

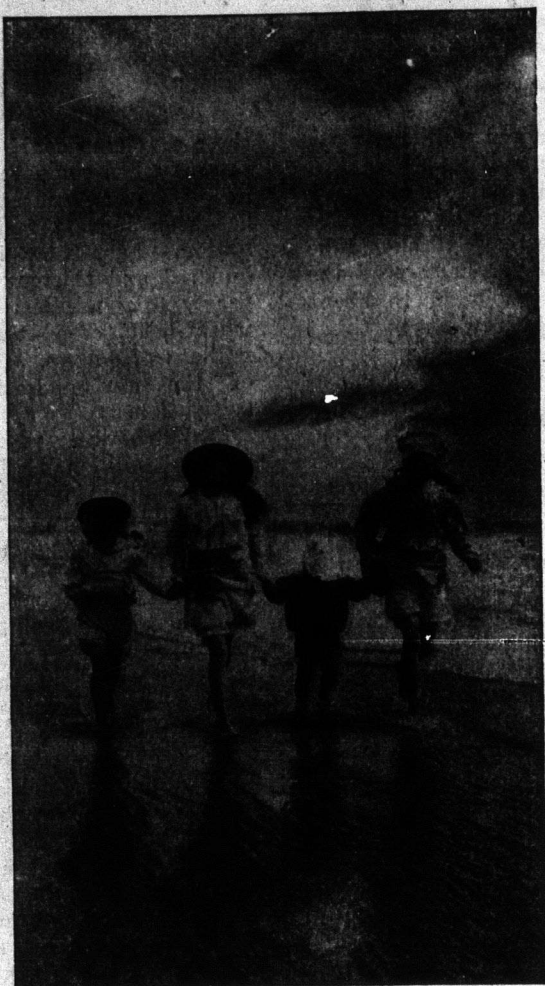
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## Forging the Golden Chain.

By William Hamilton Osborne.

Jimmy Dolliver was slightly troubled. He was facing one of the problems of life.

"It seems to me," he said slowly, toying with the solitaire that graced Miss Pembroke's hand, "that we ought to marry—soon."

Miss Natalie Pembroke flushed and nodded. "I think we ought," she answered. She hesitated for an instant. "These long engagements seem, somehow, so cheap," Dolliver started. It seemed an odd thing for Natalie to say—his Natalie. The girl, too, seemed instinctively to understand that she had struck the wrong note. "I—I don't mean that so much, Jimmy," she went on, "and, anyway, it doesn't hit us, for we haven't been engaged so long. But don't you know how people talked when Tom Dilkes and Aline Peterson stepped off." She sniggered at the recollection. "After five years!" she laughed. "I think we ought to marry soon," she repeated soberly.

Unconsciously Dolliver's face clouded. "It's a matter of pride with her," he told himself.

To some extent he was right; to a very great extent he was wholly wrong. For Natalie Pembroke—if the expres-

Natalie Pembroke laughed. Jimmy was pacing slowly up and down the room. In all Monroe there was no man so well groomed, so well caparisoned, as was Jimmy Dolliver. She liked him for it. It was a part of Jimmy.

"You!" she exclaimed. Again she laughed. "Do you know what the girls say, Jimmy? They say there are few men that lavish money on a girl as you do on me. 'They say,' she smiled mischievously and with an appreciation of the humor of her own remark—"that you certainly do treat me well."

Jimmy laughed in spite of himself. And yet, there was a grimness about it all. Here was Natalie Pembroke, the only child of old John K.—a man who could buy and sell many men in Monroe; a man whose wealth had come down to him through generations—and yet, in spite of her blue-blooded ancestry, in spite of her innate refinement, she voiced unconsciously the sentiments of the age, and in the vernacular of the times. That was the supreme test of to-day, Jimmy told himself, somewhat bitterly—Does this man make good? Does that other show his coin?

But Natalie, too, was sobering. "We can get along, Jimmy, I'm sure," she



"That is hardly the question. The point is, can we get along?"

sion he permitted—was head over heels in love with Jimmy Dolliver. She loved him for his looks; she loved him for his gentleness; she loved him because he was Jimmy Dolliver, and because he, too, was head over heels in love with her. And there was something behind Jimmy's personality that constantly lent spice to his every word, his every act. It had puzzled her for a long while until she had heard it said one day that Jimmy Dolliver possessed executive ability. That was the phrase—executive ability. Jimmy Dolliver was in the world and of it. He was masterful; he had force.

"Jimmy'll get along," Natalie's father had said to Natalie.

Jimmy was getting along, as young men of twenty-five do get along. He was head man down at Eisenstein, Thalheimer & Company's, manufacturers of gold chains in Monroe. Jimmy was a practical man. Fortunately for himself, he was living in an age when the American aristocrat doffed his hat in the presence of the practical, successful business man. Unfortunately for himself, he was living in an age when salaries were relatively small, compared with the cost of living, and when the essence of living consisted in keeping up appearances. It was an age when men who ought to marry early married late. And Jimmy Dolliver was a marrying man.

"I can get along," Jimmy went on to Natalie; "that is hardly the question. The point is, can we get along? I have fairly hard scratching as it is."

said simply, and in what she considered was a matter-of-fact tone of voice, "and if we can't, father will—"

"Stop right there," exclaimed Dolliver; "father won't. He won't, in the first place, because we won't let him, you and I, and in the second, your father will never see, will never know, the weak spots in our system of finance. Father will hand out ivory pianos when we need a joint of mutton. He will adorn us with an Oriental rug when we'd prefer to pay our rent on time. I know—I've seen and heard what other men have borne, and said. I—I want to begin on a sound basis, Natalie," he went on. "I'm not marrying a rich girl. I'm marrying a girl whose father is rich. A rich girl is one who's rich in her own right. I'm marrying you," he said, seating himself at her side, "because you're Natalie. You're marrying me because I'm Jimmy Dolliver. That's all. And we've got to fight it out together, side by side."

Natalie Pembroke drew a long breath. It sounded good, this business-like discussion. It was something different from the kind of thing she was accustomed to. It seemed to her that she was standing on the threshold of real life.

"I'm afraid," continued Jimmy, "that I'm making a fool of myself in taking these things too seriously, but, somehow, I want to be understood—I want things understood. I can live, alone—and on very little." He smiled. "It isn't very romantic and it isn't very good taste, and it certainly is sordid, to