

LAYING FOUNDATIONS: POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY

During the years between 1808 and 1816, William Rufus King served his apprenticeship in the two fields in which he was to play a significant part during his lifetime, politics and diplomacy; he was elected to the House of Commons of the State of North Carolina in 1808 and to the Congress of the United States in 1810, and was appointed Secretary of the Legation to the Court of Russia in 1816. During this portion of his life, the United States was faced with a series of difficult problems growing out of the conflict with France and England over neutral rights, the War of 1812, and readjustment following the Treaty of Ghent in 1815. Young King made contributions to the solution of several of these vital questions. In the North Carolina legislature he gave his wholehearted support to the Embargo policy of Thomas Jefferson, and in Congress he gave his support to the War of 1812. During his European mission, he helped to straighten out some of the diplomatic tangles which grew out of the war.

Little information is available about King's activities from 1805 to 1808 when he was practicing law at Clinton, nor is it possible to know all the motives which prompted him to seek public office almost as soon as he was twenty-one.

Robert Strange, King's friend, declared that he was called upon to occupy public office out of recognition by the people he represented. King, said Strange, was not the kind of man

who stooped "to the arts of a demagogue."¹ There is probably much truth in what he said, for the King name undoubtedly carried great influence in Sampson County, and the people of that county must have known of King's ability as a student and as a lawyer. On the other hand, in view of his future career in politics, it seems logical to assume that King had a burning ambition to obtain office. In the period from 1805 until he was ready to seek his first office in 1808, he no doubt mixed his law practice with the arts of the politician and made himself better known to the people of Sampson County.

At any rate, he became a candidate in 1808 for representative from Sampson County in the North Carolina House of Commons. In the August elections he received the second highest number of votes in a four-man contest for two seats and won one of the seats.² Thus at the age of twenty-two King began a public career that, except for brief periods, continued to the time of his death in 1853. In the beginning, he joined the Republican Party, the dominant part of his county and long the party of his choice; to this, the party of Jefferson, he remained loyal to his death. In 1839 he proudly

¹ Robert Strange, Eulogy on the Life and Character of William Rufus King, Delivered in Clinton, on the 1st Day of June, 1853 (Raleigh: W. W. Holden, 1853), p. 8.

² Raleigh Register, August 18, 1808. The vote was distributed as follows: Jesse Darden, 520; King, 465; Olin Mobly, 375; J. Bryant, 346.

wrote: "My youthful energies were exerted in sustaining those principles for which Jefferson, Madison and the purest and wisest of our country contended."³ Again in 1851, when he was approaching the end of his career, he declared that he had battled for the cause of the Democracy from the time when he was a beardless youth until his hair was "silvered over by age."⁴

At the time when King came upon the public stage, the United States faced grave difficulties growing out of the Napoleonic War then raging in Europe. In an effort to save American ships and men from seizure and to prevent war if possible, Thomas Jefferson secured the passage of the Embargo Act in December, 1807. By cutting off trade with foreign countries and restricting all other trade, however, the act had a disastrous effect on American commerce and caused much opposition to the administration. In March, 1808, petitions were sent to the Governor of North Carolina by people of several counties requesting him to call a special session of the legislature to suspend the collection of debts during the period of

³ William R. King to Mobile Committee, May 26, 1839, quoted in Tuscaloosa Flag of the Union, June 12, 1839.

⁴ William R. King to Bolling Hall, November 19, 1850, in Bolling Hall Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

⁵ July 20, 1808.

⁶ Journal of the House of Commons of the State of North Carolina (1808), pp. 4-5.

distress caused by the Embargo.⁵ The Bladen County grand jury declared in April that the Embargo had produced a scarcity of money, making it impossible for the inhabitants of the county to pay their debts.⁶ Prices of such products as rice, tar and shingles fell to approximately one-fifth their normal level by April, 1808.⁷ The Raleigh Minerva called the Embargo "a palsy on industry and a tomb of enterprise."⁸ The governor's message to the General Assembly in November, 1808, was far from hopeful. Two of the major problems confronting the legislature, the governor noted, were the difficulties growing out of the Embargo and the question of using the militia for federal service. Since the disputes with European countries had not been settled, he called on all citizens to act as "Men and Patriots."⁹

King soon had an opportunity to display his attitude toward steps the Jefferson administration had taken against England and France because of their unjust treatment of Americans. On December 2, the House of Commons considered a series of resolutions introduced by William Gaston expressing

⁵ Raleigh Minerva, March 24, 1808.

⁶ Ibid., April 21, 1808.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ July 28, 1808.

⁹ Journal of the House of Commons of the State of North Carolina (1808), pp. 4-5.

the indignation of North Carolinians for the repeated violations of the rights of the United States by European powers, the numerous insults to the sovereignty of the United States, and the unmanly methods of waging war being used by the belligerents. The resolution declared that North Carolinians would support with unanimity and zeal such measures as had been made or might be devised "in vindication of the national honour..., in defense of the national rights, and in the cause of their country." To these resolutions, King proposed an additional one:

Resolved, that though the laws laying an embargo have borne hard upon a great part of the citizens of the United States, yet this Legislature view them as the best means which could at that time have been devised; as dictated by sound policy and evincive of the wisdom and moderation of our government. We will therefore cheerfully acquiesce in their continuance, until a repeal can be obtained of the unjust regulations which occasioned them; or any other measure which Congress may deem necessary for the maintenance of neutral rights.¹⁰

In this resolution King showed that he was willing to make all necessary sacrifices to defend the honor of his country; he committed himself as a party regular, and as a defender of Jeffersonian policy.

