



A Visit to a Passover Bakery.

Most of us eat our matzos year after year without pausing to reflect much on their manufacture, nor what processes they undergo before being packed in their drawers in our cases, and I was not a little surprised to see the celerity with which a Passover cake is mixed, prepared, baked and stacked on the occasion of my visit to Mr. Joseph Bonn's factory.

Though the entrance, up a narrow courtway, is not very prepossessing, the factory is quite a model one, spotlessly clean, well arranged and boasting the modern of gas engines, free from steam and smell. The huge oven is lined with snowy white tiles, and the workers are all in the white array of cookery. Mr. Bonn is justly proud of his factory, converted from a tumble-down building to meet the special needs of a Passover bakery, and, though only three years old, is acknowledged as an example of its kind, and he was ready enough to show me all the processes.

The great cycle of autumn holidays are barely past when it is time to think of manufacturing matzos for the ensuing Passover, the first step necessary being to procure the flour. Here let us pause a moment to explain how the flour is procured and what its purchase involves. From the time the wheat is milled to the delivery of the Matzo from the mill, the whole process is under the strict supervision of the Sanitary Authorities. The contract for the supply of the flour (from English or foreign) having been entered into, the mill is duly inspected by the Dayanim, or "guardians" or "watchers" are appointed to attend night and day at the mill during the whole period in which the flour is being ground. Every sack is sealed by the Shomerim, and the sacks are delivered only on the order of the Secretary of the United Synagogue. Formerly a tax of 12s. 6d. was levied upon each sack of flour to cover the incidental expenses and towards the cost of the distribution of Matzos to the poor. The tax was reduced a few years ago to 7s. 10d. per sack. The whole administration of this department is under the direction of the Overseers of the Poor of the United Synagogue: the Flour Committee consists of representatives of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation, as well of the United Synagogue. The total sales to the bakers were 1,652, a slight reduction (of 16 sacks) on the total of 1898. The cost of the flour was 24s. 6d. per sack; the price to the matzo bakers being 21s. 6d., a reduction of 3s. 4d. on the previous year. The tax produced a gross revenue of £568, but as the cost of Matzos to the poor and to institutions (hospitals, almshouses, &c.) was £644, there was a nett deficiency of £34; six-sevenths of which was paid by the United Synagogue, and one-seventh by the Sephardic Congregation.

Kneading is the first of the processes in the actual making of Matzos in the bakery. 18 lbs. of flour are weighed out and mixed in a huge bowl of burnished copper, with about two quarts of water, sufficient to moisten the mass into shape, rolled to and fro with the roller, and then by the gas engine. It is not yet, however, flat enough, and the dough passes under other rollers, which carry on the task already begun. The third roller reduces the paste to its proper thickness, and it passes on to be perforated and cut to shape simultaneously, by a large cutter, worked by machinery, which descends with rhythmic precision.

The raw matzo is now *un fait accompli*, duly pricked with holes, and is ready to be baked, whilst the trimmings which the cutter separates from the matzo are heaped up and returned to the first tray and roller, where they are mixed with the fresh paste. Only wood is burnt in the bakery, and I had a glimpse at the wood cellar closely piled with long lengths of trees and blocks which serve as fuel. Mr. Bonn reckons to save me from forty to fifty tons of wood annually in his bakery. The actual

bakings is performed with the greatest despatch: one man "feeds" the long spade-shaped instrument with which the baker puts the matzo into the fire, perhaps a dozen are lying there at the same time, but they are like rapidly they are tossed in and tossed out again baked, and a third man, who piles them up on the table close by. The small matzo, made from the larger ones, a cutter employed as they emerge from the oven, serving to break up each ordinary matzo into two tea ones.

In all these processes the brittle biscuits give off numerous bits of further part to play: they are sieved down, and the brown specks which remain when they are milled, emerging from the machinery as they pass, which is supplied to Jewish households.

The history of a matzo does not finish here however, for, for some weeks or months, as the case may be, is a matter of preparation. Above the factory are specially constructed air-tight chambers, in which, in turn, and here the matzo rests securely till a few days before the Passover, thousands upon thousands of them are packed and despatched. The baker finds himself confronted with a difficult task if bidden to pack a matzo, and skill and practice are necessary in order to build those close-packed layers of the fragile biscuits. As each room is filled, it is shut air-tight for getting out and sending off the cakes, and the importance of the rooms air-tight may be realised when it is mentioned that some Passover cakes are stacked in each chamber.

A few facts and figures may not be amiss here. About 4,000 matzos are baked daily, the number of matzos (eight to the pound) turned out daily, amount being estimated at 4,000. For the toothsome sweet matzo, it uses about three tons of almonds to six tons or more of sugar, and many cases of eggs as can be procured. The bakers are all of Jewish persuasion, and bake under "the Ecclesiastical Authorities" to say that a "Shomer" from the Board must be added to the list of a matzo baker. The biggest contract given to a single firm is that of the Jewish Working Men's Matzo Association, of which Lord is the Treasurer, and the execution of which is a great pride to the bakers.

It is noteworthy that the old system of paying by piece-work, although the custom of making Passover cakes by hand fell into disuse twenty or thirty years ago. The bakers generally cease work on Friday or earlier in the day, if their allotted portion is finished, and a matzo baker, on which they are engaged during the half of the year, if the matzo bakery is not working, they find the vacant Friday very busy, and keep in touch with their other avocations. Working hours are now, nowadays it is a cleanly, wholesome employment, performed under good conditions and properly remunerated, and an intelligent Jew might find a less satisfactory berth than that of a matzo baker.

