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James Stephen

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The Opportunity

James Stephen (1758–1832) was a British lawyer and slavery abolitionist. After qualifying for the bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1782 Stephen sailed for St Kitts in 1783. The atrocities committed against slaves which he witnessed in the West Indies converted him to the abolitionist cause, and after his return to England in 1794 he campaigned on behalf of the abolition movement. This volume, first published in 1804, contains Stephen's discussion of Britain's political choices following the successful Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). Before the Revolution, Haiti was one of the wealthiest colonies in the Caribbean, which Britain had attempted unsuccessfully to acquire by force. Stephen explores the complex political situation created by Haiti's declaration of independence, and advocates for Britain to acknowledge Haiti as a sovereign state. Stephen's thorough assessment of Britain's political choices and their potential impact provides valuable insights into contemporary trade and political motivations surrounding Haiti.

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THE
OPPORTUNITY;
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WITH
ST. DOMINGO.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "THE CRISIS OF THE SUGAR COLONIES."

LONDON:
PRINTED BY C. WHITTINGHAM,
Dean Street, Fetter Lane;
FOR J. HATCHARD, PICCADILLY.

1804.

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TO THE
RIGHT HON. WILLIAM PITT,

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, &c. &c.

SIR,

I USE a freedom which may appear a little extraordinary in prefixing your name to a letter originally addressed to Mr. Addington.

To conceal this seeming impropriety, by expunging his name from the following sheets, would not be difficult; for I wrote not to Mr. Addington, but to the Prime Minister of this country: but to make such an alteration in a work already printed, would be to incur two inconveniences—loss of time, which in this case, perhaps, may be important to the public, and loss of money, which you know is rarely unimportant to an author.

This

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This work was commenced soon after the evacuation of St. Domingo by the French was first announced in Europe.—The Author, to his surprise, then found reason to suspect, that his Majesty's ministers were irresolute as to the line of policy which it might be expedient to adopt towards the people of that island; and conceiving that by such indecision an opportunity of obtaining much good, and averting great evils, might be irrecoverably lost, he resolved to offer his advice on that interesting subject, both to the Minister and to the Public.

The execution of this purpose, however, was repeatedly interrupted by unavoidable private impediments, and the work has loitered long in the Press, as well as in the closet. One half of the following sheets were printed, and nearly the whole remainder composed, before the late change of administration took place or was expected; and yet it has been impossible to publish them sooner.

Delay, Sir, in these eventful times, is peculiarly inconvenient to statesmen and political writers.

The

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The titles and situations of all my principal parties are already become obsolete. Mr. Addington is no longer Chancellor of the Exchequer; Buonaparte is become Emperor of the French; and Dessalines sole Governor, instead of Triumvir, not of St. Domingo, but Hayti.

But what is more important, the events which it was my aim to avert are already beginning to outwing the tardy progress of my pen and of the press. Dessalines, if late rumour may be trusted, is not only acting upon maxims very opposite to those by which he lately attempted to conciliate his European neighbours, and perpetrating crimes which a better policy on our part might have prevented, but is already waging that maritime war which was predicted in the following sheets, and denouncing, with a voice far more impressive than mine, the necessity of our restoring peace to the Gulph of Mexico, if we would avert from it new revolutions. I must publish without further delay, lest we should hear next of his having quarrelled with Jamaica, and conquered Cuba, or of a reconciliation on the basis of in-

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independency between St. Domingo and France.

Allow me, therefore, Sir, to transfer to you, in its original shape, as an official heir-loom, the advice which was meant for your predecessor.

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient

humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

May 31, 1804.