Although King's amendment was adopted by a vote of 76-42 in the House of Commons, a series of Senate resolutions was eventually substituted as the joint sentiment of the two houses. The Senate resolutions called for unity, denounced

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 19-20.

the activities of Great Britain and France, and "cordially approved" of measures that President Jefferson had taken. They pledged the people of North Carolina to give cheerful acquiescence in the Embargo unless Congress chose to revise it, and to risk their lives and fortunes rather than surrender their "liberty and independence." King generally approved the sentiments of these resolutions and even voted for an attempted amendment to the Senate resolutions asserting the duty of every good citizen "to submit to all the privations, and to encounter all the inconveniences" necessary in resisting "foreign insolence and injustice" and pledging members of the General Assembly to donate one-half their wages for the session for the purpose of "procuring arms for the militia of North Carolina." The majority refused to go so far as to give up part of their own salary.¹¹

In addition to his work in favor of the Embargo resolutions, King was active in other respects during the 1808 session. He was a member of the claims committee and other lesser committees and introduced several routine petitions and bills.¹² On one occasion, he voted against a bill proposing to repeal a law of 1794 prohibiting the further importation of slaves and indentured people of color.¹³ To aid debtors who were suffering from the harmful effects of the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 6, 13, 23, 14, 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Embargo, he voted in favor of a law suspending temporarily the right of creditors to foreclose for debt, provided the debtor gave part payment and security for the remainder.¹⁴

In 1809 King was elected without opposition to represent Sampson County in the session of the House of Commons which began on November 20.¹⁵ Although he was only twenty-three years old, he played a significant part in that body when it met. In recognition of his ability he was placed on numerous committees, including the finance committee, a special committee to consider the propriety of establishing a court or courts of chancery, a committee to inquire into the expediency of changing the mode of electing sheriffs, a joint committee to consider amendments to a bill for the relief of debtors, and others of less importance.¹⁶ Such recognition was a real tribute and showed the esteem in which he was held by his fellow legislators.

Only a few fragmentary accounts of King's speeches survive to show his attitude toward different issues during the 1809 session. He favored a tax of one-eighth of the net dividend paid by banks rather than a tax on bank stock, and opposed the collection of tax on stock owned by the state or

14 Ibid., pp. 48-49.

15 Raleigh Register, August 24, 1809.

16 North Carolina House Journal, pp. 4, 7, 9, 18, 22, 35, 47.

by the University of North Carolina.¹⁷ But more important, he spoke in support of a bill before the House of Commons calling for the suspension of judgment against debtors (from December 31, 1809, to December 31, 1810) provided the debtor paid interest and one-half of the principal and gave security for the remainder of the debt. The proposal was designed to extend the benefits of a similar act passed during the previous session. Defenders of the bill pointed out that the Embargo had so dislocated finances that people were unable to meet their contracts. King joined in advocating the bill because he knew the pathetic circumstances of some of his constituents. He admitted that speculators, as some charged, might reap undeserved benefits by the postponement of debt payments, but pointed out that such persons could not be discovered. He favored, therefore, giving the same benefits to all. In answer to those who said the bill was unconstitutional as a violation of the provision in the United States Constitution forbidding the impairment of the obligation of contracts by states, King answered that suspensions had already been made under the act of the previous year and had been ruled valid by the courts.¹⁸ Proponents of suspension were able to secure an extension of the benefits of the 1808 act until April, 1810.¹⁹

¹⁷ Raleigh Register, January 18, 1810.

¹⁸ Raleigh Star, February 1, 8, 1810.

¹⁹ Ibid., February 8, 1810.

Early in the 1809 session, King, among others, was nominated for the post of solicitor of the fifth circuit of the state Superior Court. Neither of the candidates received a majority of the total votes cast on the first ballot. Whereupon, by action of the General Assembly, some of the names were withdrawn, and King was elected on the second ballot.²⁰ On the last day of the legislative session, he resigned his seat in the House of Commons so as to enable him to take up his new duties.²¹ As solicitor, King was required to travel the circuit through ten North Carolina counties twice a year and "prosecute in behalf of the state." The fifth circuit included his home county Sampson, along with Montgomery, Anson, Richmond, Robeson, Bladen, Brunswick, New Hanover, Cumberland, and Moore counties. Beginning on the first Monday in March and the first Monday in September, he and a circuit judge made their two yearly rounds through the counties of their circuit, remaining up to six days in each county if necessary. It required ten weeks to complete the circuit in the spring and ten weeks in the fall. For each sitting of the court King was entitled to a salary of £10 plus certain fees collected.²² King's term as solicitor for two years

20 North Carolina House Journal (1809), pp. 12-17.

21 Ibid., p. 54.

22 Laws of the State of North Carolina, Including the Titles of Such Statutes and Parts of Statutes of Great Britain as Are in Force in Said State 1796-1820 (Raleigh: J. Gales, 1821), pp. 1050-1053.

gave him an opportunity to make himself known throughout the southeastern corner of North Carolina. Four of the seven counties of the Wilmington Congressional District were located in King's circuit. He was soon to call on the people of these counties to help elect him to the Congress of the United States.

