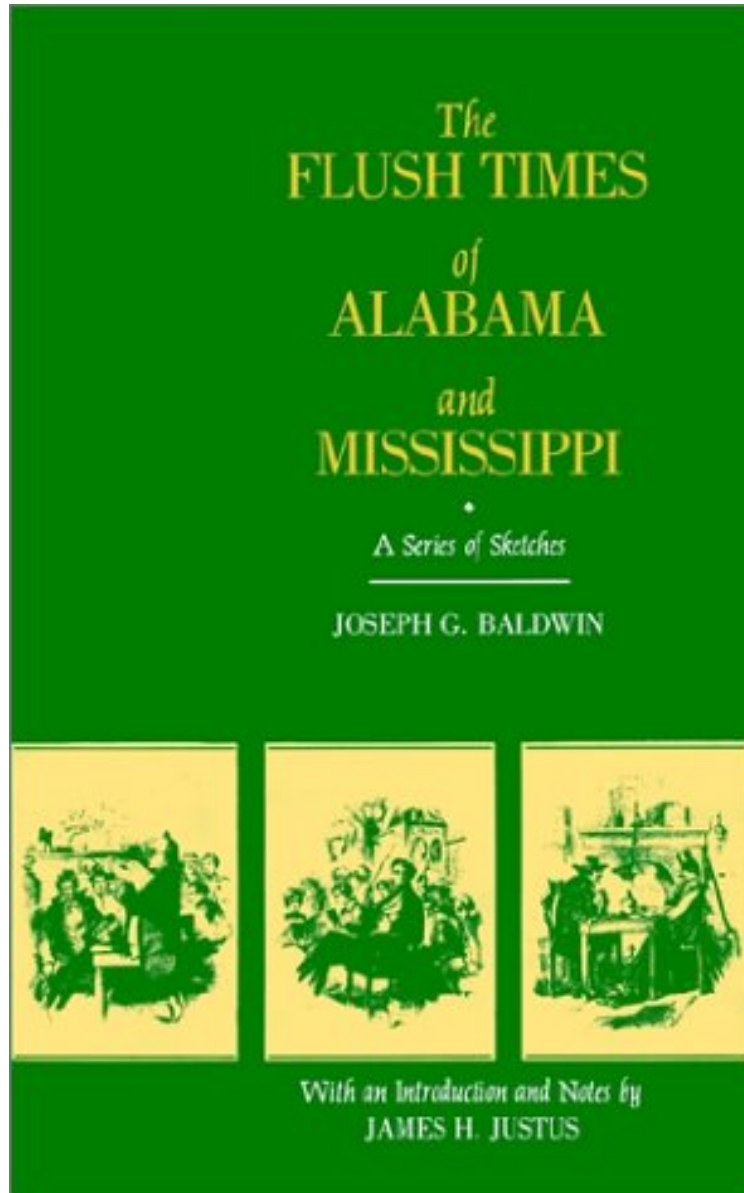


(Download) The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches

The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches

Joseph G. Baldwin

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Joseph G. Baldwin : The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi: A Series of Sketches:

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Lawyering Along A Lawless Frontier By Bill Slocum As a series of sketches chronicling life at a certain time and place involving the legal profession, "The Flush Times Of Alabama And

Mississippi" has its uses. It captures a sense of rough justice, of rowdy humor, and salty characters to interest historians of the antebellum American South, particularly as it features the same part of the country William Faulkner later brought to life. But for the casual reader, this is more like a sleep aid with an occasional funny one-liner poking through a lot of tumid exposition and hoary literary allusions. Even back when this was published in 1853, lawyers were famous for being windbags. Joseph G. Baldwin proves to be that often here. Baldwin was a 21-year-old Virginian when he arrived first in Mississippi, then Alabama, to ply his legal trade. He found the land in a state of veritable anarchy, which he writes about with some color and wit, written for the sensibilities of a different age: "I shall not attempt to describe the population," he writes in one fictional biography. "I shall only say that the Indians and half-breeds across the border complained of it mightily." Unfortunately, to get to bon mots like that, one must wade through a lot of frippery common to writers of the period, for whom directness wasn't as important as impressing upon the reader one's rangy vocabulary or love of Shakespeare. The Bard only used Falstaff in three of his plays; Baldwin references that fat scalawag so often it becomes a kind of crutch along with his frequent dips into Latin. The humorous sketches he presents are not so much stories as descriptions, played out and over and back around until the reader grows weary with the concept that this character was a big eater, and that one a spendthrift of other people's money, and so on. Baldwin's best piece offers discomfort of another kind. In "Samuel Hele, Esq." a village crank is persuaded to talk up a visiting Northern schoolmarm with a strong aversion to slavery. Baldwin has fun, too much fun, with Hele's exaggerated account of community ills, including killing slaves for sport and dog food, until the horrified schoolmarm flees the land to tell her friend Harriet Beecher Stowe what is going on. It's funny in a way that hits very close to the bone, aided perhaps by Baldwin's breezy take on the matter. "Madam, the reason why there is no scandal here is, because there is not character enough to support it," is how Hele explains it. "Reputation is not appreciated." Many of the sketches labor toward more mundane ends. One involves an incident where someone mistakes a fingerbowl for refreshment, another of a lawyer who is embarrassed when a rival attorney confronts him at a trial with his old love poetry. A couple of stories involve distracting talky gluttons of their desired fritters or oysters. There are a couple of biographical sketches that really drag, as they are much more serious in tone and present Baldwin at his most soporific. He's never completely dull; his wit is ever-ready, and there's also a creeping but never spelled-out sense this courtly Whig found himself a fish out of water among his rowdy Democratic neighbors (Baldwin would leave the South soon after publishing this book and become a justice in California's Supreme Court). On the surface, though, "Flush Times" feels like what it is, a 160-year-old collection of writings more worthy for its historic interest than literary merit. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Great historical resource By Lucien Bonaparte Baldwin's *Flush Times* is a great historical resource. Baldwin paints an interesting tale of frontier Alabama and Mississippi and the characters which lived in the region. Overall, a great illustration of the American frontier and the Jacksonian era.

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From the Back Cover A true classic of American humor. Joseph Glover Baldwin left his native Virginia as a young man in 1836 for the booming frontier of the Old Southwest, settling first in DeKalb, Mississippi, and then in 1839 in Gainesville and later Livingston, Sumter County, Alabama. Blessed with a lively imagination and a good library, Baldwin prospered as a local officeholder and attorney and produced a series of sketches for the *Southern Literary Messenger*. These essays were gathered with others into this collection of 26 and published as a book in New York by D. Appleton and Company in 1853. Joseph G. Baldwin, subsequent to publication of this book, contracted California fever, and made his way west to a judgeship and an untimely death in that state in 1864. Bert Hitchcock is Professor of English at Auburn University and coeditor of *American Short Stories* (7th Edition).