirty-foot oven of rocks on his stomach!

"At the far side he stood up, grinned and beckoned to the tourists to make their inspection. One of them placed his palm to the soles of Terii's feet and then turned a baffled face to the others, crying: 'They're not even warmed!' I also moved forward to examine his feet. They were not even marked by the crossing of the fiery furnace! The examination over, we withdrew, our amazement plain in our faces.

"Terii then turned to the assembled natives and exhorted those who were afflicted any physical or mental taints, who were in need of spiritual purification, or who wished to test their courage with fire, to walk behind him over the hot rocks.

"Several white men have walked barefooted across the fiery ovens of Polynesia, among them Dr. William Craig and his brother, former British resident agents of the Cook Islands, and they made a safe crossing. Some, voicing flippant or skeptical remarks, were horribly burned during an *umuti*, necessitating hospitalization; others, believing in the strange ceremonies of the islands, have made the walk unscathed. The reasons for the different experiences I cannot explain.

". . . Some debunkers of firewalking have suffered severe penalties—just recently, in the case of one William Spaeth of Hollywood, California, who dabbles in fiery rites in his stage shows. One of his tricks was to walk over burning

charcoal scattered over a sandy bed. He decided to use larger chunks of charcoal, but at a rehearsal the performance back-fired, and Spaeth was hurried to the Georgia Street Receiving Hospital in an ambulance, suffering first and second degree burns. He had to learn to walk on his hands for a while.

“At a jungle shrine in Ceylon, just a short time ago, a group of local *sadhus* celebrated a rite of Hindu holy men : walking barefoot over a bed of glowing coals. This was good news to Eric Robinson, a British Methodist Missionary, who decided to debunk the *sadhus*. He kicked off his sneakers, tore off his socks, and headed for the fire pit. He stepped onto the coals and, before the holy men could stop him, marched the entire length alone. The doctor's verdict : horrible burns on the feet, which kept the Reverend Mr. Robinson from his missionary work for some weeks.”

13

Hanging on Hooks

“ The devotee was sweating considerably. In man an enormous increase in skin bloodflow occurs concurrently with sweating, unlike in animals whose limbs lack sweat glands. It would therefore be appropriate to expect considerable bleeding from his wounds. However none occurred.”

Fire-walking is not the only fantastic feat of faith performed in the temples of Ceylon.

Several astonishing feats of piercing of flesh with steel occur at Kataragama and other temples in Ceylon (and also in other parts of the world).

On the question of Hanging on Hooks there was an interesting debate which took place in the “Ceylon Daily Mirror.” The debate was triggered off by an article which the author wrote to the “Daily Mirror” soon after the “Vel Festival” of 1971, spotlighting the medically inexplicable feat of Mr. Indudasan who had been taken in the Vel procession hanging on hooks.

The High Priest of Rationalism in Ceylon—Mr. Abraham Kovoor was quick to rise to the defence of his tribe, in the process dubbing the Author a “credulous person.”

In return, Mr. Kovoov's reply was torn into shreds by "A Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons" and Mr. K. Balasingham.

The entire correspondence is reprinted below :

(1) Hanging on Hooks—What is the explanation ? by
Indra Kumar (Daily Mirror, Aug. 10th, 1971).

When 20 year old A. Indudasan from Tellippalai moved along in the "Vel" procession from the Kathiresan Temple at Sea Street to the Temple at Wellawatte, the eyes of Colombo stared in utter disbelief and amazement. Cameras clicked and cines whirred. Why all this excitement ?

This was because of the blood-chilling method he had chosen of conveying a message—he travelled 12 hours dangling from a 25 foot crane (that rocked all the time) by several metal hooks driven deep into his body. He was fulfilling a vow !

Feats of faith like this surpassing the limits of human endurance, are not uncommon in this country and they continue to baffle medical science.

