

## FAT OF THE LAND

BY DELLA T. LUTES

THE Bancroft farm in the 'Seventies and the early 'Eighties, when the Middle West was enjoying what then was thought to be a fine prosperity, was one of the most affluent in all southern Michigan. Even in a community where the harvesting of grain and corn on most farms ran into thousands of bushels a year, the Bancroft acres yielded even more. Sturdy wagons went rumbling day after day along the dusty road to the nearest grain elevator; granaries and corncribs were spilling their treasures through crack and crevice until greedy fowls glutted themselves; in the golden weeks of September the noisy threshing machine flung straw to the stack, chaff to the wind, and emptied rivers of yellow grain into canvas bags. And the tales that women told of the quantities of food stowed away by husky, famished men were little less than comparable to the Gargantuan meals provided for the master of that magic castle whose only exit was a Beanstalk.

The Bancroft house was large

and rambling, with no pretense to architectural design. Just a two-story upright with a wing to the west and all kinds of additions at the back — kitchen, Summer kitchen, woodshed, tool house. There were two front doors, one opening into the sitting-room and the other into the dining room. Beyond the sitting-room was the parlor, and back of that a bedroom. Behind the dining room was the kitchen and a huge buttery. All the rooms were large, however, except the bedrooms upstairs, which were badly cut up, and only a half-story high. But there were a lot of them, as there needed to be to accommodate a huge and fluid family, considerable hired help, and innumerable guests.

The Bancroft home was a grand place to visit. There was always a houseful of people, and always some kind of meal in preparation. There were children of all ages. Most people had sizable families in those days, but the Bancrofts had not only their own generous number, but also several related families

within visiting distance, which made a day spent at their house an excitable occasion. "Noise" — healthy, hearty noise made by sturdy boots and husky voices — seemed little less euphonious than a choir of seraphim. Modern conditions have changed such attitude to a sick yearning for the quiet of those gently rolling years, but then the high sound of chorused tones, the whisper of many skirts, the shuffle of thick-soled shoes on scrubbed floors, was music to the ear.

The Bancroft farm almost surrounded one of the innumerable little lakes that pepper the landscape of Michigan. That was part of its charm. There was a short and lovely walk from the back of the house, through a fecund garden and along a path in the clover field, to the lake. Tied to a tamarack post in the lake's soft bed was an old flat-boat reeking with the odors of many a rendezvous with blue-gill, perch, bullhead, or speckled bass. Its slimy bulk rocked amongst water plantain, burr reeds, and pickerel weed, while further on at the right the water lilies lay, and on the left a gravelled sandy shore led to a grove of oak, hickory, and maple where picnics were often held.

Young couples wandered at dusk

or on moonlit nights through the scented fields, petticoats lifted against dew, clover ruthlessly trampled so that two could walk together with clasped hands, to shove the old boat out upon secret waters and drift, wordlessly perhaps, into a world of fireflies — and dreams. A simple, innocent world, gone as the Bancrofts are gone — the Bancrofts and the Bancroft house and all its homely comfort, its long wide table and the big crowded buttery that supplied it.

The garden that had to be traversed to get to the lake path was in itself a symbol of the spirit of that day. Farmers in general did not themselves pay a great deal of attention to gardens. They had all they could tend to with their mighty fields, their fine stock, the things that kept the farm going and brought in money. Gardens were left to the womenfolks and boys. Plowing the ground in Spring and getting it ready for sowing was one of the major chores attended to by the big boys, or maybe the hired man after supper. But as for puttering with cabbage and tomato plants, onion sets, rows of beets, parsnips, and things like that, menfolks could not be bothered.

Mr. Bancroft, however, had what might now be called a garden hobby. He loved to raise melons —

watermelons and mushmelons. And one reason he liked to raise them was so he would have plenty for the hordes of visitors, and to give away. The same way that my father raised strawberries—mulching and trimming and fertilizing and fussing—so he would have bigger ones than anyone else. No one ever departed from Bancroft's empty-handed. Great, dark-green, elliptical melons heavy with concentrated nectar, splitting to the touch of a knife, revealing a blaze of crimson pulp, crisp, sparkling with honeyed globs, and yet practically evanescent once subjected to the tongue. Mr. Bancroft could tell the exact stage of a watermelon's ripeness by tapping its shell, and the state of a mushmelon's ripeness by its odor.

