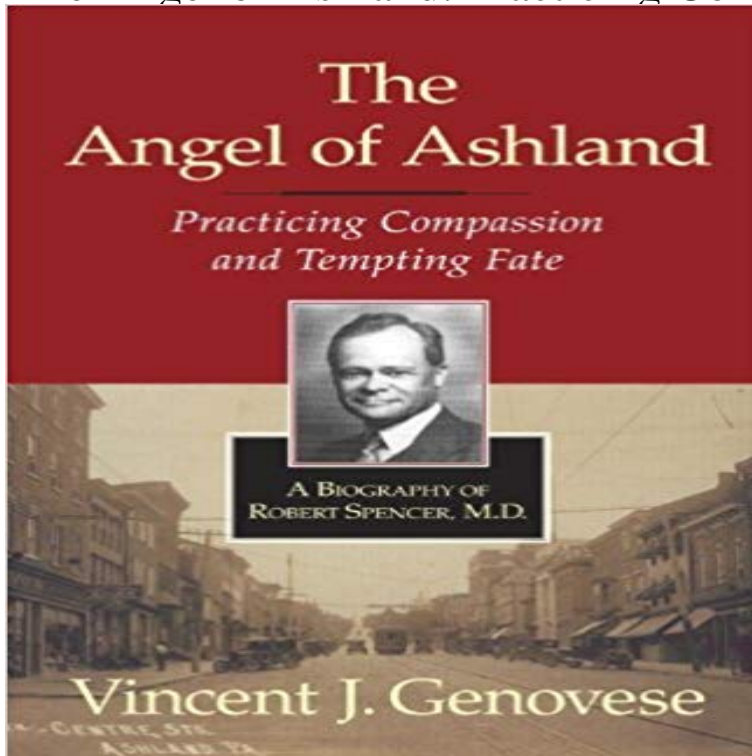


## The Angel of Ashland: Practicing Compassion and Tempting Fate



For over fifty years Dr. Robert Spencer (1889-1969) practiced medicine in the small coal-mining town of Ashland, PA. As the only town doctor, he was known by everyone as a dedicated medical professional who spent long hours at his clinic, charged a modest fee for his services, never turned anyone away who couldn't pay, and was the person the townspeople turned to with their many ailments and injuries. But he also gained another kind of notoriety as well, about which there was generally a discreet silence in the town: he would willingly perform safe and reliable abortions. Women in trouble could consult him without shame or fear, and he would perform the procedure quickly and efficiently with no questions asked. This was unique in the era before *Roe v. Wade*, especially in the 1920s when Dr. Spencer opened his practice. As a result he soon became a much-sought-after physician, to whom doctors throughout the country would refer women who wished to end their pregnancies. Of course, many disapproved of his not-so-secret and illegal abortion practice. Despite the townspeople's reliance on him for his medical expertise, over the years he was blackmailed, robbed, often shunned in public, censured by the American Medical Association, and arrested by the police. This is the first biography of Dr. Spencer. Vincent Genovese has done yeoman's work in reconstructing Dr. Spencer's life and career by researching his correspondence, interviewing surviving Ashland residents who knew him, and combing through old newspaper archives. This unique biography is a must read for anyone interested in the issue of abortion.

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