Tough Job

The devotee who undergoes the ritual never has any pain killing injections or applications. He usually lies on his stomach with his hands in worship as the steel hooks are driven through the tissues of his back. Often he focuses his eyes on a "Vel" (Spear) or an image of the Deity while this happens.

The hooks are about six inches long and of the girth of a lead pencil. Driving them through the back of a devotee is not a job for a weakling. It is a tough man's job.

The devotee is then hoisted on ropes fixed to the hooks in which position he stays for hours, swinging perilously all the time and with the hooks lifting segments of the tissues off his back and threatening to tear through at any moment.

Yet others have their tongues and cheeks pierced by small steel Vels.

Under normal conditions these devotees are susceptible to any of the following conditions:

No Bleeding

PAIN—*While the piercing with hooks and Vels is done and while the devotee dangles in suspension, he does not experience any pain. He never winces. All that is apparent on his face is an expression of religious fervour. How is this self-induced state of anaesthesia achieved ?*

BLEEDING—*In spite of his bodily injuries, the devotee does not bleed. Even the tongue which is an organ with a rich blood supply does not shed a drop of blood when it is pierced. Bleeding does not occur even when these hooks and spears are pulled out at the end. How is this possible ?*

NEUROGENIC SHOCK—*This is a condition which may be precipitated by severe pain or fright. The person who gets it becomes pale, cold, clammy and usually loses consciousness. Blood pressure falls and the pulse becomes thready, its rate too registering a fall. Unless this condition is recognised and treated the person can die.*

These devotees do not develop neurogenic shock. At a firewalking ceremony held at the Sugathadasa Stadium last year, medical science had an opportunity of taking a close look at these devotees. The devotees did not become pale, cold, clammy or unconscious. Their pulse instead of registering a fall from the normal rate of 76 beats per minute showed a rise. A thirty-year-old man who was hooked up recorded a pulse of 170 beats per minute while a young boy of 12 who underwent the same ritual registered a pulse of 110. What is the explanation?

TETANUS—Even before an injection is given by a Doctor elaborate steps are taken to sterilise the needle. The hooks and spears used to pierce these devotees are never sterilised. In fact they are brought in sacks or wrapped up in newspapers.

How then does this devotee not develop tetanus? He never had tetanus toxoid, anti-tetanus serum or surgical cleansing of his wounds? How is it possible?

GAS GANGRENE—An allied but more serious condition is gas gangrene. The organisms causing this dangerous condition thrive in deep wounds with a poor blood supply and with contained dead tissues. How is it that the devotees, who have not had surgical removal of dead tissues or injections of anti-gas gangrene serum, never get gas gangrene?

BACTERIAL INFECTION—The wounds of the devotees are never dressed and they never have any antibiotics. But yet, the wounds never get infected by bacteria or exude pus. They heal on their own within a week. How is this possible?

Medical science has failed to explain up till now the amazing feats of these devotees, which defy natural law.

(2) Nothing supernatural about hanging from hooks . . . says Abraham Kovoor. (Daily Mirror, September 3rd 1971).

I THOUGHT some medical doctor would come forward to answer the question: "What is the explanation?" posed by Mr. Indra Kumar regarding a man dangling before an idol by "several" hooks during the recent 'Vel' procession in Colombo. But so far nobody has done so.

Even if this gruesome sight might baffle certain medical men, it is absurd to say that "medical science has no explanation" for this type of self-torture still practised among some primitive people.

Since he could not find any explanation for the lack of pain, bleeding, festering and tearing of flesh Mr. Indra Kumar, like thousands of credulous persons, comes to the conclusion that it was a miracle performed by the help of the idol that was taken in procession that day. One need not be a medical man to find out the secrets of similar so-called miracles. All what is needed is a bit of commonsense.

Lack of Pain

Analgesia or lack of pain can be brought about in three ways: firstly, by anaesthetising the peripheral nerves of the sensory organ concerned; secondly, by preventing the sensation of pain from reaching the brain by anaesthetising the spinal cord; and thirdly, by anaesthetising the brain itself.