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HOW MATZOS ARE MADE.



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Though the entrance, up a narrow courtway, is not very prepossessing, the bakery is quite a model one, spotlessly clean, well arranged and boasting the most modern of gas engines, free from steam and smell. The huge oven is faced with snowy white tiles, and the workers are all in the white array of cook. Mr. Bonn is justly proud of his factory, converted from a tumble-down building to meet the special needs of a Passover bakery, and, though only three years old, acknowledged as an example of its kind, and he was ready enough to explain to me all the processes.

The great cycle of autumn holidays are barely past when it is time to think of manufacturing matzos for the ensuing Passover, the first step necessary being to procure the flour. Here let us pause a moment to explain how this flour is procured and what its purchase involves. From the time the wheat is milled to the delivery of the Matzo from the factory, the whole process is under the strict supervision of the Ecclesiastical Authorities. The contract for the supply of the flour (from English wheat only) having been entered into, the mill is duly inspected by the Dayanim. Shomerim ("guardians" or "watchers") are appointed to attend night and day at the mill during the whole period in which the flour is being ground. Every sack is sealed by the Shomerim, and the sacks are delivered only on the order of the Secretary of the United Synagogue. Formerly a tax of 12s. 6d. was levied upon each sack of flour to cover the incidental expenses and towards the cost of the distribution of Matzos to the poor. The tax was reduced a few years ago to 7s. 10d. per sack. The whole administration of this department is under the direction of the Overseers of the Poor of the United Synagogue; though the Flour Committee consists of representatives of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation, as well of the United Synagogue. The total sales to matzo bakers were 1,652, a slight reduction (of 16 sacks) on the total of 1888. The net cost of the flour was 24s. 6d. per sack; the price to the matzo bakers being 32s. 4d., a reduction of 3s. 4d. on the previous year. The tax produced a gross profit of £568, but as the cost of Matzos to the poor and to institutions (hospitals, asylums, &c.) was £644, there was a nett deficiency of £34; six-sevenths of which was paid by the United Synagogue, and one-seventh by the Sephardic Congregation.

Mixing is the first of the processes in the actual making of the Matzos in the bakery. 18 lbs. of flour are weighed out and mixed in a huge bowl of burnished copper, with about two quarts of water, just sufficient to moisten the mass into shape, rolled to and fro with the roller, driven by the gas engine. It is not yet, however, flat enough, and the dough next passes under other rollers, which carry on the task already begun. The third set of rollers reduces the paste to its proper thickness, and it passes on to be perforated and cut to shape simultaneously, by a large cutter, worked by machinery, which descends with rhythmic precision.

The raw matzo is now *un fait accompli*, duly pricked with holes, and is ready to be baked, whilst the trimmings which the cutter separates from the rounds are heaped up and returned to the first tray and roller, where they are welded with the fresh paste. Only wood is burnt in the cleanly oven, and I had a glimpse at the wood cellar closely piled with unyielding lengths of trees and blocks which serve as fuel. Mr. Bonn reckons to consume from forty to fifty tons of wood annually in his bakery. The actual



bakings is performed with the greatest despatch: one man "feeds" the matzos to the long spade-shaped instrument with which the baker puts them in a hot fire, perhaps a dozen are lying there at the same time, but with lightning-like rapidity they are tossed in and tossed out again baked, and received by a third man, who piles them up on the table close by. The smaller matzos are made from the larger ones, a cutter employed as they emerge from the oven serving to break up each ordinary matzo into two tea ones.

In all these processes the brittle biscuits give off numerous bits which have further part to play: they are sieved down, and the brown specks fall away from them when they are milled, emerging from the machine as the "matzo meal" which is supplied to Jewish households.

The history of a matzo does not finish here however, for its storage for some weeks or months, as the case may be, is a matter of prime importance. Above the factory are specially constructed air-tight chambers which are filled in turn, and here the matzo rests securely till a few days before Passover, when thousands upon thousands of them are packed and despatched. The tyro would find himself confronted with a difficult task if bidden to pick a matzo-room for skill and practice are necessary in order to build those close, firm, columns formed of the fragile biscuits. As each room is filled, it is shut up till the time for getting out and sending off the cakes, and the importance of having these rooms air-tight may be realised when it is mentioned that some £90 worth of Passover cakes are stacked in each chamber.

A few facts and figures may not be amiss here. About 4½ sacks of flour are baked daily, the number of matzos (eight to the pound) turned out from the amount being estimated at 4,000. For the too-humble sweet cakes Mr. Bonn uses about three tons of almonds to six tons or more of sugar, and literally as many cases of eggs as can be procured. The bakers are all, of course, of the Jewish persuasion, and bake under the Ecclesiastical Authorities, which mean to say that a "Shomer" from the Board must be added to the permanent staff of a matzo baker. The biggest contract given to a single firm is the order for the Jewish Working Men's Matzo Association, of which Lord Rothschild is the Treasurer, and the execution of which is a great pride to the firm.

It is noteworthy that the old system of paying by piece-work still prevails although the custom of making Passover cakes by hand fell into desuetude twenty or thirty years ago. The bakers generally cease work Thursday night or earlier in the day, if their allotted portion is finished, and as some of them pursue other callings, on which they are engaged during the half year when the matzo bakery is not working, they find the vacant Friday very convenient to keep in touch with their other avocations. Working hours are long, but nowadays it is a cleanly, wholesome employment, performed under comfortable conditions and properly remunerated, and an intelligent Jew might find a not less satisfactory berth than that of a matzo baker.

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