The Bancrofts enjoyed certain luxuries that one did not always find in other farmhouses, such, for instance, as ice in Summer-time. They cut the ice from the lake and stored it in a low-roofed building sunk well into the ground. There was no reason why other farmers couldn't have ice, for it was free to all who would take the trouble to cut it, but many were either lacking in ambition, or the cold cellar or spring house seemed to be sufficient. Just the same, when the Bancroft girls

brought out lemonade with *ice* tinkling in the glasses, it was something to talk about. Moreover, the Bancrofts made ice-cream practically every Sunday, all Summer, a luxury in which most of us indulged but seldom.

The Bancrofts always had honey, too—plenty of it, but for the matter of that, so did many farmers. Raising bees was an almost effortless means of providing something good for the table, but I think many of them did not exercise a great deal of intelligence in doing so. They watched for the swarming season, had new hives ready, and generally managed to keep the swarms at home, but mostly they just let the bees run their own affairs and at the end of the season lifted off the top of the hive and took what honey they thought could be spared. Mr. Bancroft, however, studied his bees. He liked fussing with them, and he loved honey. That long deep shelf in the cellar which held the pans of broken combs was a sight to behold.

This shelf also held milk—large round pans of milk on which the cream rose thick and yellow as the milk “lobbered” beneath. I do not know how many cows were kept on the Bancroft farm, nor the breed, although I do remember a

day when the young son, Carl, led us all to the barn where in a special stall stood the new Alderney bull with glaring, arrogant eyes and a ring in his nose. But there was quite a herd of cattle winding down the lane at milking time, and there were always oceans of milk in the cellar. I have seen as many as eighteen barn cats gathered around a great pan of new milk, poured fresh from the pail. The cats kept the barn and granaries free from mice and were allowed to propagate until somebody happened to notice an over-population, and then they would begin to drown the kittens.

Skimming milk took a good share of a woman's time every morning, and carrying the sour milk upstairs was a job, but it was all in the day's work, as was the churning which followed. Hundreds of pounds of butter, fresh and sweet, found their way to the city market in crocks and pats and rolls, and gallons of buttermilk slaked the thirst of tired men and supplied an indispensable ingredient to johnnycake, and also helped to fatten the pork which would accompany it in Winter.

Apple orchards, peach, cherry, pear, and plum trees contributed to the stores which crowded the Bancroft cupboards and closets,

and shouldered each other along cellar shelves. Grapevines provided fruit for the thirsty tongue, jelly for the table. Fields of grain — wheat, rye, buckwheat, oats, barley, and corn — filled the bins and barrels and granaries. Poultry thrived very much as did the cats. Hens and turkeys stole their nests and eventually came forth from their seclusion proudly maternal, busily intent. Geese and ducks provided feathers for pillows and food for the table. The smell of fried chicken or chicken pie was indigestible to the Sabbath, and turkeys took part in many a celebration other than Thanksgiving.

Work? Yes. God knows there was work. Long, hot and heavy hours of work. And when you got through there was no movie to go to, no automobile to take a ride in, no radio to listen to. Just supper to eat — an hour or so in which to sit out of doors in Summer in quiet and peace, or, in Winter, to read or doze before a fire and then to bed.

In Summer the boys and hired men wrestled on the grass or threw horseshoes, or, on cloudy nights, fished, or took their girls out riding, or jumped. The big boys loved to jump — as if their legs had not already had enough to do. Standing jumps, pole jumps, even jumping

off the porch. And, of course, every boy by the time he was eighteen had his own horse — a colt that had been given him and which he had petted, loved, and broken to bit and harness. By the time he was eighteen, he had managed somehow to wangle a vehicle of sorts, if it was no more than a buckboard.

Yes, there was hard work, but I refute the argument that it was monotonous. Compare, for instance, the Spring or Fall plowing of a forty-acre lot with sitting or standing all day at a bench, drilling uniform holes in a piece of steel. How does a man ever more closely come to the pleasures Eden knew than when he treats his dusty throat to a drink of water fresh and cold from the springs which flow beneath his feet? Or when he sits down before a table laden with the fruits of his labor, the products of his own efforts? When he stands at dawn and watches the sun come over the horizon to bless acres of his own? Or when, his day done, he stretches upon his bed and closes his eyes in content upon an earth which is *his* earth, solid under his feet, holding him and his in friendly embrace, its treasures outstretched for him to take. He must work for them, indeed, but if he works he is sure to be recompensed, which is more than can be said of

the factory worker and many others in higher wage-brackets.

