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Legacy: One Family, A Cup of Tea and the Company that Took on the World. By Thomas Harding. *William Heinemann*; 592 pages; £25.

A FAMILY IS a little kingdom, Samuel Johnson noted, and in the mercantile principality of Gluckstein and Salmon, the heraldic emblem might have been a sheaf of sticks. A father hands his sons some twigs, Monte Gluckstein once told his nephew, drawing on Aesop's fable. Break one, the father orders. They do. He bundles the sticks. Now break them, he says. *L'union fait la force*—"Strength in unity"—was the family motto, explained Monte, third-generation scion of a catering empire.

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Thomas Harding mined the traumatic history of his father's family in Germany in "The House by the Lake". In "Legacy" he explores his maternal lineage—an arc spanning five generations from immigrants to tycoons. The Glucksteins and Salmons founded Lyons, a firm that shaped British tastes, catered for Buckingham Palace and owned a hit parade of mega-brands.

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jam in Swiss rolls—Henry Ford applied to comestibles.

Mr Harding's affectionate family story is deftly sandwiched in the rise and fall of empire, two world wars, and two centuries of social and political change. A refitted Lyons factory made many of the bombs dropped on Germany in the second world war. Despite the chauvinism at head office, Lyons tea shops are said to have contributed to female emancipation by providing a safe entry to social life and consumerdom. Previously, male-dominated pubs had been practically the only places for many women to order drinks.

In the end, the sticks threatened to fall apart. A younger generation caught conglomeration fever and binged on acquisitions, adding Baskin-Robbins, an American ice-cream chain, and continental meat-processors. Overreach and spectacularly bad timing—involving an oil crisis, a recession and a sinking pound—brought Lyons to the brink of insolvency. The hotels were sold and then, in 1978, the company itself. But the denouement, a delicate business complicated by lots of heirs, was managed "with care and honour", Mr Harding writes, and with "friendly relationships intact". Monte's bundle held fast.

This article appeared in the Books and arts section of the print edition under the headline "Storms in a teacup"



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