Cerebral analgesia can be brought about by chemical means or by psychological means. Hypnotic trance, which can bring about analgesia, can be induced either by hetero-suggestions or by auto-suggestions.

A person can enter into a self-hypnotised state by emotional excitement, prayer chanting of refrains, deep faith even in a delusion, contemplative meditation, rhythmical dancing, singing and drumming, focussing the eyes on a fixed point, etc.

William Sargant, the renowned author, psychiatrist and physician in charge of the Department of Psychological Medicine at St. Thomas' Hospital, London, in an article captioned: "The Mechanism of Conversion," writes: "Trance is usually a state of self-hypnosis, through which all sorts of dubious beliefs can be implanted and maintained."

Indudasan from Tellippallai, who hung by hooks during the 'Vel' procession like all other similar minded persons who mortify themselves by self-torture at temples, devals, voodoo and devil dances, was in a self-hypnotised state of trance induced by his extreme piety and impressionability.

Lack of Bleeding

Unlike incised wounds, pierced wounds do not often bleed. Even when blood vessels are pierced during intravenous injections there is no bleeding. But one might bleed to death if a blood vessel is cut.

Another factor which prevents bleeding during ecstatic trance is the effect of emotional excitement on the adrenal gland of the subject. There is an enhanced discharge of adrenalin into the blood stream during emotional stress. This causes the capillaries of the peripheral blood vessels to shrink, and thus prevent bleeding.

Persons who get wounded on the battlefield or a keenly contested game of football or rigger do not bleed during the combat. It is only after the combat or the game is over, and the mental excitement is eased, that the bleeding starts.

If Indra Kumar had visited Indudasan a few hours after he got down from his swing, he could have seen the agony and bleeding!

Lack of Festering

Wounds fester as a result of bacterial infection, and that such infection can be prevented by the application of a bactericide. One need not be a medical man to know that the so-called Holy Ash, like any other wood ash, has bactericidal properties.

Even mongrel dogs seem to know the antiseptic properties of ash. When they get badly bitten by rival dogs during the mating season, they heal their wounds by lying in pits made in the ash-heap in the garden.

Hasn't Indra Kumar seen the "devotees" smearing their bodies with "holy ash" before and after the "sacred" act?

I know of certain self-torturing devotees who have sought medical aid even after their ash treatment!

Lack of Tearing of Flesh

Indra Kumar wonders why the skin and attached muscles do not tear off during the swinging. Had Indudasan been hanging by one hook, Indra Kumar could have seen the flesh tearing off. It was not for nothing that he was hanging by "several" hooks as Indra Kumar states in the article.

During my youth in India, I have seen hundreds of devotees dragging the temple chariot in procession during the annual festival, by hundreds of cords hooked on to the

back of each devotee. The chariot was dragged by the combined heaving of hundreds of devotees chanting the refrain : " Hara Hara Hara," all the time.

From the day this article appeared in the ' Daily Mirror ' I have been receiving numerous letters and phone calls asking for an explanation. Since it is difficult to reply all these inquiries individually, I thought of giving my answers through the ' Daily Mirror ' so that even others who have similar doubts may also benefit.

Though there may have been slight bleeding from their wounds, none of them showed any sign of pain. Each devotee had several cords hooked onto his back so that the weight was evenly distributed thus preventing tearing. Though the spectacle creates awe in the minds of the spectators, there is absolutely no miracle in the phenomenon.

Most of those devotees consume ganja and opium just before the kavadi dance and start of the procession. The hypnogenic properties of ganja and the pain-killing properties of morphia present in the opium is too well known for me to expatiate !

If anyone has better or more explanations to give on this type of cult believed to be miracles by the gullibles, I would like to read about them in the " Daily Mirror."

(3) Hanging on Hooks—Is it Faith or hypnotism ? By a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (Daily Mirror, September 13th 1971).

