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VISITING THE SICK

by James Gillray, published by Hannah Humphrey, 28 July 1806

An original hand-coloured etching and aquatint by the caricaturist James Gilray. A lampoon on the final, fatal illness of Radical MP Charles James Fox. The 'Intrepid' Fox was a leading Whig statesman of the late 18th and early 19th century. Fox is shown in a stage of advanced illness at the Duke of Bedford's house in Arlington Street. He is surrounded, supported and discreetly slighted by a complex cast of political figures of the day. Fox's opposition to the Slave Trade, his support for Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Test Acts, as well as his sympathy towards the American and French Revolutions and fixed belief in the pacific intentions of Napoleon Bonaparte made him a hate-figure for an assorted coalition of High-Tories, Patriots, Protestants, Royalists and conservative Whigs. Upon the death of William Pitt the younger in 1806, Fox was admitted to a 'ministry of all the talents' by Prime Minister George Grenville and elevated to his old position of Foreign Secretary. The print represents and allegorises a confusing array of more or less ephemeral and recondite political tendencies and policies of the middle Georgian period including Catholic emancipation, the French wars, and contentions over political liberty as well as the personal rivalries and dissensions within the Whig party of Lord Seymour, George Grenville and Charles James Fox. Fox was to die of his illness at Chiswick House on 13th September 1806. Despite his declining physical condition his final year in politics witnessed perhaps his most noble and abiding achievement. In the spring of 1806 he had overseen the Foreign Slave Trade Bill in spring 1806 which prohibited British subjects from contributing to the trading of slaves with the colonies of Britain's wartime enemies, thus eliminating two-thirds of the slave trade passing through British ports. Later, on the 10th of June, barely three months before his demise, he had offered to the House a resolution for the total abolition of the Slave Trade proposing that: "this House, conceiving the African slave trade to be contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and sound policy, will, with all practicable expedition, proceed to take effectual measures for abolishing the said trade..." The House of Commons voted 114 to 15 in favour and the Lords approved the motion on 24 June.

DIMENSIONS: 33cm (13") High, 50.8cm (20") Wide

STOCK CODE: A079

