

IN THE **FOOTSTEPS**
OF **CHASSIDIM**

The Shochtim of Dublin

By: Rabbi Mendy Greenberg (Twinsburg, OH)

לזכות החייל בצבאות ה'
צבי הירש אייזיק בן חי' מושקא שיחי'
לרגל הולדתו כ"ז סיון ה'תשפ"ה

ולזכות אחיו ואחיותיו
החיילים בצבאות ה'
מנחם מענדל, אסתר הנ"ל רחל,
שמעון, שיינא, אליהו שמואל שיחי'

יה"ר שיגדלו לנח"ר כ"ק
אדמו"ר והוריהם שיחי'
מתוך בריאות, שמחה,
הרחבה והצלחה בכל

In the aftermath of World War II, Europe lay in ruins. Tens of millions were dead, cities and towns were reduced to rubble, and the continent's infrastructure—its roads, railways, and communication lines—was devastated.

A terrible famine began to spread, not from natural causes like drought, but as a direct result of the war. Farmland had been destroyed, farmers displaced or killed, and food could not be transported even where it did exist. It was a man-made crisis of historic proportions.

Ireland, a neutral country during the war and part of the British Commonwealth at the time, remained largely unscathed. With its wide expanses of farmland and surplus of cattle and other staples, Ireland was uniquely positioned to help feed a starving continent. The Irish government launched a massive campaign to export food across Europe.

A Jewish member of the Irish Parliament, Robert Briscoe, lobbied the government to help Jewish refugees as well.

Hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors were scattered throughout Europe with nowhere to go and no means to sustain themselves. Briscoe lobbied the government to extend aid to them specifically, by arranging for the production of kosher meat—a lifeline for Jews in displaced persons (DP) camps.

Around that time, Eretz Yisroel's Chief Rabbi Yitzchok Eizik HaLevi Herzog—former chief rabbi of Dublin and highly respected by the Irish leadership—visited the country. In honor of his visit and at Briscoe's urging, the Irish government agreed to establish kosher meatpacking plants to serve Jewish needs.



MR. ROBERT BRISCOE.

But who could provide the kosher supervision and expertise needed for such a large operation?

Enter the Chassidim in Pocking. Posing as Polish refugees, hundreds of Lubavitcher Chassidim had just emerged from Russia with their families on the trains known as 'eshalons'. Among the Chassidim were many competent shochtim and qualified Rabbanim. They were stuck in DP camps, waiting for immigration papers to the United States or Eretz Yisroel, with nothing to do and no source of income in the meantime.

It was a match made in heaven.

A group of Chassidim traveled to Ireland and immediately began working. But when Chassidim arrive somewhere, it's never just about earning a living. They quickly turned their attention to the spiritual needs of the local Jewish community. "A chossid macht a sevivah"—a Chassid transforms his environment. Guided by the Frieddiker Rebbe, they got to work doing just that.

One of the most prominent Chassidim in the group was Reb Nachum Shmaryahu Sasonkin (known as "Shmerel Batumer"), one of the elder chassidim from Lubavitch who had already served many years in rabbanus. He was one of the leaders, along with Reb Shneur Garelik, Reb Peretz Mochkin, and Reb Zalman Shimon Dvorkin.

Years later, at a Kinus of Tzeirei Agudas Chabad in Eretz Yisroel, Reb Shmerel shared the remarkable story of their time in Ireland and the lasting impact they made on the local Jewish community. His account was published shortly afterward in *Bita'on Chabad*, issue 6, in honor of Yud-Beis Tammuz 5714.

That account has never been fully republished—and never before translated into English. It is presented here in its entirety.



REB NACHUM SHMARYAHU SASONKIN AND HIS ARTICLE IN 'BITA'ON CHABAD'.

The government of Ireland decided to donate one million (!) cans of meat for Jewish refugees, through the efforts of Mr. Briscoe, a Jewish member of the Irish Parliament. The Irish government provided only the raw material—a specific number of cow heads. But turning those into kosher canned meat required much more. That part of the operation was taken on by the Joint Distribution Committee in Paris, who appointed Mr. Briscoe himself to carry it out.

Mr. Briscoe began searching the globe for qualified *shochtim* and *menakrim*, looking in London, Eretz Yisroel, and Paris, but came up empty. At a certain point, he was ready to give up. That's when the Joint suggested he reach out to the *Lishkah*, the European Office for Refugee Relief and Resettlement established by the Frieddiker Rebbe. He was directed to its European representative, Reb Bin-

yomin Gorodetzky.

As soon as he connected with Rabbi Gorodetzky, he realized that he had found a source for *kashrus* of the highest standard. In the summer of 5708, Rabbi Gorodetzky assembled a group of thirty-five *shochtim* and *menakrim*, all Lubavitcher Chassidim and refugees from Russia. Among them were two *rabbanim*—Rabbi Shneur Garelik, *rav* of Kfar Chabad, and myself—who served as the rabbinic supervisors and heads of the *kashrus* operation.

Mr. Briscoe excels in the mitzvah of *ahavas Yisroel*; he is someone who cherishes Torah and those who study it. He made the trip easy for us, arranging our flights to Dublin, the Irish capital. Within three hours, we arrived and were warmly received by the city's dignitaries, with Mr. Briscoe at their head.

He told us that he had never met anyone from Chabad,



A MEMBER OF THE 'JOINT' WITH (LEFT TO RIGHT) RABBIS BINYOMIN GORODETZKY, SHMARYAHU SASONKIN, PERETZ MOCHKIN, AND ZALMAN GORELICK.

but he had read about the movement in history books. Now, he was overjoyed to finally meet Chassidim in person. During our entire stay in Ireland, he barely left our side. He genuinely enjoyed our company, and more than once confided that he often skipped parliamentary sessions just to be with us, saying there was no greater pleasure than spending time with Chabad Chassidim. He said that everything written in secular books about Chabad doesn't come close to the truth. To really understand who Chassidim are, you need to live among them.