SEVERAL thousands of eyes were focussed on the inspiring spectacle of a youth suspended from massive hooks accompanying the majestic procession of Lord Murugan during the recent Vel festival. To those many devotees who thronged the entire length of the route to receive the blessings of the Lord, the feat of Indudasan was undoubtedly a high plane of spiritual attainment.

The mysteries of the mind were unravelled many many centuries ago by Sadhus and Yogis, although science, as we know it in modern times has not rediscovered it in concrete terms.

I write these brief comments with the full complement of medical knowledge of the physical mechanisms in the human body. An article headlined " Nothing supernatural about hanging from hooks " by Abraham Kovoor appearing in the Daily Mirror of 3rd September has roused in me and in many others an intense feeling of despair and remorse that this individual takes extreme liberties at making blasphemous statements pertaining to what, millions of Hindus the world over, accept as their God. To refer to the Statute of God taken in procession as " an idol " speaks either of (a) callous disregard of what others consider sacred or (b) that the individual is wanting in adequate comprehension of the English language—to give it a charitable explanation.

Mr. Kovoor ventures to " rationalise " on the various aspects of Indudasan's feat. He explains the lack of pain as follows : " It could be due to local analgesia, spinal analgesia, or cerebral analgesia. And that the latter could be brought about by a self-hypnotised state due to emotional excitement which in turn was achieved by prayer, chanting of refrains, deep faith even in a delusion, contemplative meditation, rythmical dancing singing and drumming, focussing the eyes on a fixed point etc."

Piety

Although on his own admission, it can be achieved by prayer and contemplative meditation he contradicts this in an incoherent confusion of ideas. Control of the

mind achieved by extreme piety is indeed an achievement of a high spiritual level. This again contradicts his statement that it is practised by "primitive" people.

The text of the paragraphs which follow are also of questionable factual basis. He states that punctured wounds of blood vessels do not bleed and he draws attention to the fact that after intravenous injections there is no bleeding. It does not require a "rationalist" to realise that there is a world of difference between the size of the hooks suspending Indudasan and the fine sharp needles used in intravenous injections.

Hooks of such size could never be expected to produce punctured wounds of blood vessels. Although much laceration of blood vessels is envisaged, it is indeed inexplicable medically as to why there is no bleeding although with relatively innocuous agents such as intravenous needles bleeding can occur.

In the statement "Emotional excitement produces a discharge of adrenaline into the circulation causing the capillaries of peripheral blood vessels to shrink and thus prevent bleeding," Mr. Kovoor includes two sets of blood vessels which react to a given condition in quite different ways (a) skin vessels and (b) muscle vessels and thereby negates any form of logical response which might be anticipated.

The contradictory features are that the devotee was sweating considerably. Sweating is normally accompanied by vasodilation which is dependant on the activity of sweat glands (Fox & Edholm 1963) and is believed to be due to diffusion of a dilator substance called bradykinin from the sweat glands into the tissue spaces.

Science

In man an enormous increase in skin bloodflow occurs concurrently with sweating, unlike in animals whose limbs lack sweat glands. It would therefore be appropriate to expect considerable bleeding from his wounds. However none occurred. Medical science cannot explain this. The other contradictory statement is that adrenaline is increased in circulation assuming that there is a long sustained state of excitement.

That obtained in the case of Indudasan was a state of extreme tranquility wherein a supreme control was exercised by the mind over the entire physique. The statement that persons who sustain injuries on the sportsfield do not bleed during the combat is also incorrect. Presumably Mr. Kovoor is either not a sportsman or has not been sufficiently attracted to the sportsfield to observe this.

Many readers are perhaps aware that several diseases of the Soma (body) are determined by the mind. Similarly by adequate conditioning of the mind the body could also be prevented from being affected by disease—the science of Yoga.