King had an opportunity to run for Congress in 1810 when Thomas Kenan, the incumbent of the Fifth District (or Wilmington District as some called it), declined to seek re-election after representing the district for six years.²³ In the August election, King was opposed by the Federalist candidate, Christopher Dudley. In the seven county district, composed of Sampson, Duplin, New Hanover, Columbus, Brunswick, and Onslow counties, King amassed a total of 3,047 votes; Dudley received only 1,449. King carried his home county of Sampson by a majority of more than five to one and lost only Onslow County to Dudley.²⁴ Only twenty-four at the time of his election, King was probably the youngest member of the Twelfth Congress when it was called into special session by President James Madison in November, 1811. He took his place among a group of able young men with whom he was destined to be associated for most of his remaining life -- John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and others. Though young in

²³ Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1949. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1950), p. 1401.

²⁴ Raleigh Register, August 16, 23, 30, 1810.

years, King was called on to assist in conducting some of the most important legislative business that the country had yet faced.

As the Twelfth Congress assembled, war with England was approaching ever nearer. Efforts to secure the abandonment of British Orders in Council and French decrees had proved unsuccessful. Many Americans had come to the conclusion that to submit to further violations of neutral rights was too degrading to be continued. They called for protection of these rights at the possible risk of war. Additional factors entered the thinking of some which caused them to welcome war with England. Westerners lived in constant fear of Indian attack and accused the British, correctly in some cases, of giving aid to the Indians and encouraging their attacks on American settlers. Finally, many Americans looked with covetous eyes on Canada and Florida and felt that war would be a quick method of securing these territories. Hence, a lust for new territory, coupled with resentment at British interference with American commerce and encouragement of Indian attacks, worked together to breed a war spirit.²⁵

The press of North Carolina was conscious of the situation. In printing Madison's proclamation calling for a

²⁵ Valuable studies of this subject are found in Julius William Pratt, Expansionists of 1812 (New York: Macmillan, 1925); Alfred Le Roy Burt, The United States, Great Britain, and British North America (New Haven: Yale, 1940), and Bernard Mayo, Henry Clay: Spokesman of the New West (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937.) (Hereinafter cited as Mayo, Henry Clay.)

special session of Congress, the Raleigh Minerva noted that the call forboded a "most unfavorable aspect towards the continuance of peace." A contest with Great Britain, "so long and ardently hoped for by many," now seemed unavoidable.²⁶ In September, 1811, the same newspaper pointed to continued British violations and declared, "Between the villainous and prejudiced there, and the inveterate and unprincipled here, strange will it be if war do not take place."²⁷ King and other members of Congress were given the choice of peace or war before the fateful first session of the Twelfth Congress was over.

King's first speech in Congress grew out of a resolution by John Rhea of Tennessee proposing that the Committee on Commerce and Manufactures make an inquiry into the expediency of laying an additional duty on coarse manufactures of hemp, flax, and cotton, a proposal designed to strengthen the United States by protecting its manufactures. King spoke in favor of the resolution during the course of a "long desultory debate." He favored the protection of domestic manufactures generally and suggested that an inquiry should also be made into the expediency of laying a duty on the importation of salt. This product, he said, was a manufacture of general consumption and should be encouraged. The United States had suffered in the past from shortages and might avert later

²⁶ Raleigh Minerva, August 2, 1811.

²⁷ Ibid., September 6, 1811.

inconveniences by encouraging home manufacture. On the other hand, Nathaniel Macon, also of North Carolina, opposed a salt duty because salt was a necessity of life. A special group, he felt, should not be allowed to gain extra benefits. Eventually King withdrew his suggestions because some members felt it improper to amend a resolution already before a committee, but he disclaimed any intention of giving special benefits to a particular section at the expense of another or of interfering with a resolution already being considered by a committee. Instead, he wished to see how far Congress was willing to encourage the manufactures of the United States "in preference to those of foreign nations." As in his days of service in the North Carolina Assembly, he showed a willingness to support legislation that would strengthen the United States. His speech foreshadowed the protective policy and search for self-sufficiency which was adopted after the War of 1812 as a part of the program of new nationalism.²⁸

As the United States drifted toward war in late 1811 and early 1812, there were several shades of opinion in Congress regarding the expediency of entering the conflict. They included a group of young insurgents, later called the War Hawks, a group of moderate Republicans, composed mostly of elderly and mediocre men, a small but able group of Federalists and the old Quid element, led by John Randolph of

²⁸ Annals of Congress, 1789-1824, 42 volumes (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834-1856), XXIII, 359-361.

Virginia and Richard Stanford of North Carolina. When Henry Clay, one of the leading members of the War Hawks, was elected to the House speakership, it became clear that the insurgent faction was to be in control. These men represented a revolt of youth against cautious age, a protest against the conservative seaboard, and an upsurging of nationalistic fervor. Most of them were from the West and South. Their names are well-known: Henry Clay of Kentucky, John Caldwell Calhoun of South Carolina, Felix Grundy of Tennessee, Richard Mentor Johnson of Kentucky, among others. Unlike the War Hawks, the moderate Republicans showed timidity and advocated the old policies of trade restriction. The Quids, likewise, were grimly opposed to war, as Randolph's noisy attack on the War Hawks demonstrated.²⁹ As a new member of Congress, William R. King had to choose between loyalty to the militant War Hawks or to one of the more moderate groups. Since his earlier speeches had foreshadowed an adherence to a policy of defending American rights, it is not surprising that he joined the youthful War Hawk faction and supported measures for the strengthening of his country.

