

The Making of a Political Abolitionist: George W. Julian and the Free Soilers, 1848

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Of transcendent importance in the formation of the Republican party in 1854 were the third party movements of the preceding fifteen years, such as the Liberty party of 1840 and the Free Soil party of 1848, which in 1852 called itself the Free Democracy. Predicated on the conviction of a minority that the slavery question was political in nature and that it could be solved by political processes in a democratic community, these movements were a positive factor in the disintegration of the major parties prior to the successful formation of the Republican party. For politicians especially the third parties provided a refuge in which they could agitate against the immoralities of slavery without necessarily giving up their political careers. Indeed, in searching for the motivations that led these men into the third party movements one is almost certain to find a combination of moral convictions and mundane political ambitions.

Historical perspective reveals at once the potential strength of the political antislavery organizations in the milieu of mid-nineteenth century America, with its prevailing idea of progress, its reforming zeal, and its abiding faith in democratic processes; yet it is doubtful in the extreme that men living in the 1840's could foresee clearly what the future held in store for them. For those with their political careers before them, novices as well as experienced politicians, the decision to join the Liberty or the Free Soil party was a calculated risk, and it was seldom made hastily or ill advisedly. Charles Sumner was willing to adopt any organization aiming at the abolition of slavery. Joshua R. Giddings, who was in complete sympathy with the aims of James G. Birney and his Liberty party, fought the antislavery fight from within the Whig party until 1848; after that time, when he was finally convinced that the Whigs were not dedicated to the antislavery cause, he could no longer stomach the compromise attitude of the two major parties. Salmon P. Chase, while hoping that the northern Democrats would take a firm stand

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against slavery, became a leader in the Liberty party and joined the Free Soilers in 1848.¹

In similar fashion, George Washington Julian of Indiana, entering politics as an ardent Whig in 1840, underwent a political metamorphosis that by 1848 made of him a Free Soiler and a bitter enemy of the Whigs. While it would be erroneous to suggest an absolute parallel between Julian's decision and the decisions of other men, in some respects at least his case seems typical: there was the intense political ambition, the dedication to a cause, the difficulty intrinsic in breaking old bonds—political or other, an acceptance of the idea of progress, and the religious factor that is often intricately related to reform activity.²

It was men as these who were the original leaders of the Republican party. By 1854 their third parties had ceased to be effective organizations; hence they were ready to take advantage of any situation conducive to a new antislavery political movement. Their opportunity came with the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which was followed in the various states by the formation of a number of separate anti-Nebraska organizations. True enough, the victorious Republican party of 1860 was the result of a fusion of many different groups with varied interests, such as protective tariffs, a homestead act, internal improvements, a temperance law, and a transcontinental railroad. But in its chrysalis stage the one point upon which all could agree—an indispensable requirement for the formation of a new party—was the Free Soil doctrine that there should be no further extension of slavery into the territories and that Congress had the con-

¹ Moorfield Storey, *Charles Sumner* (Boston, 1900), 36-85; Edward L. Pierce (ed.), *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner* (4 vols., Boston, 1878-1894), III (1894), 164-170; William H. Smith, *A Political History of Slavery* (2 vols., New York, 1903), I, 96-97; Alto L. Whitehurst, *Martin Van Buren and the Free Soil Movement* (Chicago, 1935), 159-160; Theodore C. Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (New York, 1897), 126-130; Francis Curtis, *The Republican Party* (2 vols., New York, 1904), I, 148-229; George W. Julian, *The Life of Joshua R. Giddings* (Chicago, 1892), 217-254; Albert B. Hart, *Salmon Portland Chase* (Boston, 1899), 97-98; Jacob W. Schuckers, *The Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase* (New York, 1874), 81-90.

² Grace Julian Clarke, *George W. Julian* (Indianapolis, 1923), 69-84; this is vol. XI of the *Indiana Historical Collections*. George W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840-1872* (Chicago, 1884), 30-68; Patrick W. Riddleberger, "George W. Julian, Nineteenth Century Reformer as Politician" (Ph.D. dissertation, department of history, University of California, Berkeley, 1953), 25-50.

stitutional power to forbid it.³ Thus the decision of an anti-slavery politician to leave a major party to join the Free Soil movement and the complex motivations behind his decision seem worthy of investigation.