Moreover in the words of that eminent Neurophysiologist Sherrington, PAIN is defined as the "Psychical adjunct of an imperative protective reflex." It is plain therefore, that when the mind is in communion with God, this supplicatory state does not permit of construing any inflicted injury as being a threat to comfort. Hence the exemption from the modality of pain. Those who have such powers of the mind over the body whereby they are able to periodically divorce themselves of sensual impulses are unquestionably superior to others. And when such are referred to as "primitive," it is perhaps confused terminology.

It has also been discovered by experimental physiologists that various parts of the central nervous system namely the neo-cortex and amygdaloid and limbic cortex when destroyed in different species such as the wild Norway rat and the Macacus monkey produced diametrically opposite results (Bard 1956), who explains this as determined by the degree of domestication of the animal. In the light of this it is indeed in poor humour that Mr. Kovoor draws a parallel between a human being and a mongrel who seeks an ash pit.

Absence

That the mind conditions the freedom of the cells in the body from destruction and invasion by pathogenic bacteria not only in life but also in some instances for an appreciable time after death is exemplified by the findings of Mr. Harry T. Rowe, Director of the Los Angeles mortuary and Forest Lawn Memorial Park on the body of the great world teacher Paramahansa Yogananda who attained Mahasamadhi on March 7th 1952 in Los Angeles.

"The absence of any visible signs of decay in the dead body of Paramahansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience. No physical disintegration was visible in his body even 20 days after death. No indication of mold (fungus) was visible on the skin nor did any desiccation take place in the bodily tissues. This state of perfect preservation of a body, is, so far as we know, from mortuary annals an unparalleled one". It might be remembered that no form of preservative was used. (In the company of saints—by K. Ramachandra).

The lack of infection in the wounds inflicted on Indudasan is therefore explained by the complete control of the body by a mind that had supplicated itself to Murugan. Holy ash is itself applied with the same sincerity of purpose and not with eye of suspicion as individuals like Mr. Kovoov would do!

That the suspending hooks were disposed in such a manner as to reduce the shearing force is yet another point made by him. This is incorrect as the hooks were in fact placed so as to support the centre of gravity in the most difficult posture.

The statement "If Indrakumar had visited Indudasan a few hours after he got down from the swing he could have seen the agony and bleeding has a streak of sadism in it, which is regrettable. I had the opportunity of seeing him after his feat and he seemed to be remarkably free of pain. I wish also to reaffirm that in my experience as a surgeon no devotee has sought medical or surgical treatment for any complication accruing therefrom.

All limits of endurance on the part of the readers was transgressed by the crude unfounded statement that these devotees consume ganja and opium just before the kavadi dance. It irks the Hindu public that an individual under cover of calling himself a rationalist thinks it fit to belittle another religion in toto—the God and devotees.

I do not wish to enter into any form of debate. I would conclude, recalling the words of Oscar Wilde "What is a CYNIC? A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

By a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.

- (4) Antiseptics in our ash cans by K. Balasingham,
Colombo 15. (Daily Mirror, September 13th 1971).

Antiseptics in Our Ashcans

INSTEAD of Mr. Abraham Kovoov explaining every action of a devotee with the charge of "self-hypnotism," let him publicly demonstrate a similar feat with the help of, if necessary, a dope addict.

The Mr. could make the subject enter into a self-hypnotised state, administer the hooks himself and show others how it could be done according to his theory, instead of trying to "explain" how it is done by others.

Incidentally, the learned "Mr." has given some useful tips to the Health Ministry to cut down waste :—

1. Dispense with anaesthetists and let the patients be "self-hypnotised through rhythmical dancing, singing and drumming."
2. Scrap the Blood Bank, since bleeding during an operation could always be arrested by subjecting the patient to emotional excitement permitting "enhanced discharge of adrenalin into the blood stream etc. etc."
3. Ban all antiseptics. There is enough, even for export, in the ash-heap in our gardens !

K. BALASINGHAM,
Colombo 15.

APPENDIX I

The Full report issued by the Judges who participated at the Festival of Fire:—

FESTIVAL OF FIRE

Sugathadasa Stadium, Colombo.