King expressed his views on national policy in December, 1811, when he took part in the debate on a resolution to increase the size of the standing army. His speech was made in answer to one of Richard Stanford of North Carolina in opposition to standing armies. Calling them the "bane of

²⁹ Mayo, Henry Clay, pp. 385-426.

free Governments," Stanford contended that such establishments would prevent the United States from being the "freest and happiest people on earth." In his speech he admitted that there was just cause for war, but maintained that the main interest of the United States was to cherish peace. Peace, he declared, was a "Republican doctrine, as well in the old minority times as since the minority grew into a majority." War had not been declared under Washington, Adams, or Jefferson although there had been great cause to do so. Now, however, he saw a new group preaching the doctrine of war -- one that was to be a war of conquest and not of defense. He opposed any measure which might hasten the day when the United States would be a belligerent.³⁰

A representative of the new group and an advocate of new doctrines, King responded immediately by calling Stanford's doctrine one of abject submission. Admitting that full debate was necessary when such a vital question as peace or war was being considered and that members should divest themselves of warm feelings induced by the unjust prostration of American rights, he yet believed that the resolution should be passed. His own section, he pointed out, had extensive and exposed seacoasts which needed protection. He and his constituents were willing to take steps to protect them. "As in my individual capacity, I feel at all times willing to make not only

³⁰ Annals of Congress, XXIII, 511-516.

pecuniary sacrifices, but to expose my person in vindicating the rights and interests of my country," he declared, "in my Representative capacity, I will undertake to say, that my constituents will do no less."³¹ The "demon Avarice," which benumbed the warm emotions of the soul, had not gained the ascendancy in the South; the love of country animated every breast and burned with "inextinguishable ardor." Southerners felt the degradation of the country in submitting to the dishonorable terms proposed by the British government. In trying to avoid European entanglements and in passing laws to restrict American trade, the United States had borne with injury until "forebearance had ceased to be a virtue." Calls for justice had gone unheeded. In spite of American efforts to keep peace, Britain had refused to stop her deprivations.³²

King denied that he would support a measure which might lead to war simply for the sake of the carrying trade, from which nine-tenths of the people did not benefit. But he asserted, "The right to carry in our own ships the produce of our country to any quarter, not thereby violating the laws of nations, or contravening legitimate regulations, is one which I never will yield; for ... in doing so, we paralyze the industry of our citizens; we give a fatal blow to the best interests of our country." If principles were once yielded,

³¹ Ibid., XXIII, 516. The speech is reported in pages 516 to 520.

³² Ibid., XXIII, 516-517.

further encroachments would follow. By passing the defense resolution, however, the United States would give its sanction to a fixed resolve to render effective the use of force against nations that refused to give it justice.³³

In answer to those who feared the loss of property as the result of war, he replied, "To us, it matters little whether our cities tumble into ruin by desertion for want of employment, by poverty produced by British wrongs and aggressions, or, in vindicating the cause of our country, fall by a quicker process." When national honor and pecuniary interest were weighed in the balance, he declared, honor would prevail among Southerners.³⁴

Some had suggested that war would bring uprisings among the blacks, but King had no such fears. He did, however, lament the existence of the institution of slavery. "I view it as a bane," said King, "the curse of the land, and most sincerely, sir, do I wish that some Moses could take them by the hand, and lead them to a distant land, where their cries would never more strike on the ear of sympathy."³⁵ Such words seem somewhat strange, coming from a slaveowner and a man who was to become a leader of southern forces in years to come; the slavery question, however, had not become the subject of

33 Ibid., XXIII, 517.

34 Ibid., XXIII, 518.

35 Ibid.

bitter sectional dispute in 1812.

In answer to those who had called the imminent war one of conquest, King said that he was little inclined to extend the boundaries of the United States because extension would introduce new interests and make the country too large. He conceded, however, that if war were forced upon the United States, the seizure of territory would be a means of injuring the British. Since this was the case, Canada, as a vulnerable spot, would undoubtedly be taken by force of arms.³⁶

King's feeling is well summed up in a few sentences near the end of his speech:

I am just commencing my political career; I am consistent; I find my country degraded by insults unrevenged; almost ruined by her efforts to preserve friendship with nations who feel power and forget right; and, although I am opposed to the principle of having large standing armies in our country, yet, sir, under these circumstances, I feel justified in departing from the general principle.... I had rather that fast-anchored isle [Britain], that protector of the liberties of the world, should be swept from the catalogue of nations than submit that one American -- one natural-born citizen -- should, at her will, be torn from his family, his country and kept in a state of the most horrid slavery. Sir, this will not be a war of conquest. It will be a struggle for existence.³⁷

This speech shows that King was imbued with the War Hawk spirit but that he was neither an ardent expansionist nor a staunch defender of the carrying trade purely from the

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XXIII, 519.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, XXIII, 519-520.

commercial standpoint. Instead he disclaimed both the desire to annex Canada and to defend the carrying trade. The chief factor which shaped his thinking seems to have been nationalism -- the earnest desire to defend American rights and to see that other nations gave her justice. He opposed any temporizing expedients that might lead to further insults.

The War Hawks secured passage of preparedness resolutions by large majorities. King voted with the majority in favor of raising more troops, the calling out of fifty thousand volunteers, the calling out of the militia, the refitting of certain ships, and the arming of merchant vessels.³⁸

When President Madison called for war in June, 1812, King cast his vote in favor of war. He did not make a speech at the time, but the next year, he declared: "I was at that time, after the most mature deliberation which I was competent to give the subject, firmly impressed with the conviction that it was the measure demanded by the safety, the honor, and the best interests of the nation."³⁹ Once the United States was in the war King believed in a vigorous prosecution in order to attain these objectives. By his votes, he supported those measures deemed necessary to bring the conflict to a successful termination.⁴⁰ The United States, he felt, must not recede from the position she had taken until every

³⁸ Ibid., XXIII, 545-548, 565.

