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THREE PIGEONS

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A MATCH FOR THE KING'S PLATE,

George Cruikshank original print, 1819.

A hand coloured etching by George Cruikshank commenting on the contest for seat of Westminster. George Lamb and John Cam Hobhouse, 1st Baron Broughton are shown astride a lamb, Sir Francis Burdett, 5th Baronet, on a fine but injured charger and Henry 'Orator' Hunt straggles behind on an old carthorse representing the 'Father of Reform' Major John Cartwright. All five figures are shown racing for the winning post at the gate of His Majesty's Treasury with an implication that the contest is for one for both power and political patronage while the twin devils of radical reform and universal suffrage inadvertently 'steal a ride' on the Baronet's charger. The election of 1818 was the first to be staged after the end of the Napoleonic wars and was to become both a distillation of the latent class-conflicts bubbling over in the United Kingdom, and a fore-warning of the growth of militant radicalism that was to envenom and fracture British politics in the early parts of the 19th Century. Sir Francis Burdett was the Radical incumbent in Westminster and yet was firmly set against the new Radicalism which was beginning to colour the politics of the manufacturing districts of the North. This extreme and confident movement for universal manhood suffrage and political reform was by now associated with Henry Hunt, Major Cartwright and the writer and journalist William Cobbett. Caught in a cleft stick by his need both to mollify the prosperous and respectable Westminster electorate and yet maintain his own character as a tribune of the plebeians and Radical leader, Burdett was in a classic political double-bind. To the eye of the exiled Cobbett the Baronet was a placeman and an establishment 'traitor' but to his Tory opponents and the wavering freeholders and burgesses of Westminster he was beginning to appear a dangerous extremist. The suicide of Sir Samuel Romilly, the second member for Westminster, in November 1818 threw the situation wide open and the resulting by-election became something of a national sensation.

DIMENSIONS: 30.48cm (12") High, 38.1cm (15") Wide

PRICE: £180

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