4th December, 1970.

We were present at the Fire-Walking Ceremony organised by the Society of Devotees of God Kataragama.

The fire was of Palu and Milla wood. It measured 18' x 6'. It was about 6" thick. The temperature ranged between 420°C and 320°C during the period of the walk (as measured by technical officers of the CISIR).

46 Devotees (who had previous experience in fire-walking) walked the fire. Their ages ranged from 6 years to 55 years. Six were females. Three were below 12 years (11, 7 and 6 years).

The number of steps taken to cover the fire ranged from 6 to 18, and the time ranged from 1.8 seconds to 6.5 seconds.

The three boys referred to walked the fire towards the end of the Ceremony. Their time of walk ranged from 2.8 - 6.5 seconds and the number of steps from 8 - 18. The youngest aged 6 years took 10 steps in 3 seconds. The temperature then was in the region of 320°C.

The texture of the soles of the feet of the walkers was examined immediately before and after they had completed the walk. It ranged from soft to thick as described by the examiners. There was no evidence of any special applications on the feet although two of them had wet feet. There were no noticeable difference in the appearance of the feet after the fire walking.

There were 17 devotees the soles of whose feet were described as "normal," "not thickened" or "soft." This related to the appearance and texture of the feet. Of these 17, there were three persons who said that they were regular users of footwear. Some

of the devotees whose soles were described as thick were also said to be regular users of footwear. Two of those whose soles were normal in appearance, No. 2 Wimalasena, No. 8, Jayaweera, claimed that they had walked over a hundred times. No. 10, Jayasiri, whose sole was described as very soft claimed thirteen walks at Kataragama, besides many others. It was concluded that there was no evidence that repeated fire-walking causes undue thickening of the soles of the feet.

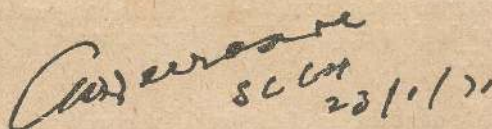
Duration of Contact :

The minimum period during which the foot was in contact with the fire varied from .6 seconds in four walkers to .2 seconds. This was calculated by dividing the period occupied by the walk, by the number of steps taken. It was observed that in most cases, at least one of the feet was in contact with the fire all through the duration of the walk. The only exceptions would have been if the fire walkers took jumps instead of the usual steps. As a matter of fact, quite often during the walk more than one foot was in contact with the fire. This would increase the period of contact, but no allowance was made for this or for any possible jumping.

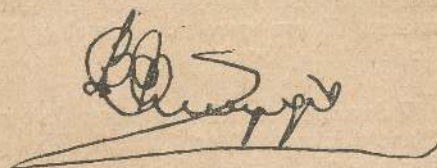
The duration of the walks varied from 1.8 seconds - 6.5 seconds.



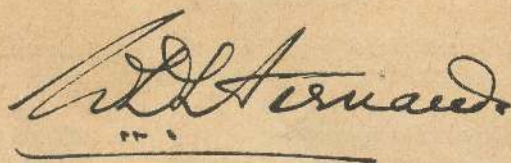
Prof. H. V. J. Fernando, M.D. (Lon.)



Dr. G. Weerasiri, M.B.B.S. (Cey.), D.T.M. & H. (Eng.)



Dr. P. R. Thiagarajah, F.R.C.S., M.R.C.P. (Edin.), D.R.C.O.G. (Eng.)


 A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'W. D. L. Fernando', written in dark ink on aged paper. The signature is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Dr. W. D. L. Fernando, F.R.C.P. (Edin.), J.M.O., Colombo


 A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'T. Visvanathan', written in dark ink on aged paper.

Dr. T. Visvanathan, F.R.C.S. (Edin.), M.R.C.O.G. (Gt. Bt.) M.O.G. (Cey.)


 A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'S. Y. D. C. Wickramasinghe', written in dark ink on aged paper.

