



An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South: Ezekiel Birdseye on Slavery, Capitalism, and Separate Statehood in East Tennessee, 1841-1846

Durwood Dunn

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This volume, a collection of letters written by an abolitionist businessman who lived in East Tennessee prior to the Civil War, provides one of the clearest firsthand views yet published of a region whose political, social, and economic distinctions have intrigued historians for more than a century. Between 1841 and 1846, Birdseye expressed his views and observations in letters to Gerrit Smith, a prominent New York reformer who arranged to have many of them published in antislavery newspapers such as the *Emancipator and Friend of Man*. Those letters, reproduced in this book, drew on Birdseye's extensive conversations with slaveholders, nonslaveholders, and the slaves themselves. He found that East Tennesseans, on the whole, were antislavery in sentiment, susceptible to rational abolitionist appeal, and generally far more lenient toward individual slaves than were other southerners. Opposed to slavery on economic as well as moral grounds, Birdseye sought to establish a free labor colony in East Tennessee in the early 1840s and actively supported the region's abortive effort in 1842 to separate itself from the rest of the state.

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