³⁹ Ibid., XXV, 1000.

⁴⁰ Ibid., XXIII, 1108, 1111, 1147-1151, 1155.

important right was secured. "It behooves us," he said in 1813, "to be prepared; the war was commenced by us for the attainment of right; that unsecured, it must not be abandoned."⁴¹ In later years King felt pride because of the stand he had taken during the war. Speaking at a Jackson Day dinner on January 8, 1835, he pointed out that his group had advocated war in 1812 even though they had been denounced by many for their rashness. They had never faltered, he declared, in sustaining the war and had brought it to a successful conclusion.⁴²

In a strongly nationalistic speech, King supported a bill, introduced in Congress in 1813, that would prohibit the employment of foreign seamen on armed vessels and merchant ships of the United States. Proponents of the bill had already asserted that American dependence on foreigners for seamen constituted a danger and that the bill in question would put American vessels into the hands of Americans rather than in the hands of undependable foreigners. Opponents of the bill contended, on the other hand, that the United States would be truckling to their British oppressors if the bill were passed, for it would be interpreted as a concession to the British who had always claimed the right of impressment. The United States had gone to war to free its commerce, and it must not accept any temporizing. Americans must claim the

41 Ibid., XXV, 1003. XXV, 961-988, 997-1000.

42 Huntsville Democrat, February 4, 1835.

right to employ whomever they pleased.⁴³

King began his speech by expressing his belief in a vigorous prosecution of the war and the willingness of Americans to shed blood in defense of their rights. He said that Americans were "a brave, an honorable, and high-minded people"; they were a "just and virtuous people," possessed of a greater portion of intelligence "than any other people on earth." They would be willing to pay the blood tax and the money tax. Notwithstanding the unwearied and unceasing efforts of some men of high standing to mislead and deceive them as to the causes of the war, they would submit to the sacrifices necessary to support the government. Let Congress pass the Seamen's bill, he said, and prove to them that the country was fighting only for its rights. By permitting a few hundred Britishers on American ships, as had been the case in the past, the United States would jeopardize thousands of native and naturalized citizens as had been done before the war. He would never abandon bona fide Americans who had been seized but would fight so long as there was "an inch of ground to stand on" rather than sacrifice the personal liberty of a single man that the country was pledged to defend. He protested, however, against "shedding one drop of American blood, or expending one cent of the money of the nation" to protect foreigners who were aliens in every sense of the word. He hoped

⁴³ Annals of Congress, XXV, 961-962, 997-1000.

that local interests would not operate to defeat the bill.

"We are now legislating for a great people," he pleaded, "bound together by common ties; let us discard all minor considerations and consult the general good." Of foreigners he said, "We want them not...." Not only were they the cause for impressment of Americans but they also took jobs away from deserving American sailors.⁴⁴ He defended the constitutionality of the Seamen's bill, saying:

The Constitution is nothing more or less than a compact between the several States composing this great Union, by which they bind themselves to submit to a General Government; while they vest in the Legislature, thus established for the government of the whole, the power to prescribe the rule by which persons not entitled to the privilege of the compact are to enter in and become entitled under the stipulations prescribed.

Congress had power to regulate commerce and navigation; it could, therefore, regulate the use of seamen on American vessels. Lasting advantages would result from the passage of the bill.⁴⁵

That King's course was generally approved by the people of his home district is evidenced by the fact that he was re-elected to serve in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth

⁴⁴ Ibid., XXV, 1000-1003.

⁴⁵ Ibid., XXV, 1004. The bill was eventually passed by the House of Representatives, with King voting in the affirmative. Ibid., p. 1055.

Congresses. A Wilmington group, meeting to celebrate Washington's Birthday in 1813, toasted him as "our faithful Representative in Congress -- his vote on the war question; and all others connected with it, incontestably prove his Americanism, and establish his claim to our support at the ensuing election."⁴⁶ In the May election of 1813 and the August election of 1815, he was re-elected without opposition. Thus he was twice sustained by his constituents in his support of the war.⁴⁷

Still in Congress as the war neared its close, King shared in celebrating the news of the Treaty of Ghent and the Battle of New Orleans. In an 1835 speech he told of the worries that preceded and the joys that followed the battle of New Orleans. In December, 1814, information reached Washington that the Treaty of Ghent had been signed, but there was still danger of an attack on New Orleans. Veterans of the peninsula campaign against Napoleon were to be thrown on American soil. To meet them was a "little band of hardy sons of the West," lacking discipline and arms, but bold, daring, and patriotic and led by the gallant Jackson. Many feared that the Americans could not prevail against the odds involved. Said King of Jackson's victory on January 8: "Never can I forget the joyful manifestations, which that intelligence produced -- even the bitter revilers of Madison,

⁴⁶ Raleigh Register, March 12, 1813. Washington Globe

⁴⁷ Ibid., May 7, 1813, August 18, 1815.

the uniform opposers of war in its every stage, carried along by the enthusiasm of the moment, united in giving honor to the man who, in the language of Mr. Jefferson, had filled the measure of his country's glory." The victory at New Orleans had secured the permanence of the Treaty of Ghent.⁴⁸