## II

The Bancrofts are all gone from the farm. Fifty years have seen almost utter desolation and decay supplant the thriftily-groomed home which it took fifty years to build. I do not know just when the destructive serpent entered the garden, for I was too busy growing into maturity where a struggle for existence must supplant that security into which I had been born. But once begun, the end was not long in coming.

During a recent visit to Michigan, I went with friends who also had known and loved the Bancroft place to see it. I had been warned against disappointment, but nevertheless, the condition of this old farm home as it now stands shocked and hurt me.

It has passed long since from Bancroft hands. After Mr. Bancroft died, the children wanted the estate settled so they could use the money. Mrs. Bancroft and some of the younger children stayed on for a while but one after another they left for the city, and hired help could never give to production what had been given by those whose home it was. So Mrs. Ban-

croft sold the place and moved to town. After this its downfall was swift.

Sills had rotted; the roof sagged. The house had not been painted in all the passing years. The ice house had fallen in, and was half-hidden in weeds — thistle, burdock, rattle-snake weed, wild lettuce, the very scum of weeds. The orchard was a tangled welter of split trunks, fallen limbs, uncut grass, clinging vines. The barns were shattered, half-sunk in manure. The garden where melons had ripened in clean weedless sand was now a part of the meadow. The path to the lake is gone, and where the old boat had once scraped a gravelly shore, stand cabins, cottages, a hot-dog booth, a dance hall — in short, a Summer resort where comes restive youth, bored with the city's shattering noise, confusion, and unprofitable toil, sick in heart and mind from struggle with industrial gods, hoping to find some modicum of serene content that was once here for the taking.

I have recently been reading about the sit-down strikes, that impudent, lawless protest against the envied condition of a "ruling class" which cannot rule the happiness of its own souls. I wondered if some of the Bancroft grandchildren were amongst those strikers, futilely con-

tending for a few more dollars to spend on more gasoline, more movies, more radios, more funny papers, things that are supposed to "raise the standards of living". I wondered whether they were any better off than their fathers had been with *their* standards of living, which included a roof over their heads and solid ground under their feet. Standards which covered the best food in the world, and good clothes — not always stylish, perhaps, but honest, clean, durable. Standards founded upon faith in God — as exemplified by their trust in His beneficence, and visualized by their reverent attitude toward His Word, and their attendance upon His House.

Strikes, for all I know, may be the only way in which to settle the world's problem of getting a living, but I cannot make it seem so. The old Bancroft farm lies there basking idly in the Summer sun, stirring faintly in Spring rain, shivering in Winter's cold. To me it did not look quite dead, quite hopeless. Under its ragged, unkempt bosom, there seemed a heart still beating, a sad and lonely heart to be sure, yet ready, it appeared, to thrust up a shining head through the promising earth, crying: "Return! For here, as nowhere else, you can still live on the fat of the land."

# DON'T YOU BELIEVE IT!

BY AUGUST A. THOMEN

*A practicing physician herewith debunks a number of myths concerning medicine and cures, which have for years been accepted as gospel truths by health experts in the home.*

**T**hat cleaning one's teeth frequently, especially if a tooth paste or powder is used, will prevent the teeth from decaying.

Science does not know the cause of dental decay. It only knows that there are numerous causative factors which may be summarized as anatomic, chemical, endocrine, bacteriologic, and dietetic. Amidst the confusion which has arisen as a result of the many divergent notions, only one fact has been established: namely, that no tooth paste or powder can have any therapeutic action whatever. These preparations do not render the germ acids harmless, neither do they remove tartar or prevent decay; acid mouth is corrected but momentarily, and film is removed only to reform again in a few minutes; no paste can possibly whiten teeth in three days; the new "polishing agent" which is supposed to have been especially developed is

a chemical substance known to science for centuries and has been for many years a component of baking powders; pyorrhoëa cannot possibly be cured by any tooth paste, and no dentrifice can conquer bacterial mouth. Nevertheless, all persons should brush their teeth twice daily for the same reason that they wash their faces — to keep them visibly clean. Use a paste or powder, if you wish, but remember that its most important function is to make the task of brushing the teeth a little more pleasant.

*That rubbing the body with medicinal preparations and adding certain powders to the bath are effective methods of weight reduction.*

Practically all "obesity cures" — and there are many — are worthless. As an example of a fraudulent "cure" which is supposed to reduce fat when "rubbed into the skin