Dr. S. Y. D. C. Wickramasinghe, M.S. (Cey), F.R.C.S. (Eng.)



APPENDIX 2

The details of the fire walkers who participated at the Sugathadasa Stadium fire walking demonstration :—

Dimensions of carpet of fire	... 18' x 6' x 6''
Time at Commencement of firewalk	... 9.55 p.m.
Temperature at commencement of firewalk	420°C.
Time at end firewalk	... 10.45 p.m.
Temperature at end of firewalk	... 320°C.
Temperature range	... 320°C/420°C. = (608°F/788°F)

No.	Name	Sex/Age	Texture of Sole	Temperature at Time of firewalk in degrees (Centigrade)
1.	K. Arnolis	... M/42	Soft	—
2.	J. M. Wimalasena	... M/39	Soft	420
3.	J. Jayasena	... M/31	Thick	"
4.	L. P. Sigera	... M/36	Thick	420
5.	A. H. Albert Silva	... M/52	Thick	"
6.	D. Thomas Appu	... M/45	—	410
7.	E. Michael Gunawardene	... M/52	(Did not participate)	
8.	Nihal Jayaweera	... M/	Soft	
9.	H. J. Caldera	... M/51	Thick	
10.	W. G. Jayasiri	... M/27	Soft	
11.	H. Justin Fernando	... M/40	Thick	
12.	Somarathne Weliwita	... M/30	—	
13.	K. Arthur Fernando	... M/44	Thick	340
14.	M. C. Robert Cooray	... M/36	—	"
15.	T. Davith Appuhamy	... M/42	—	390
16.	J. M. Dayapala	... M/30	Soft	"
17.	H. Odiris	... M/27	Thick	"
18.	D. A. Sarnelis	... M/55	Thick	"
19.	R. A. Hinnihamy	... F/55	Soft	340
20.	D. Ekanayake	... M/44	Thick	"
21.	K. Charles Fernando	... M/51	Soft	340
22.	M. D. D. Piyadasa	... M/40	Soft	"
23.	R. Dayananda Perera	... M/38	Thick	320
24.	K. A. D. Gunawathie	... F/42	Soft	"
25.	K. A. D. Godwin Siripala	... M/25	Soft	350
26.	T. Lantin Silva	... M/22	Thick	
27.	N. G. Podiappuhamy	... M/55	Thick	350
28.	R. U. S. P. W. Waidyaratne	M/24	Thick	"
29.	K. L. Wijesena	... M/24	Thick	350
30.	E. D. Simon	... M/32	Thick	"

No.	Name	Sex/Age	Texture of Sole	Temperature at Time of
31.	H. U. Juliet Nona	... F/49	Thick	340
32.	P. D. Sarnelis Appuhamy	... M/53	Thick	"
33.	K. M. Lal Kithsiri	... M/11	Soft	320
34.	A. Wilbert Perera	... M/42	Thick	"
35.	S. D. J. Gunaratne	... M/22	Thick	"
36.	W. M. S. W. Fernando	... M/30	Soft	"
37.	L. P. Dissanayake	... M/22	Thick	"
38.	A. W. Sarnelis	... M/54	Thick	"
39.	J. A. Wickramapala	... M/32	Thick	"
40.	K. W. Perera	... F/44	Soft	"
41.	H. A. Ruban Singho	... M/45	Thick	"
42.	D. G. D. Harold Perera	... M/6	Soft	340
43.	M. P. A. Prithiraj Perera	... M/13	Soft	"
44.	L. Asokalal Sigera	... M/7	Soft	320
45.	T. Daya Swarnalatha	... F/14	—	—
47.	J. D. Kuruppu	... M/50	Soft	"

APPENDIX 3

Report issued by the Judges who officiated at the Attidiya Firewalking confrontation:—

I was one of the Medical Officers who was named as a Judge by Mr. Muthukuda on the day (8.2.71) when fire walking contest held at the Attidiya Road Devalaya.