When the Fourteenth Congress met in December, 1815, President Madison called for the passage of a nationalistic program, including the creation of a national bank, the improvement of the military and naval establishment, a tariff for the protection of industry, and provision for internal improvements by constitutional amendment.⁴⁹ King took little part in the ensuing debates that revolved especially around the bank and the tariff question. His votes on these issues show, however, that he only partially supported the nationalistic post-war policy. He voted for the creation of the Second Bank of the United States, a vote that was to prove embarrassing to him many times in his later life; but he opposed some features of the tariff bill of 1816.⁵⁰ Later, he said that he favored protection at the time but reluctantly opposed the bill because of its minimum feature.⁵¹ He voted for amendments to strike out the minimum provision on cheap

48 Huntsville Democrat, February 4, 1835.

49 Annals of Congress, XXIX, 15-17.

50 Ibid., XXIX, 1219, 1347-1348.

51 Congressional Globe, 108 volumes (Washington: Globe Office, 1834-1873), XI, 809.

cotton cloth and to reduce the ad valorem duties on woollens, but both amendments failed.⁵² What he thought about other phases of the Madisonian program cannot be known because he resigned from the House of Representatives and was commissioned as Secretary of the Legation to the Court of Naples and the Two Sicilies and to the Court of Russia on April 23, 1816.⁵³ Shortly before the adjournment of Congress on April 30, he left Washington to make ready for his trip abroad.

Since King took so little part in debates and left practically no correspondence dating from his first term of service in Congress, much of what he thought and did during the period must be left unexplained. One would like to know, for example, who influenced him most and whom he influenced and what his opinions were on many specific issues, but records are practically non-existent for answering such questions. King noted later, however, that during part of his residence in Washington he had lived in the same house with Elbridge Gerry, a venerable Massachusetts leader who was elected Vice President in 1812. With Gerry, he had "enjoyed a long intimacy" and had derived "much knowledge from his long

52 Annals of Congress, XXIX, 1347-1348, 1352.

53 Howard Rosario Marraro, ed., Diplomatic Relations Between the United States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, 2 volumes (New York: Vanni, 1951), I, 107. (Hereinafter cited as Marraro, Diplomatic Relations.)

54 Congressional Globe, I, 113.

55 Raleigh Standard, September 8, 1842.

experience in public affairs."⁵⁴ To have lived in close contact with such a man as Gerry must have been an inspiration and an education to King. In 1852, when he was a candidate for the Vice Presidency of the United States, King summed up for a group of well-wishers in his old district the debt he owed to his term of service between 1811 and 1816. Said he:

To the citizens of Wilmington District, I can truly say, I am principally indebted for whatever of reputation I may have acquired in the public service: for when I was but a mere boy in years, they generously confided to me the important trust of representing them in the Congress of the United States, and this led the way to my subsequent employment in other situations.⁵⁵

In resigning from the House of Representatives to accompany William Pinkney on his mission to Russia and to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, King gave up a promising career in politics. At the time of his resignation, he was still a young man of thirty, but he left behind him eight years of political experience. In taking his leave of Washington, he was motivated by a desire which he had felt from an early period in his life to visit the continent of Europe, but which had hitherto been impossible because of his other pursuits. As secretary of the Pinkney legation, he hoped to enjoy good facilities for acquiring knowledge about Europe through travel and observation. He expressed a desire for

⁵⁴ Congressional Globe, X, 119.

⁵⁵ Raleigh Standard, September 8, 1852.

the post, and was promptly given his commission on April 23, 1816. In the following weeks, he visited friends and relatives in North Carolina and prepared for an indefinite absence. By early June he was in Baltimore making preparations to sail for Europe, and on June 8, 1816, embarked for Naples aboard the seventy-four gun ship Washington, a warship from the Mediterranean squadron furnished by the American government for the Pinkney group. With "something of a heavy heart," as he wrote in his journal, he bade adieu to his relatives, his friends, and the soil of his cherished homeland.⁵⁶

Pinkney had been ordered to Naples while en route to Russia in order to seek indemnity for losses sustained by American citizens as a result of illegal seizures of vessels by the Neapolitan government while it was under the control of Napoleon's brother-in-law Joachim Murat. In July, 1809, American ships had been invited to come to the port of Naples, and protection was promised by the Murat government. Later, however, Murat, to satisfy Napoleon, issued decrees which enabled him to seize and confiscate vessels, sell the cargoes, and use the vessels for public purposes. After the close of the Napoleonic Wars, the United States demanded

⁵⁶ Private Journal of William R. King, p. 1, in William R. King Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History. (Hereinafter cited as King, Private Journal); see also letter from William R. King to James Monroe, June 2, 1816, Department of State Papers: Russia, in National Archives.

reparations and indemnity for losses sustained by American merchants and shipowners as a result of the illegal seizure and confiscation of their property. It maintained that the Murat government was the legally constituted government of Naples and that the new government inherited all claims against the old Murat government. To present the American claims, Pinkney was sent on the special mission.⁵⁷ King was given an opportunity of seeing Italy.

