



Up from Methodism: A Memoir of a Man Gone to the Devil

Herbert Asbury

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In 1926, while a reporter for the New York Herald Tribune, Herbert Asbury, great-great-nephew of Francis Asbury, the first American Bishop of the Methodist Church, submitted a chapter of his profane work-in-progress, an almost spiteful memoir of his boyhood in the Ozark town of Farmington, Missouri, to H.L. Mencken's American Mercury magazine. Mencken published "Hatrack," the story of the town's prostitute, in the April issue. The Mercury was then banned in Boston at the incitement of J. Frank Chase, the head of the New England Watch and Ward Society, who called the story "bad, vile, raw stuff." Mencken was arrested selling the magazine to Chase on Boston Common in a stunt designed to provoke the free-speech trials that followed. In its restrained, but unrelenting attack on religious bigotry, irrationality, and hypocrisy, the book that was published soon thereafter retains its transgressive power today. Its taunting title, playing on Booker T. Washington's early-century bestseller *Up from Slavery*, gives an idea of what Asbury thought he had escaped. In his mocking humor and plain-spun language, used to evoke a bygone South suffocating in its fear of pleasure and damnation, Asbury reveals his debt to another son of Missouri, Mark Twain.

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