

5.6 – The Rise of Merchant & Sons

In the aftermath of the Great War, few companies were able to turn a profit. Most companies were forced to downsize and economise until the economic climate changed enough for growth to once again take place.

Those companies taken over by the Alexis Monopoly became independent once again, though naturally it would be some years before they would be able to trade as normal. Most were forced to take loans from their neighbours or competitors, or consider the possibility of a full or partial takeover. As for the Alexis Conglomerate, they were forced into liquidation with the Everley Oil Empire and the Vashinski & Haladchi Partnership taking half of the assets each, and would both soon return to their own tempestuous rivalry, which would almost erupt into conflict many times over the coming years.

The one company which achieved growth through these troubled years was Merchant & Sons. Having stayed neutral for much of the early stages of the war, and separated by distance from it, they had suffered the smallest losses and had the opportunity to corner the market and take advantage of the troubled climate. But this was not before some internal strife could be taken care of.

Jeremiah Merchant was now approaching 80 years of age and as a result had become eccentric in his strategy. His sons, Tobias and Antonius, desperately wished for him to retire as he had once claimed he would if his talents were to fail. Unfortunately, since the death of his first wife ten years before, Jeremiah had married Livia Prendergast, of the troubled Prendergast Company. Her desperation to keep her own flagging company going, led her to manipulate events and her husband in her own favour. She knew that once he stepped down, his sons, who saw her as nothing more than a gold-digger who cared little for their father, would be rid of her and her daughter.

The brothers were saved the hard task of trying to oust their own father. He died of a heart attack less than a year after peace was declared. Livia was soon put into retirement and unable to influence policy in favour of her own company, which was swallowed up by Franklin Foods less than two years later.

It was then that the boom years began for Merchant & Sons. Tobias and Antonius blazed through the business world. The level of production doubled, their profits rose by over half. They were both workaholics, they were tireless in their efforts to make Merchant & Sons the most profitable and powerful company the world had ever seen.

Tobias was a man possessed. All he did was work and work, so much so that it became too much for even his workaholic brother. While he dedicated himself solely to his work, Antonius

found more in his life and married the beautiful Amelia Gabriel of Maitland Ltd and together they had a child.

This beautiful boy distracted him from his work. Antonius is said to have dedicated much time to the education of his son. Tobias had no wife or heir. Leaving Antonius to assume that it would be his son that would become President of the Company.

Though he did try to dedicate much of his time to caring, and training his son, the temptation of work was always there. Tobias was as imaginative and visionary as ever and always sought the advice of his brother. Antonius was easily drawn and slipped back into his old routine. Eventually the stress took its toll on Antonius and he suffered a huge heart attack and died.

Tobias was heartbroken. But his workload did not decrease. Merchant & Sons now had a reputation for success and innovation, one which he would not give up. He could not also bring himself to replace his brother and appoint a new Vice President and became even more embroiled in his work than before.

Then Tobias too, was a victim of a heart attack.

But it was not fatal and Tobias Merchant was forced to do something that was alien to him: six months of rest and relaxation.

Rebecca Everley, second daughter to Claudius Everley of the Everley Oil Empire, had met Tobias Merchant many times. She already knew Tobias and it is said that she personally traveled especially to Merchant & Sons to care and look after him.

Within a year they were married. Within two she was pregnant.

The whole company celebrated. Workers danced in the street (they had the afternoon off), the executives rejoiced, but it was not to last. There was already an heir to throne.

Antonius's son Godric was almost twenty and he had been groomed to become the next President, the next man to have the keys to the vault.

While everyone else celebrated, he cursed his uncle's name, he cursed his whore of a wife, and he cursed this new heir. Like his father, like his uncle, he was a determined and resourceful man. He was about to become a ruthless man.

The 'boom years' were about to come to an end.