As the Washington glided down the Chesapeake and took its leave from American shores on June 10, King settled down to life on shipboard. Accommodations were a problem because of the large number that accompanied Pinkney; but Commodore Isaac Chauncey, by giving up his own rooms to the Pinkney family and suspending canvas screens to form rooms for the others, made it possible for all to travel with a reasonable degree of comfort. King proudly wrote that he slept suspended in a cot "in a canvass room enclosing a long thirty two pounder, at whose breech I took my nightly rest." He was favorably impressed with the ship's crew and his fellow passengers. Pinkney, he noted, was a "man of superior endowments of mind, but consumed by an intolerable personal vanity." Still he felt his superior would be useful to the United States in a diplomatic capacity. During the early days of the voyage King suffered the miseries of seasickness which

⁵⁷ James Monroe to William Pinkney, May 11, 1816, in Marraro, Diplomatic Relations, I, 90-93.

rendered him "almost disposed to meet that grim, and generally so much dreaded, messenger, and hail him as the means of relief." By June 13, however, he had so far recovered as to be able to eat at the dinner table. For the remainder of the trip, the passengers were treated to a delightful voyage across the Atlantic with good weather and favorable winds. On July 1 the Washington sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and cast anchor in the bay that night. As morning broke on July 2, King saw the "emence fortress" of Gibraltar which raised its "majestic head to an enormous hight" and seemed to frown on surrounding objects. After twenty-four days on board ship, he welcomed the chance to go ashore and visit the rock "immortalized in story."⁵⁸

King found much to interest him at Gibraltar. The town, he noted, was of no great importance. Its streets were narrow and the houses small. Everything seemed to be constructed with a view to the defense of the place. He was struck by the great variety of costumes in the town, which seemed a resort of all nations: Turks, Jews, English, French, Spaniards, all preserving their own costumes and languages. Procuring a pony, he climbed the zig-zag road to the summit of the rock, from which he viewed "the fertile fields of Spain ..., the towering cliffs of Africa," and the unruffled bay below. Returning to the town, he and other members of the

⁵⁸ King, Private Journal, pp. 2-5.

party were received with great politeness by the British governor. On July 4, the party examined the fortress and enjoyed a dinner given by representatives of the British government. When the Washington fired guns to celebrate American independence, King wrote of "the pride of feeling which thrills the breast of an American, thrown on a land of strangers, on witnessing the celebration of the independence of his Country." On July 8, the Washington, with the Pinkney group aboard, sailed for Naples, now accompanied by the Java and the Constitution from the Mediterranean fleet.⁵⁹

The Washington brought the party in sight of Italy on July 13 and dropped anchor in the Bay of Naples that night. King was much impressed with what he saw. "The Bay of Naples," he wrote, "is perhaps not surpassed by anything of the kind in the world, and has been justly celebrated in every age." Those on board the Washington looked forward to leaving its decks on July 14, but quarantine regulations dashed their hopes. These regulations called for a quarantine of twenty-one days, but, because of the good health of the crew and passengers, were suspended after thirteen days so that those aboard were permitted to land on July 26.⁶⁰

After the group had secured lodgings, Pinkney sought an audience with the Marquis di Circello, the Neapolitan Foreign

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 5-8.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

Minister, to arrange for their presentation to the King. The presentation was delayed for more than a week, however, so that the Americans could acquire "the Uniform prescribed by the Diplomatic Corps." While they waited for their clothing, they procured carriages and servants, putting them in livery, and made every preparation to "show off to the greatest advantage."⁶¹

When properly clothed the American delegation had an audience with the King at his palace just outside the city. In spite of the known objects of their mission, the King received them with great politeness. King described the Neapolitan monarch as "a tall, robust old man, very awkward in appearance and manners" and apparently "of extremely limited powers of mind."⁶²

Two days after their interview with the King, Pinkney and King conferred with the Marquis di Circello about some of the objects of their mission. Again King noted that they were received with great cordiality and treated with a degree of frankness that he had not expected. When Pinkney asked about the prospects of securing a commercial treaty between the United States and Naples, Circello replied that none had yet been made with the powers of Europe and that under the circumstances his government would not be disposed to make one with the United States. He promised, however,

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶² Ibid., p. 10.

that American goods would be subjected to the same regulations as those of other nations. Pinkney also asked Circello about securing special privileges in the Kingdom for American war vessels, including the right to establish depots on Neapolitan soil. To this, Circello replied that American ships would be permitted to communicate with the shore without molestation and to procure such articles as they might require, but that his government could not grant the right to establish depots on its soil. Finally, Pinkney proposed to present a note later regarding the main object of his mission. Although Pinkney had told Circello about the subject only a few days before, the latter now pretended to be ignorant of the object of the mission. After Pinkney re-explained his major purpose in coming to Naples, Circello said that his government had examined the American claims and did not deny that the seizures by Murat were base and unjustifiable or that he had put some of the money in the public treasury. However, Circello concluded, the government presumed that Murat had disposed of the funds for his own private purposes. King predicted that the Neapolitan government would use this argument to escape payment of the debt.⁶³ His guess proved accurate, for Circello's written answer to Pinkney's formal note refused payment. King wrote James Monroe on August 24: "From all I can collect both from the Marquis of Circello,

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

who is the minister of foreign affairs, and from other sources, there is little prospect of success; our stay here will I trust be short -- Naples with all its beauties has failed greatly to interest me."⁶⁴

Pinkney sent his official note dealing with the spoliation claims on August 24, stressing the responsibility of a nation for wrongs committed and obligations incurred even though governments changed. He waited for about a month without receiving a reply and sent another note reminding Circello that he had to proceed to Russia before winter became too far advanced. Circello still evaded the issue and sent an answer only after Pinkney had left Naples for St. Petersburg. In it, he rejected the American demands on the grounds that Murat was a usurper, that the confiscations were forced upon him, and that proceeds from the seizures went to Murat personally and not to the government of Naples.⁶⁵ The mission had proved to be a failure as King had predicted.