I was present at the spot from about 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. When I arrived at the spot Mr. Muthukuda was in the Pooja room. Dr. Carlo Fonseka was also there. I met him and spoke to him. I also spoke to some of Fire-walking team members. After the Pooja, the fire was lit at about 11 p.m. The fire was raging from then onwards till about 5 a.m.

The fire-walking itself started at about 5.30 a.m. Mr. Muthukuda led his team, all dancing while they went. After testing the fire with his feet thrice, he signalled his team members to go across the fire. Three members quickly strode across the fire one following the other. **NONE OF THEM RAN, BUT CROSSED THE FIRE WALKING BUT FAIRLY QUICKLY** and all members continued to dance the Kavadis.

Now came Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team to walk the fire.* Dr. Carlo Fonseka lead the team. They went to one end. **THEN I SAW THEM ALL ARGUING AND THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE DELAY.** I understand that Dr. Carlo Fonseka insisted

that the feet of the devotees must be examined before their (Dr. Carlo Fonseka's) team walked the fire. This request was conveyed to the Judges. WE EXAMINED ONE DEVOTEE AND FOUND THAT THE FEET WERE NOT BURNT. At this stage Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda said that examination of the feet of devotees will take a lot of time by which time the fire will be cold and Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team should walk the fire immediately. BUT WE FOUND THAT THIS WAS NOT FORTHCOMING. The crowd was becoming restless. There was lot of hooting at this stage. Then suddenly one of the members belonging to Dr. Carlo Fonseka raised his sarong and tied it above his knees and RAN ACROSS THE LENGTH OF THE FIRE. UNLIKE THE DEVOTEES HE DID NOT WALK BUT RAN. HE RAN VERY FAST AS IF SOMEBODY WAS CHASING HIM. This was seen by the entire crowd. Dr. Nandadasa Kodagoda too saw and made the following comment: 'The begger ran no man.'

Because this man ran and not walked the fire the crowd started jeering and hooting and a lot of them broke the barricades and entered the enclosure. Now there was confusion. Some people carried Mr. Muthukuda shoulder high crying 'Appi Thinuwa.*' Some others poured water on to the fire, and from there onwards there was confusion.

In my opinion while the Devotees walked the fire with full confidence, the Ace fire walker of Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team Lionel Fernando made a mad dash across the fire panic stricken. This is not fire walking but may be called Fire racing. Had Dr. Carlo Fonseka's man walked just like the Devotees then the contest could be called equal. But here there was no comparison because Dr. CARLO FONSEKA'S MAN RAN AS IF HE WAS BEING CHASED BY A TIGER while the Devotees walked the fire one following the other FULL OF CONFIDENCE AND LEAST SCARED.

I feel that Dr. Carlo Fonseka's team needs further training or even more alcohol to get over the panic.

I agree with the above
 fact as stated by Dr. P Jayapal
 Dr. P Jayapal
 Dr. P. Jayapal
 D. M. O.
 HOMAGAMA
 Dr. T. Manasighe
 C. K. O. H. Kambura
 323
 12.2.71
 * 'We won'



Dr. K. Indra Kumar is perhaps the most impressive amongst the Tamil Science writers in Sri Lanka today. His forte has been Space Science writing. Of late, he has entered a new field—that of Science broadcasting.

His career in Science journalism which he started as a pre-medical student at Jaffna Hindu College came into full blossom when he was a medical student. In fact, there was not a single Medical Student publication during his undergraduate days at the Faculty of Medicine, Colombo which did not include an article from him.

Dr. Indra Kumar is only too well known for his outspokenness on any matter, including Fire-walking.

The clarity and style with which he presents his facts and the power with which he argues them out holds him in excellent stead in the field of Science journalism.

Dr. BUDDHADASA BODHINAYAKE,
*Chairman, Government Advisory Panel
on Scientific Literature, Sri Lanka.*