

CONGRESS.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

MONDAY, FEB. 5.

Mr. King of Mass. presented for consideration the following resolution:

Resolved, That the committee on Foreign Relations be instructed to inquire into the expediency of excluding from the ports of the United States, all foreign vessels, owned in coming from, bound to, or touching at, any of his Britannic Majesty's possessions in the West Indies, and in the continent of North America, from which the vessels of the United States are excluded.

Mr. K. said, he was induced to present this resolution, as well from information, as to the state of the trade alluded to, received before and since he left that part of the country which he had the honor to represent, as from his own conviction of the necessity of some legislative provision on the subject. It is, said Mr. K. by no means the object of this resolution, to revive an extensive, odious, restrictive system, or commercial warfare with Great Britain; but justly to retaliate upon her some of those embarrassments, which her rigid colonial system is, at this moment, inflicting upon us.

In relation then to this trade, all our vessels are permanently excluded from her islands and continental possessions in America. She did, indeed, for a time, offer one or two insignificant ports in the Island of Bermuda, under great limitations, which we ought to have rejected with scorn. While the United States, on the contrary, threw all their ports open to British vessels of every description. She next selects from her stores such articles as are not important to her, & sends them to the United States; and also selects in return such articles as she cannot produce or do without; that is, she picks and culls our markets, as a petty chapman does his wares; and we greedily receive whatever she is pleased to vouchsafe to us; a beggar like us, devours the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table; we ought to spurn such a degraded, such a contemptible traffic.

prived, or attempted to be, by the act of one of her colonial assemblies, made expressly against this country, and no doubt the same will be done in other Islands. I allude to "an act laying a duty on certain goods, wares and merchandize, imported into this Island (Jamaica) from the United States of America, and other places," passed the 15th of November, 1815; by which it is enacted, that from the passing of that act, and during the continuance, there shall be levied and paid to his majesty, &c. on all goods, wares and merchandize, imported into that Island "from any port or ports of the United States of America, or from any colony or plantation in America, belonging to or under the dominion of any foreign European sovereign, in a state of amity with his majesty, the following duties, viz. among others—

"For every barrel of wheat flour, not weighing more than 196, net weight, 15s 4d.

"For 100 lbs. of rice, 6s 8d. "For every 1000 shingles, or Boston chips, not more than 12 inches in length, 6s 8d.—(About three times the first cost, being what we call common shipping shingles.)

"For every 1000 shingles more than 12 inches in length, 13s 4d.—being more than the value in the northern parts of this country.

"For every 1000 feet of white and yellow pine lumber of all descriptions, 20s"—which is above half the original cost in this country. Various other articles, on which specific duties are imposed, in the same proportion, and an ad valorem duty of 10 per cent. on all other articles which they see fit to admit. And information has been received, that it is their intention, in relation to the article of plaister from Nova Scotia, to impose an export duty on it of five dollars the ton, (nearly its value in the Boston market) when landed east of New-Haven; so that their vessels may be the exclusive carriers to those states, where it is used. The operation of this system in the north and east is such, that our lumber trade to the West Indies has been nearly destroyed, and two-thirds of the vessels employed in that trade thrown out of employ. I presume that nearly one-third of all the tonnage of Maine, (which in 1814, tot a very propitious year, amounted to 125,000,) was formerly employed in the West-India trade. A large porportion of our vessels have now become useless, and British vessels have, in many cases, become our carriers.

The question then is, said Mr. King, whether we shall aid Great Britain to enforce her colonial system, exclusively for the benefit of her subjects, or retaliate upon her some of the injuries which we suffer from her navigation laws. It will be in vain, and worse than in vain, that we freed ourselves from former impositions and pretensions, if we must again be brought in subjection to colonial servitude.

The whole trade of this country is too valuable to be bartered away for a portion of that of any nation. I cannot admit the doctrine, that we have no equivalent to offer Great Britain for this trade. It carries its equivalent with it, as she may and ought to find it, in that immense traffic she enjoys with this country. She appeared disposed, by the treaty, to put the commerce of the two countries upon the most liberal ground of reciprocity.—Instead of that, we do not gain half the advantages which we yield to her, while she closes so many of her ports against us. Whatever interest Great Britain has to favor the colonial trade of her subjects, we have none; nor ought we to aid her in this semi-territorial policy. If these colonists suppose they can do without a trade, on the ground of reciprocity, with us, let us see, in return, if we cannot do without a trade with them; one good effect at least, will be produced—we shall encourage the production of sugars, molasses, rum, &c. in our southern states; and thus, with the trade we shall enjoy with the colonial possessions of other nations in the West Indies, free our citizens from those colonial impositions. Unless foreign nations are disposed to trade with us on the ground of the most perfect reciprocity, I would reject their commerce, and by every means in our power encourage all articles, the growth, produce or manufacture of our own country, &c.

