



Tying the tobacco-leaves into bundles of two or three preparatory to kiln-drying. Behind the girls are racks of full sticks waiting to be transferred to the kilns.

The harvested leaves are packed into bins and taken to sheds, where girls tie the leaves in bundles of two or three. Each bundle is tied at the top and hung over a 4 ft. 6 in. manuka stick so that each leaf hangs freely. When thirty-six bundles have been placed on the stick it is taken to the kiln and packed in on racks beginning at the top of the kiln and working downwards. Each kiln holds 700-750 sticks.

The furnaces are next fired, and for two days a current of air about 85° to 95° F. in temperature circulates through the kiln. During this yellowing process the vents at the top of the kiln are closed and the leaf is kept alive. The process turns the starches in the leaf to sugars.

Next the vents are opened and the temperature raised by gradual steps to 175° F. while the leaf is dried to a brittle, bright yellow. The whole kiln process may take four to seven days, depending on the ripeness of the leaf.

The dried leaf cannot be immediately handled. It is so crisp that it would break when touched. Some of the moisture that has been extracted must, therefore, be put back before the leaf is taken from the kiln to be bulked and graded. A nice sea breeze will do the job in a few hours if the vents and doors of the kiln are opened. Otherwise it may be necessary to lay wet sacks on the floor of the kiln.

Grading

The leaf is hand-graded by expert girls. First in determining the quality of the leaf comes its position on the stalk. Except for the leaves nearest the ground, which because of their contact with the earth are usually burnt and damaged, the standard of the leaf deteriorates as it nears the top of the plant. Next in importance is the colour of the leaf, with yellow as the most desirable colour, followed by orange, light and dark brown, then green. At the same