

## Court Days <sup>[1]</sup>

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*George Higby Throop's second novel, Bertie: or, Life in the Old Field. A Humorous Novel was published in 1851 and heavily informed by his experiences working as a tutor on a Bertie County plantation. This work, although not especially popular with critics or the public at the time, depicts the plantation society in antebellum North Carolina from the perspective of both an outsider and an observer; Throop was born in New York but spent time working for and a summer vacationing with the wealthy Capehart family at Nag's Head. It was on a fictionalized version of the the Capehart plantation -- Scotch Hall in reality but Cypress Hill in the work of fiction -- that Bertie was set.*

*In the below excerpt, Throop describes some of the "local color" of Bertie County, albeit through a very particular lense.*

We were among the earliest to arrive. The hotel was thronged with waiters who were in readiness to receive the guests. I found mine host and his lady, both of whom at once recognized me, bustling asthmatically about in the work of preparation. Mr. Dawson was filling the sugar-drawers with lump-sugar, while Mrs. Dawson was as nearly [ubiquitous](#) <sup>[2]</sup> and out of breath as it was possible for her to be. She assured me that she was "just ready to [drap](#)." She had been, she said, as busy as a bee for the last three days in making preparations. A glimpse of the pantry where meats, pies, puddings, cakes -- what not? -- were piled like [shot](#) in an [ordnance-yard](#), fully confirmed the statement.

"Had I ever been at Court in the country?" she asked.

"No."

"Well, then, I should see sights!" she exclaimed; and she waddled away with a sigh of exhaustion.

[Anon](#) came the people in carts, in carriages, on horseback, on foot. I saw [the professor](#) in an agony of laughter as he watched the [advent](#) <sup>[3]</sup> of two men in a cart which was drawn by a single [steer](#). Such horses; thin as the [Cumæan Sybil](#), who could only be recognized by her voice; [consumptive](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, asthmatic, shadowy, [dilapidated](#) <sup>[5]</sup>, uncombed, unwashed, unfed; despair in their long, sharp faces. The carts were in similar variety. The yard, however, was fast filling up with horses and carriages that would do credit to any part of the country. Among the arrivals was that of "a show," as it was called; the same being a deformed dwarf, whose picture roughly sketched on canvas was quite enough to disgust me. It proved, however, to be one of the lions of the day. In one corner of the public room was a book-[peddler](#) <sup>[6]</sup>, [demure](#) <sup>[7]</sup>, [spectacled](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, [sanctified](#) <sup>[9]</sup>-looking. In another corner a [saddler](#) exposed his goods, and in another a shoemaker was similarly employed. Not far from the door of the court-house was a covered cart laden with oysters. There was a fire near it, and a rude deal-table, to which, [ever and anon](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, thin, long haired, [ague](#) <sup>[11]</sup>-[blenched](#) <sup>[12]</sup> men, with limitless shirt collars, gathered [tumultuously](#) <sup>[13]</sup> for the [ambrosial](#) <sup>[14]</sup> stew. [Fips](#), [ninepences](#) and quarters were thrown recklessly, almost furiously down, with the desperate air of people who are resolved to have what is technically called "[a bender](#)." The professor seemed perfectly at home. Whenever and wherever I met him, he was exhibiting a piece of hardened cement.

Not far from the oyster cart was a sort of tent, if such it could be called, it being simply a sheet fastened at each corner to a pole, and thus serving to shelter from the rays of the sun an ample stock of cakes and candy and nuts. In another part of the yard a man was selling a horse at auction. The doors of the court-house as well as the walls were covered with notices, written in every imaginable style of penmanship, and in the most hardy defiance of all the rules of [orthography](#) <sup>[15]</sup> and punctuation.

And then the dress! Coats that were [venerable](#) <sup>[16]</sup> when [swallow-tails](#) were young; hats that might represent the progress of hat-architecture since [the flood](#); caps of fur, cloth, leather, silk, and materials nondescript; [nankeen](#) in its glaring, undisguised, [unmitigated](#) <sup>[17]</sup>, remorseless yellowness, made up in [Turkish capaciousness](#) <sup>[18]</sup>; bonnets from the height and size and [antiquity](#) <sup>[19]</sup> of Noah's Ark, with something of the [picturesque](#) <sup>[20]</sup> modernness of a Chinese [junk](#) or a Dutch [frigate](#) of the old school. Perhaps the Egyptian war-chariot is a better standard of comparison. Then there were umbrellas which I will not undertake to say were of Chinese or [Botany Bay](#) manufacture, but which would do no violence to the remotest of umbrella probabilities -- due regard being had to [their chronology](#).

The people were out in force. There were greetings hearty and without number. There were grave consultations on all sorts of topics: the weather, the [compromise](#), the [committee of thirteen](#), the [Contoy prisoners](#), the last message, California, Utah, the dissolution of the Union, while

["News much older than their ale went round,"](#)

as unblushingly as if it were the last [telegraphic dispatch](#). Apple-brandy was as water for abundance, and barrels were as fountains of beer. Hard-handed toil [regaled](#) <sup>[21]</sup> himself on gingerbread and stewed oysters. [Old Times](#) stalked unconsciously along, jostling the newest and [gaudiest](#) <sup>[22]</sup> robes of fashion and novelty.

It was warm that day. The landlady meekly and in resignation rolled her eyes heavenward, while mine host, "[as subject to heat as butter](#)," seemed ready to evaporate. The dogs sank wearily and pantingly down, stretching themselves to their full length with an evident conviction that all flesh is grass in hot weather.

At dinner-time a crowd was gathered at the door of the dining-room. When at length it was unfastened, there was a general rush, on the tide of which mine host was [borne](#) along, to the [irremediable](#) [detriment](#) of a new and somewhat tight pair of Sunday breeches. The table was loaded. There was [wordbeef](#) by the half-ox, whole [hecatombs](#) of fowls, vegetables innumerable. After dinner came the speeches from some of the political candidates, and at the [instigation](#) of Dr. Jeffreys, Professor Matters was called upon for a speech upon his new system of hydrology. The substance thereof may, [perchance](#), yet be given to the world.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the crowd began to disperse, and we were among the first to depart. The professor informed us that he had been very successful, having closed a bargain for no less than five [cisterns](#).

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