Mr. Forsyth said, he coincided entirely with the gentleman from Massachusetts, in his views of this subject, but thought the resolution he had proposed too limited in its terms. He therefore suggested an amendment, by inserting after the words "United States," the words "or laying additional duties on."

Mr. King said, he had no kind of objection to the amendment, which he therefore accepted as a part of his motion.

Mr. Burwell said, this was a proposition, it appeared to him, of such importance, that the house ought to act with much caution in respect to it. If the United States undertook to countervail the British colonial policy, it was in vain to suppose that it would not produce collision with that nation. The subject of this proposition would necessarily affect the consumers, and particularly the agriculturists of every part of the country. The course of this nation, on this subject, should depend much on the policy pursued by the other nations of Europe in regard to those colonies. It was perfectly evident, Mr. B. said, that the effect of these measures of the British government, must be to embarrass the intercourse with her colonies, and enhance to the consumers in the islands the price of every necessary in life; if the policy of the other owners of Islands in the West Indies should be more liberal, Great Britain will lose the benefit of the trade she burthens so heavily, and the evil will cure itself. England has a right to regulate the trade to her colonies as she pleases; and an attempt to coerce her to change her policy in this respect would, he apprehended, ultimately prove the commencement of a new commercial contest with England. He was, therefore, desirous that no decision should be made on this proposition, without mature consideration and full information, particularly as to the policy of the other powers of Europe who have colonies abroad.

Mr. King spoke in reply, and in further support of this motion. He said, he had intended to have made this resolution more general, to countervail the restrictions and impositions, to which our trade, with the colonial possessions of other foreign nations, is subjected. But as we have yet had no opportunity of forming any new commercial arrangements with other foreign nations, I thought it best, for the present, to omit them. Great Britain too, of all nations in the world, is bound to form with us the most liberal and reciprocal commercial arrangements; I mean from the amount and kind of trade which she enjoys with us. She receives from us the raw material to keep in motion a great proportion of her manufacturing industry and ingenuity, then sends a large proportion back in its finished state, as to manufacture, to be consumed in this country. Mr. K. further said, it might be feared by some, that the retaliation proposed would deprive us of some necessary supplies. I think not, said he; it is for the interest of the Islands to receive various products of this country, in exchange for their produce. It will be impossible to prevent a traffic of this kind, through the possessions in the West Indies of other European powers: from these possessions, then, and our southern states, an abundant supply can be afforded. Will it not lead to a war with Great Britain? Just commercial retaliation can never be a just cause of war.—When Great Britain thinks it for her interest to have a war with this country, pretexts will not be wanting.—We are not to be deterred from any just or necessary measure by any fear of this kind; it is quite sufficient for us, that the interest of our citizens, & the honor and dignity of this nation demand it.

Mr. Wright said, he was surprised at any opposition being made to the adoption of a proposition to enquire into this highly interesting subject. He desired nothing more than reciprocity in our intercourse with Great Britain. But he was not to be deterred from countervailing her commercial regulations, by the fear of new collisions with her—and he hoped we should never

let her transgress the rules of a just policy towards us, without attempting, by corresponding regulations, to bring her to a sense of justice. He would give a carte blanche, to inscribe thereon what regulations she chose for her intercourse with us, provided they were exactly reciprocal. He was glad his honorable friend from the east had introduced this proposition, and he hoped it would be the means of bringing the question fully before the house. He would not supply her islands with a biscuit or a sugar, but on terms of reciprocity.

Mr. Lowndes said, he hoped the gentleman from Massachusetts would permit such a modification of his motion, as should include in the enquiry not only the policy of Great Britain, but of other nations. He could not see why the measures of France, Spain & Holland respecting the trade with their colonies should not meet the same counteraction. He could not, however, see the subject in the serious aspect in which it had appeared to the gentleman from Virginia. He could not agree in the opinion that it would involve us in a serious commercial conflict with England, because it did not propose an attempt to force on Great Britain an abandonment of her commercial system. Some discriminating duties might be adopted, not by way of retaliation of those imposed by G. Britain, but to induce her, by considerations of reciprocity and mutual convenience, to abandon those regulations. The adoption by this country of a policy which would only burthen with considerable duties the vessels of those countries which exclude our vessels, &c. would merely have the effect of inviting a change of their system. It would be merely offering them an inducement to reciprocity. He could see no reason, however, why a distinction should be made in this proposition between Great-Britain and other nations.

Mr. King professed his readiness to give the enquiry the utmost latitude, although his object had been more limited; and was willing to accept any amendment proposed for that purpose. Mr. Lowndes then moved to amend the resolve by striking out the words "of his Britannic majesty."

