

Thomas Jefferson to St. George Tucker, August 28, 1797, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO ST. GEORGE TUCKER J. MSS.

Monticello, Aug 28, 97.

Dear Sir, —I have to acknowledge the receipt of your two favors of the 2d & 22d inst. and to thank you for the pamphlet covered by the former.¹ You know my subscription to its doctrines; and to the mode of emancipation, I am satisfied that that must be a matter of compromise between the passions, the prejudices, & the real difficulties which will each have their weight in that operation. Perhaps the first chapter of this history, which has begun in St. Domingo, & the next succeeding ones, which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy & necessity; & furnish an answer to the difficult question, whether shall the colored emigrants go? and the sooner we put some plan underway, the greater hope there is that it may be permitted to proceed peaceably to its ultimate effect. But if something is not done, & soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children. The ‘murmura venturos nautis prodentia ventos’ has already reached us; the revolutionary storm, now sweeping the globe, will be upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land. From the present state of things in Europe & America, the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand; and only a single spark is wanting to make that day to-morrow. If we had begun sooner, we might probably have been allowed a lengthier operation to clear ourselves, but every day's delay lessens the time we may take for emancipation. Some people derive hope from the

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aid of the confederated States. But this is a delusion. There is but one state in the Union which will aid

1 *Dissertation on Slavery.*

us sincerely, if an insurrection begins, and that one may, perhaps, have it's own fire to quench at the same time.

The facts stated in yours of the 22d, were not identically known to me, but others like them were. From the general government no interference need be expected. Even the merchant and navigator, the immediate sufferers, are prevented by various motives from wishing to be redressed. I see nothing but a State procedure which can vindicate us from the insult. It is in the power of any single magistrate, or of the Attorney for the Commonwealth, to lay hold of the commanding officer, whenever he comes ashore, for the breach of the peace, and to proceed against him by indictment. This is so plain an operation, that no power can prevent it's being carried through with effect, but the want of will in the officers of the State. I think that the matter of finances, which has set the people of Europe to thinking, is now advanced to that point with us, that the next step, & it is an unavoidable one, a land tax, will awaken our constituents, and call for inspection into past proceedings. I am, with great esteem, dear Sir, your friend and servant.