

What Next ⁱⁿ the Tempestuous Career of "Baby" Best?

The Man She Disappointed in Love a Suicide, Her First Husband a Bankrupt, the Second "Too Poor to Keep Her Happy," the Late Mrs. Astor's Protege Tries Her Luck Again

How Her Increasing Matrimonial Experiences Are Reflected in the Decreasing "Low-Water" Mark of Mrs. "Baby" Best-Smith-Carroll-Duell's Decolletage



1—The Very Modest High Neck with but the Slightest Suspicion of Lowering When "Baby" Best Was Still a Maid.



2—The Corsage Falls Considerably When She Becomes Mrs. Eli Yale Smith.



4—And as Mrs. Duell, as This Painting by Halmi Shows, Much, Much More Has Vanished in the Steady Downward March of the Decolletage.



3—As Mrs. Carroll the Shoulder Straps Have Been Entirely Dispensed with as Have Also Been the Sleeves.

WHEN "Baby" Best—to be accurate, Annie Livingstone Best-Smith-Carroll, the lovely daughter of Mrs. Clermont Livingstone Best and protegee of the late Mrs. Astor—was married just the other day to Mr. W. Sackett Duell, Jr., of Philadelphia, all fashionable society of New York and Newport sighed and wondered whether her tumultuous matrimonial career had at last ended in a haven of peace. For Mr. Duell is a manufacturer with a large fortune; he has no particular social ambitions, although his family is one of the best; he is much older than "Baby" and therefore, perhaps, can guide her along the sometimes rocky path of matrimony, finding clear trails in which she will not stub her pretty toes and stumble—as was certainly not the case with her when under the guidance of her two former husbands.

Also the sun shone upon their wedding, and the old saw says, "Unhappy the bride it rains upon"—and did it not rain upon each of her former wedding days? Straws show which way the wind blows and it may be that the state of the weather does have something to do with happy marriages. In these out-of-board ruled days who knows what is truth and what is not? But seldom in the complicated annals of fashionable society has one short span of life been so tumultuous, so crowded with trouble as the past twelve years have been for "Baby." Dimpled and chubby in her cradle, she was called even then by this affectionate sobriquet. Newport kept the pet name for her as the best fitting. "Baby" Best she has been all through her life.

Her troubles began very early, in spite of the fact that she was a pet of Mrs. Astor's, and was popular in the Newport colony as well as in New York, and that her mother made every sacrifice to provide the luxuries necessary to the success of a fashionable girl. Mrs. Best was Miss Mary Tucker, a cousin of the wedding Mrs. Whitney Warren and a member of a family whose wealth and social position were high. But Colonel Tucker, of the United States Army, had no children and she had married him for love. "Baby" was the only child of this marriage, and as she grew up her mother determined that she should have the position her name entitled her to, leased a small, attractive cottage on Bellevue avenue, Newport, and bent every nerve to place and keep "Baby" in the set to which she was born.

It was a hard struggle, for the daughter needed pretty clothes, and plenty of them. She needed, first, a smart phaeton, and later an electric runabout. And she had them. Her coming-out party in Newport was as perfectly done as that of any rich man's daughter.

The late Mrs. Astor, then in her declining years, took her up and set the seal of her approval by inviting her to the always famous mid-season ball given at Beechwood. At this ball Colonel John Jacob Astor signalled Miss Best out for special attention, and even the newly rich members of the colony understood that this debutante was not to be ignored. Her first summer was, therefore, very brilliant, and when Mrs. Best took a house on East Seventy-ninth street for the height of the New York season "Baby's" star rose high in the heavens.

Everything depended, of course, on her making a good marriage, which meant capturing a rich husband.

Again Mrs. Astor favored her, and Mrs. Stuyvesant Platt, just coming into social power, was great kind to the girl. Every thing was done by her friends and relatives to keep Miss Best in the limelight and provide a satisfactory husband.

But, alas, the necessary millionaire did not appear, and when the Newport season once more rolled around there was much unhappiness in the Best family. However, being socially trained, Miss Best put a smiling face forward and talked of the desirability of early marriages. Society was not fooled, and suddenly a suitor materialized. Only, alas, he was Alfred Holbrook, a most worthy young

man of good family, who had not a cent to bless himself with. Society will always insist that this was the one truly great and only love affair in "Baby" Best's life. For two years she kept Holbrook at her feet, seemingly loath to send him away and yet afraid to marry him.

When things had reached a desperate state in Mrs. Best's affairs a miracle happened. Came one day a most personable youth, Eli Yale-Smith by name, who fell madly in love with Miss Best. As a son of Wellington Smith, millionaire manufacturer of Lenox, Mass., the young man fulfilled every financial expectation of the troubled girl, and, urged into it by her relatives and her dire needs, she broke with Holbrook and announced her engagement to Yale-Smith.

Following his last meeting with the girl he adored, Alfred Holbrook went to his hotel and shot himself through the head! The marriage was celebrated in Grace Church on the stormiest day of the Winter. Ten days later events came fast and thick and proved that the rain omen had been only too well founded. The mother, quietly recovering from the strain of the wedding and happily looking forward to some peace of mind, was called to the telephone. Long distance was calling her. At the other end of the wire her daughter frantically told her that Eli had no money and his father refused to send him any. They had to have it at once for their hotel bill and travelling expenses.

