



Broke by the War: Letters of a Slave Trader

A. J. McElveen

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Broke by the War is a collection of more than 140 letters written between 1852 and 1857 by South Carolina slave trader A. J. McElveen to his employer Z. B. Oakes, a prosperous Charleston broker. The correspondence provides an intimate look into the world of slave trading, from the economic aspects of prices, shipping, supply sources, and financing to the impact on those involved, including the breakup of slave families, the pursuit of runaways, and the various roles played by doctors, lawyers, bankers, and planters in this abominable business.

Edited and introduced by Edmund L. Drago, McElveen's letters give the modern reader an opportunity to view Old South slave trading through the eyes of a representative participant. As Drago recounts, the Civil War decimated McElveen's finances and left him, as described years later by a credit investigator, simply as "broke by the war--old man."

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