Mr. Wilde said he did not rise for the purpose of opposing the motion of the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. King.) He had no objection to consider the resolution, and he was in favor of the amendment proposed by the gentleman from South-Carolina (Mr. Lowndes.) But as his friend and colleague, the chairman of the committee of Foreign Relations (Mr. Forsyth) was not in the House at the time the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. King) commenced his remarks, and therefore could not reply to some of them which he had not heard, Mr. W. thought it his duty to say a few words in answer to what had fallen from the honorable gentleman. He begged leave, in the first place, to recal to the remembrance of the House the fact that some days ago his friend the chairman of the committee of Foreign Relations, proposed certain amendments to the bill regulating the commerce of the U. States with G. Britain according to the late convention, the object of which was to exclude vessels and goods not coming directly from the European territories of his Britannic Majesty, from the benefits of the act, agreeably to the fair and evident construction of the convention, as understood by both parties. These amendments were then rejected, although the effect of them was, to a certain extent, the same as the measures contemplated by the resolution of the gentleman from Massachusetts, and were rejected from a very fastidious delicacy about the construction of the treaty. Then it was contended that the terms of the treaty did not authorize us to say that British vessels coming from or touching at the West India Islands of his Britannic Majesty's colonies in North America should be subjected to the payment of our discriminating duties. Now it is asked of us to increase those discriminating duties upon such vessels and their cargoes, on the ground that this species of trade is not at all within the provisions of the treaty. He would leave gentlemen to reconcile these different constructions of the same instrument as they could. To him it appeared there was no small share of inconsistency in such conduct. When

the terms of the convention were to be found fault with; when those who made it were to be accused of sacrificing the interests of the country; then it meant one thing; when the interests of gentlemen's constituents required it, then it meant another. Mr. W. said, that on this subject it was also his duty to correct a mistake into which the honorable gentleman from Massachusetts had fallen—he called it a mistake, for as he was sincere himself he was willing to allow sincerity to all others; yet he certainly thought it strange that one so well informed as that honorable gentleman should have been misled upon such a subject. The honorable gentleman had stated today, and as he had stated the same thing some days since in reference to the treaty, it might be taken as his deliberate opinion, that the interests of his part of the country were sacrificed in this convention to the interests of the cotton states—that the fisheries had been given up to preserve these interests—and that the grand objects of the treaty seemed to be to secure to the southern planters a saving upon their cotton by the reduction of the British discriminating duties upon that article. Now, sir, I can assure the honorable gentleman that the southern planter never felt the slightest inconvenience from the operation of those duties. He never got a cent less for his cotton—he only shipped it in British instead of American vessels, and the loss therefore fell upon the American ship-owner, not on the agriculturalist. Mr. W. said, he himself had received, previous to his arrival at Washington, various communications on this subject, but they all related to the owners of American tonnage and not to the planters of American produce. The argument which they all contained, was, not that our agriculture, but that our navigation would be ruined. Whom, sir, (said Mr. W.) would the ruin of our navigation most severely affect? Who own nine-tenths of the tonnage of the U. States? Certainly the eastern and northern states. Mr. W. hoped it was unnecessary to say, that neither here nor elsewhere, had he been, or would he ever be the advocate of local interests, or the encourager of narrow and selfish jealousies, which had so long disturbed the repose and happiness of this Union. It was for this very reason that he had wished to correct the mistake of the gentleman from Massachusetts. Such statements go abroad and make injurious impressions—they induce our brethren of the east to believe that we of the south are hostile to their prosperity, destroyers of their commerce, in short, enemies and oppressors who have no community of feeling or of interests with them. It was very possible, Mr. W. said, that his reply to this statement would have very little effect; most probably it would never reach the people of Massachusetts, whose prejudices, prejudices which had been purposely fomented, it was intended to remove. Still, however, he had felt it his duty to make it, in justice to the people whom he had the honor to represent, in justice to the administration whom that people by choice supported, and for the sake of that union and harmony among the people of the United States, which all such mistaken views of public measures as that taken by the gentleman from Massachusetts had a tendency to destroy.

Mr. Randolph said, he had just got out of a war with Great Britain, the foundation of which was laid some 8 or 9 years ago, by a resolution moved in this House at the instigation of commercial meetings in different seaport towns of the United States. He was not prepared now to say whether he was ready to commence a system which might lead to the same practical and disastrous results; but this he would say, that the House ought not to act on a subject of this importance without one day's previous notice. He therefore moved to lay the resolution on the table.

Mr. King of Mass. said, he had no more desire for a new war with Great Britain than the honorable gentleman; nor had he more agency in the late war than that gentleman—nor did he view his motion of that nature which could possibly lead to war, &c. He was proceeding to discuss its merits—when the Speaker reminded him the question was merely on postponement.