In the meantime, before he had finished his business in Naples, Pinkney received word from the American chargé d'affaires in St. Petersburg that Russia had suspended intercourse with him because of the arrest and imprisonment of

⁶⁴ William R. King to James Monroe, August 24, 1816, in Marraro, Diplomatic Relations, I, 107.

⁶⁵ Howard Rosario Marraro, "William Pinkney's Mission to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, 1816," Maryland Historical Magazine, XLIII (December, 1948), 240-245.

Kosloff, the Russian Consul General at Philadelphia who had been charged with rape. Feeling that the good will of Russia was important enough to merit special handling, Pinkney sent King to St. Petersburg with a letter in which he promised to come to Russia as soon as possible.⁶⁶ Thus King set out for St. Petersburg in the latter part of September in an effort to calm Russian feelings while Pinkney remained in Naples to complete his work there. King arrived in St. Petersburg early in November and found that explanations given by the chargé d'affaires had removed all difficulties between the countries and that Pinkney would be well received. He conveyed this news to Vienna where Pinkney had agreed to wait until he had news from King about affairs in Russia.⁶⁷

King wrote Secretary of State Monroe a long letter in January, 1817, recounting his activities since August and evaluating the situation in Russia. Pinkney had been well received, and the Russians generally seemed friendly to the United States. From his stay of two months in Russia, where he had mingled freely with the diplomatic corps and Russians of distinction, he had come to the conclusion that great jealousy existed between Russia and England and that

⁶⁶ William Pinkney to James Monroe, September 18, 1816, in Marraro, Diplomatic Relations, I, 120-121; see also note by editor on p. 121.

⁶⁷ William R. King to James Monroe, January 29, 1817, Department of State Papers: Russia, in National Archives.

the Czar's army of a million men was viewed with suspicion in England and with alarm in the rest of Europe. Russia looked on the United States, a growing naval power, as a rival of England. In the past Russia had been held back by lack of money, but King felt it was now ready to move ahead. He wrote: "The Emperor Alexander is in the prime, and vigor of manhood. Flushed with recent successes; he sees himself reigning over more than fifty millions of people, to whom his sole will gives law. Power naturally begets ambition." Even if Alexander favored moderation he would be led by his army officers to forego such a course. A system resembling French conscription had been adopted by Russia; this was possible because Russian soldiers ate such poor food and received such low pay. Europe, King feared, had freed itself of the power of France but at the same time had "paved the way to their subjugation by the barbarous hordes of the North." He warned Monroe, therefore, to cultivate the friendship of Russia and to send able ministers to the court of St. Petersburg. He complained that the frozen climate of Russia had seriously affected his health and proposed to leave the country if the spring did not bring an improvement.⁶⁸

Although he wrote little about it, King (young man that he was) must have enjoyed the social life of the Russian capital. Pinkney wrote Monroe in January that King had been

68 Ibid.

presented at the court circle, and had been "very graciously received."⁶⁹ Probably the most important social event of his stay in Russia was the marriage of the Grand Duke Nicholas to Princess Charlotte of Prussia. Along with the marriage a series of fetes, balls, and "felicitations" were held, to which the diplomatic corps were invited.⁷⁰ Out of the wedding celebration grew one of the legends about King, which today is still unproved and perhaps unprovable. Nevertheless, the story possesses a degree of plausibility and a great deal of human interest. According to the story, the beautiful daughter of the Czar was in the receiving line. Much impressed by her dazzling beauty, King hesitated long enough in the line to squeeze her hand and kiss it ardently. Though he was told that the incident might cost him his place at the legation, he was surprised to receive a call the next day from an officer of the royal household with a personal note from the Czar's daughter inviting him to call at the palace.⁷¹ The legend may be partly true or entirely false, but it is

69 William Pinkney to James Monroe, January 28, 1817, Department of State Papers: Russia, National Archives.

70 Pinkney to John Quincy Adams, July 5/17, 1817, ibid.

71 See Stoessel Smythe Barksdale, "Congressional Career of William Rufus King," (Unpublished Master's Thesis, the University of Alabama, 1933), p. 6; and John A. Oates, The Story of Fayetteville and the Upper Cape Fear (Fayetteville: John A. Oates, 1950), p. 845.

told both in his boyhood home town of Clinton, North Carolina, and in his later home town of Selma, Alabama.

About a month after the marriage ceremony, Pinkney wrote Secretary of State John Quincy Adams that King had "quitted" him on his return to the United States.⁷² Whether he left Russia because the cold weather was harmful to his health, or because he had fallen in love with someone he could not marry (perhaps the princess), or because he had become unacceptable at the Russian court because of his performance at the wedding, or because of other reasons, will probably always remain unanswered. Most likely, he decided to return to the United States because of a combination of reasons. Certainly, he was conscious of the detrimental effect of Russian weather on his health. While he was abroad, moreover, he had maintained his interest in politics and probably desired to re-enter political life in the United States. Finally, he probably envisioned bright economic prospects in Alabama for those planters who were willing to risk the move. He was ready to leave Europe because he had accomplished the main purposes of his trip abroad: extensive travel in Europe and acquaintance with life in several countries.

⁷² William Pinkney to John Quincy Adams, August 1/13, 1817, Department of State Papers: Russia, National Archives.