Down fell poor Mrs. Best's house of cards. Heartbroken she secured funds and telegraphed her daughter to return home with her husband. In the end Mrs. Best found that she had to pay even for the diamond engagement ring blazing on her daughter's finger.

In June, just seven months from the day of her marriage, Annie Best Smith secured a divorce from her husband, and, poorer in every way, she joined her mother in Newport. Shortly after this Yale-Smith, as he now styled himself, went into bankruptcy and betook himself to Europe. He figured in several sensational financial episodes, being arrested in London for non-payment of his hotel bill, and later, on his return, was again arrested on the charge of the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, where it was alleged he passed a fraudulent check.

These latter episodes, however, did not concern his ex-wife, for she had already won her freedom and was considering a second marriage. Two years after her divorce Mrs. Annie Best, as she called herself, by consent of the courts, announced her engagement to Arthur Carroll, son of General Howard Carroll, of New York, whose country place at Tarrytown is one of the show places on the Hudson River.

This engagement delighted both the daughter and her mother, for the Carrolls were absolutely all right socially; they had great wealth and, incidentally, were an exceedingly worth-while family from every viewpoint.

Once more the future gleamed brightly. Arthur's proposal altered all her world and "Baby" Best lost no time in letting it become known. But again misfortune loomed ahead. Mrs. Carroll, born a daughter of John Starin, was a home-loving woman of ultra-conservative standards and traditions.

The general threatened to disinherit him and his mother pleaded and wept. All to no avail, the engagement stood and cards for the wedding were issued. The ceremony was performed in Mrs. Best's home and was attended only by members of the bride's family, although one of Arthur Carroll's brothers acted as best man.

For the second time "Baby" Best was banking on futures. For several months everything ran

smoothly. Young Mrs. Carroll visited her new relations and became popular among the Carroll following. She seemed glad and relieved to have a chance to lead the well-regulated life of this conservative family. Arthur's position with his father's firm gave him a good income and there seemed little chance for unhappiness.

But eventually Mrs. Arthur began slipping back into the set she had frequented as a divorcee. It was a ray of light, utterly repugnant to the Carroll standards, and even Arthur protested. But protest did no good. Mrs. Arthur finally became completely with her "in-laws" and identified herself entirely with her spectacular friends. Naturally, Arthur went with her, and only too speedily Newport women who had kept up with her for her mother's

sake calmly dropped her from their calling lists.

Things went from bad to worse. Arthur's salary, that seemed large enough when he and his wife practically lived with his family, amounted to very little as an independent support. There were quarrels and bitter recriminations. Of course, the end came.

A few short years after securing her first divorce Annie Best Smith Carroll was again a divorcee, free to live her own life unimpeded by husband or censorious "in-laws." For the second time she returned husbandless and distraught to her mother's home.

And two divorces are just two hand-pieces, as Mrs. Best Carroll discovered. For the way she has seldom been in the limelight during our months of writing, she did the usual war work and, so far as society knew, lived quietly under her mother's wing. In a way, society per se had forgotten her existence. New work and new scandals occupied its attention,

and certainly no one expected her to "come back."

Six months ago Mother Best, it was noticed, began to look happy once more, but her daughter remained consistently in the background. No one suspected that a third husband was really in sight. But, as such things do happen occasionally in real life, a rift was appearing in the dark clouds. His name was W. Sackett Duell, a New Yorker by birth, but a Philadelphian by adoption.

And Mrs. Best Carroll met him through her war work. He was older than herself, a man of standing and utterly unbiten by any social bug. In every way he differed from the men she had formerly married, and there seemed no point of contact between the two.

But strange things happen in real life. The rather staid, matter-of-fact Philadelphian saw beneath the surface of the divorcee and fell in love with her.

Whether she turned to him as a safe haven or whether she truly loved him, even society did not know. But a few weeks ago the engagement was announced and within three days the marriage was performed. The Warren family forgave the past and attended the simple ceremony, thus setting its approval on Mr. Duell.

"Baby" Best is now beginning her third matrimonial adventure. Because of her experiences she must have learned much. At least she has learned something of husbands and domestic life. Society says that

if she has profited any by her terribly hard lessons there is every reason for her to make a success of her third trial. Close friends of the past say that if she had had children by Arthur Carroll her second venture would probably not have gone to smash.

More than one woman has found safety in babies, and every one is hoping that as Mrs. Duell the once "Baby" Best will set about furnishing a nursery.

On the surface the bride and bridegroom are very happy, and it may be that at last her tumultuous matrimonial experiences are at an end.

After each of these matrimonial experiences "Baby" was certainly for a while a chastened soul. Perhaps not for long, but still for a while. And then society began to notice a rather curious thing. A ways noted for the excessive loss of her décolletage, a strange phenomenon was noted. As one friend put it: "The more experience 'Baby' gets in matrimony the less her ears seem to be."

Back in the days of childhood her décolletage was very much in vogue. As Mrs. Carroll she dragged the shoulder straps and gloves on her costumes very at that time considered most daring with their expense of delicate, dusted shoulders and very far down the neck. But the famous artist Halmi's picture of her and her décolletage attracted attention to her. Carroll made art her friend, and has been in these days of immoderate décolletage