

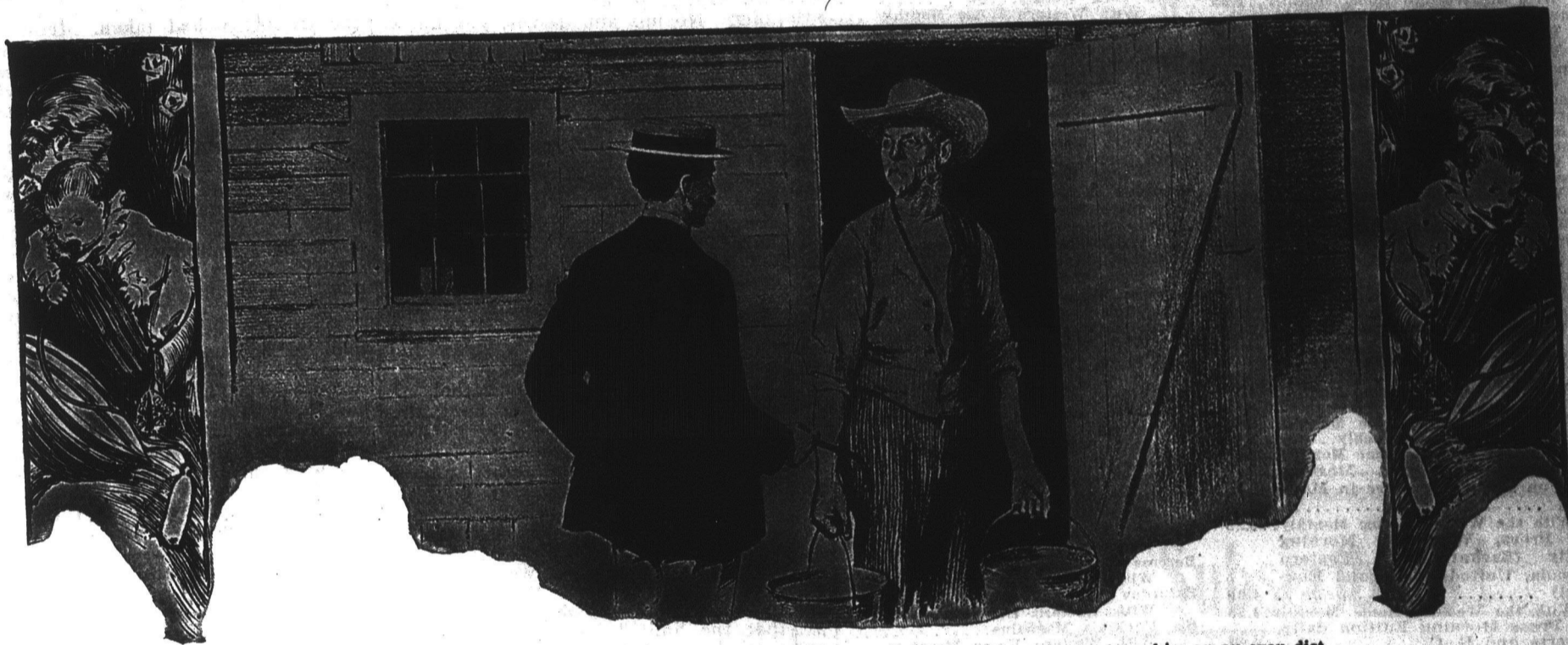
THE WESTERN HOME MONTHLY

Vol. VII. No. 9.

WINNIPEG, CANADA, SEPTEMBER, 1906.

PRICE { 5c. per copy.
50c. per year

The Quest of a Cow •• By Edward Mumford.



"Mr. Jones," I began, "we have a baby who has given us some trouble, and the doctor wishes to keep him on an even diet. No ups and downs, you know. The same richness every day. Do you see?"

Perhaps after all we knew too much. With never a clinical thermometer or a sterilizer, both Roxana's grandparents and mine raised families of a round dozen or so, and with less than a twelfth of the fuss that we made over our one infant. If they were sickly there were hot flannels, and mustard, and paragoric; and when those failed—well, it was an over-ruling Providence, and who should gainsay it? Perhaps that was the better way. But even our grandparents felt anxious over their first babies. This was our first baby, and I thought a good deal of it.

I had devoted much time and thought to that baby. I once calculated that altogether I had coaxed into him, through rubber nipples that collapsed at every other suck, not less than one thousand bottles of food, or something like seven thousand and liquid ounces, administered chiefly between the hours of eleven p.m. and six a.m. The calculation was made, I remember, about dawn on a cold December morning, but I believe it to be substantially correct. I also considered myself something of an expert in preparing his food. I could measure the barley-water to a teaspoonful and put it in with my eyes shut; and I always woke up at pre-

cisely the psychological moment when the gas had to be shut off or the whole thing would be spoiled. In fact, I had taken my full share in the raising of that baby by hand. I must, say, therefore, it grieved me to have Roxana speak as she did.

It was one hot night in June, when I came home tired out. I had brought the absorbent cotton, and the nursing bottles, and had told the doctor about the cough and the temperature, and the rash on the back; but I had forgotten to speak to him about the milk. Roxana looked at me reproachfully.

"Oh, Sylvester," she said, and turned up her eyes and laid down her hands with that gesture which means "How can a woman get along when she has to depend on such stupid things as men?"

"And I told you the very last thing," she added. "You know how important it is. The child is not well at all. He hasn't gained but an ounce this last two weeks. You know how anxious I was to hear what the doctor thinks about it."

"About what, Roxana?" I asked, as patiently as possible. I could make allowances for Roxana.

"Why, about the milk supply, Sylvester. We discussed it so fully, I

was sure you understood. Just as the doctor was leaving last Thursday he said something about feeding the baby on milk from one cow. I didn't quite catch it, but I know what he meant. The thing is to keep the food as even in quality as possible. It ought never to be over sixteen per cent. cream. You know he has said that often, Sylvester. And I have been looking at it to-day, and I'm sure it's too rich for him. It's perfectly awful on his poor little stomach. And you never asked him about it!"

Roxana's lip trembled, and her eyes filled. "Why, really my dear," I began, soothingly. "I didn't understand I was to ask about it. And if it had been important don't you think he would have mentioned it? I told him about the cough and the—"

Roxana pushed away the arm I was trying to put about her. "Oh," she moaned, "I just knew you would forget it. You don't care, that's what's the matter. Nobody cares for that poor little thing but me."

"Oh, come now, Roxana," I protested. "That's pretty strong, isn't it? And as for this one cow idea, I never heard anything more ridiculous in my life. I shall expect to

hear next that the doctor has prescribed pigeon's milk."

"Oh, how can you?" burst out Roxana, tremulously. "He never suggested such a thing, never. But that's the way. Make light of the whole thing, do. You don't care if the child dies. You don't love him one bit. No, don't tell me you do. You never brood over him as I do. You never worry about him. All the burden falls on me!" And Roxana hid her face in a silk portiere, and wept.

I might have reproached Roxana. I might have reminded her that I had walked that baby on an average two hours a night for the past week or so, in order that she might rest. I might have recalled to her the glorious ride in Perkins' new auto which I had refused only the afternoon before, so that I could come home on an early train with the boracic acid and the sugar of milk. But I didn't. Instead I found her something less expensive and more comforting than a silk portiere to wipe her eyes on, and I drew her down in my lap. For I knew very well that Roxana was not herself by any means. The baby had been ill nearly a month, and we were both pretty well discouraged. I may also have been a little piqued