We were given our own kitchen and dining area, and a shul was set up especially for us. We arrived in the month of Elul, and throughout the *Yamim Nora'im*, many local residents visited our shul. Some were visibly moved to tears, remembering earlier times—when they too had davened with heartfelt sincerity—but had since grown cold.

For Sukkos, they gave us space in the courtyard of the city's central shul, where a large sukkah was built that fit us all comfortably. On Shabbos and especially during Yom Tov, the pauses between courses would naturally be used for *niggunim*, thanks to the talented *baalei men-agnim* among us. It was very moving. Even on ordinary Shabbosim, many locals would come just to hear the singing—and during Sukkos, our sukkah became a magnet for the community.

Seeing how joyful our Sukkos was, the townspeople concluded: if this is how Chabad celebrates Sukkos, we

can only imagine what Simchas Torah will be like! So they made up their minds—this year, everyone in town would come to participate.

As in Jewish communities all over the world, on Simchas Torah men, women, and children come out for *Hakafos*. And so it was in Dublin: the entire city showed up.

After the *chazan* and the dignitaries completed seven *Hakafos* with the Torah and sang the familiar Simchas Torah songs—a process that took about half an hour—the women and children returned home. But the men stayed. They wanted to see how the Lubavitcher Chassidim celebrated.

In the large hall adjacent to the shul, tables had been set up, overflowing with fine drinks and *farbeisen*. We made *kiddush* and the *balebatim* joined us. For hours we sat together, farbrenging about Yiddishkeit and Chasidus.

The atmosphere warmed and the *l'chaims* flowed; soon the hour had grown late. So we headed back into the Shul for *Hakafos*. Since the men weren't returning home, the women eventually came to check what was going on.

At first, the men stood by and simply watched our dancing. But quickly, they were swept up by the energy. They joined in excitedly, dancing like Chassidim. The women couldn't believe their eyes. Never in their lives had they seen such inner joy, or their husbands dancing like this. They were very moved, and none of them even

suggested heading home, even though it was well past midnight. They remained, captivated, watching the celebration; though the *Hakafos* were still going strong and the hour was very late, the women remained in the *ezras nashim*, watching.

That's when Mr. Briscoe stood up on the *bima* and called for quiet. Addressing the crowd, he said: "What's going on here, people of Dublin? On a regular Simchas Torah, by ten o'clock, the whole city is asleep. But look at tonight—the hour is late, and not only are the men still here, they haven't even thought of going home. And when the women came, I thought they'd be upset and drag their husbands away. But no—I was shocked to discover that they too were swept up in this Lubavitch *simcha!*"

Then he turned to the crowd with a heartfelt cry: "What have you seen here? What changed? What happened to us? We're Jews too. We also made *Hakafos* with the Torah—but it was cold and lifeless. These people came and breathed new life into us! How beautiful it is to see people whose entire energy is Torah, who are so connected to Torah that they are literally one with it. Their joy, their vitality—it's overflowing! It's contagious! And we're all feeling it. We're in another world."

Then he concluded, overcome with emotion: "You see now what Lubavitcher Chassidim are. "*Zutra d'bchu mechaye meisim,*"¹ the smallest among them can bring the dead to life! Jews like these—we need them! They will bring our city to life. They'll revive our entire country. We can't let them leave. Let's do everything we can to make sure they settle right here with us." His words made a powerful impression, and everyone present wholeheartedly agreed.

When Reb Shneur Garelik described the entire episode in a letter to the Frierdiker Rebbe, on behalf of the whole group, this was the Rebbe's holy response:

"In response to your letter, sent by Reb Shneur Garelik, regarding the activities during the Yomim Tovim in general, and especially on Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah—and about the reception on Motzei Simchas Torah with the participation of the local *balebatim*—and no doubt also joined by representatives of the Joint—I greatly enjoyed hearing about all of it.

"In my personal journal, I have a note from one of the *sichos kodesh* in which the Rebbe [Rashab], my father, shared something that he had once heard from his father, the Rebbe Maharash, during a *yechidus* regarding



SOME OF THE YOUNGER LUBAVITCHER SHOCHTIM IN IRELAND.

the study of Chassidus:

"Chassidus,' the Rebbe Maharash said, 'is like a palace standing in a lush, flowering garden, surrounded by an iron gate.'

"When my father, the Tzemach Tzedek was in Petersburg at the Rabbinic Conference of 5603, some of the *balebatim*—who were there along with Reb Itzele Volozhiner—asked him what Chabad Chassidus really is, and what effect it has on those who follow the ways of Chassidim.

"The Tzemach Tzedek answered: 'Chassidus makes a person wiser, more *frum*, and more joyous. And they influence others to be joyous as well, and that, in turn, makes them wiser and therefore more *frum*.'

"May Hashem grant all of us the strength to fulfill the ultimate purpose of Chassidus, in the merit of our holy Rebbeim."



A few months passed. A million cans of kosher meat were prepared and shipped to continental Europe, and the project drew to a close. The canned meat supplied Yidden throughout Europe with vital kosher food, and some of it even made it to Eretz Yisroel during the years of austerity.²

Mr. Briscoe desperately tried to find ways to keep the shechita plants operational and have the Chassidim settle there permanently, but it was not meant to be. The Chassidim returned to their families, soon moving on to their final destinations.

But for a short while, the light of Chassidus burned bright in Ireland.³ **T**

1. A quote from the Gemara about Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi's disciples.

2. See "Pinpoints, Ireland," Derher, Sivan 5785.