George W. Julian was born and reared in Wayne County, Indiana. In 1822 his father had been elected to the state legislature in Corydon as a follower of Henry Clay; other members of his family, brothers, uncles, and cousins, many of whom were leaders in Wayne County, were also affiliated with the party of Clay and Webster. Jacob Julian, an older brother who made George his junior law partner, remained one of the Whig leaders of the county after George had ended his affiliation. Indeed "Old Wayne," one of the earliest Hoosier counties to be settled, was a National Republican-Whig stronghold, and it remained so even after the Democrats gained control of the state in 1843.⁴

Thus because of the influence of his early associations it was almost foreordained that Julian would cast his first presidential vote, in 1840, for William Henry Harrison. Later he was to remember the election as a "grand national frolic" virtually devoid of issues, but as a young man of twenty-three he joined in the enthusiasm for the hero of Tippecanoe, even accepting the spurious representation of Harrison as a log-cabin frontiersman who stood for the rights of the oppressed and poor against the aloof aristocrat, Martin Van Buren. Once he rode 150 miles through mud and swamps to attend a mass meeting, a journey for which he felt compensated by the spirit of the immense crowd and the abundance of hard cider. Later he went to a rally at Dayton, Ohio, where he succeeded in getting close to Harrison, "gazing into his face with an awe which I have never since felt for any mortal."⁵

³ Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (4 vols., New York, 1947-1950), II (1947), 316-323; James F. Rhodes, *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850* (8 vols., New York, 1902-1919), II (1902), 45-46, 65, 97-98. Many northern Whigs were reluctant to abandon their old party organization. This was especially true of William H. Seward and his followers in New York. In Massachusetts also the Whigs refused to combine with the new party, so that in its early stages the Republican party there was the former Free Soil party under the leadership of Sumner and Henry Wilson. On the other hand, Whig leaders such as Ben Wade of Ohio, Zachariah Chandler of Michigan, and Horace Greeley of New York went early into the Republican movement.

⁴ Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 29; Grace Julian Clarke, "The Burnt District," *Indiana Magazine of History* (Bloomington, 1905-), XXVII (1931), 119-121; Julian, *Political Recollections*, 11-12.

⁵ Julian, *Political Recollections*, 12, 16-17.

When young Julian first entered the political world, the Hoosier state was experiencing perplexing problems, the most pressing of which was her debt. By 1840 the state owed the tremendous sum of \$12,000,000 because of its efforts to construct an elaborate system of internal improvements during the hard times which followed the Panic of 1837. Because the debt was contracted during a period of Whig political dominance, the situation was slowly weakening that party's hold on the state. Other important issues were river and harbor legislation, public land policy, banking, and the tariff. Indeed, the fact that the Whigs had relied too much on the attractions of personalities like William Henry Harrison and too little on positive programs to deal with these questions helped to defeat them in 1843.⁶

As a part of the Old Northwest, Indiana was in a region which was rapidly gaining the balance of political power between the Northeast and the South: which way she would throw her weight was a paramount interest up to the Civil War. Commerce with the South and the southern origins of many of her people help to explain a legislative resolution of 1839 which declared that interference with slavery in states where it already existed would be "injurious to the peace and stability of the union."⁷ But if the resolution represented a majority sentiment against antislavery agitation, a vocal and ardent opposition was already developing. Even before the advent of the Liberty party in 1840, the abolitionist Stephen S. Harding had carried the fight into southern Indiana, the stronghold of the proslavery forces.⁸

Julian's native Whitewater Valley was deeply involved in these developments. When the depression began, the people

⁶ In the 1843 election, the Democrats elected their candidate for governor and eight of the ten congressmen, and gained control of the general assembly. Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana*. . . (2nd ed.; 2 vols., Indianapolis, 1918), I, 522-531. Charles Roll, *Indiana, One Hundred and Fifty Years of American Development* (5 vols., Chicago, 1931), II, 45-53, 63-70, 82-83.

⁷ *General Laws of Indiana, 1838-1839*, p. 353; *Senate Documents*, 25th Cong., 3rd Sess., No. 209 (serial no. 340). For a consideration of the position of the Old Northwest before the Civil War, see Albert L. Kohlmeier, *The Old Northwest as the Keystone of the Arch of American Federal Union* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1938).

⁸ Henry C. Hubbard, "Pro-Southern Influences in the Free West, 1840-1865," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1914-), XX (1933-1934), 48-52. Kenneth M. Stamp, *Indiana Politics During the Civil War* (Indianapolis, 1949), 1-2; this is vol. XXXI of the *Indiana Historical Collections*. Etta R. French, "Stephen S. Harding; a Hoosier Abolitionist," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXVII, 209-229.

there were more than ever concerned with means of transporting their flour, wool, and paper to Cincinnati and elsewhere. Adding to their troubles was a shortage of currency that for a time after 1837 caused shin plasters to come into common usage. Valley people were also confronted with the problem of absorbing Irish and German immigrants who had come to farm or to work on the Whitewater Canal, inhabitants especially obnoxious to the Whigs because of their tendency to vote "loco-foco." Most important, the Hoosier antislavery movement originated in the valley, and it was more lively there as an issue than in any other part of the state.⁹

Thus, as young Julian entered politics, he was in direct contact with issues on which he would have to formulate ideas and policies, and the environment undoubtedly stimulated the process of development; but not until 1844 was he ready to state his views with precision and conclusiveness. The period from 1840 to 1844 was one of professional and emotional preparation for his real entrance into politics.

Admitted to the bar in 1840, Julian began to practice in New Castle, where he remained for only a few months before he moved to Greenfield. Before Julian could hope for a career in law or politics he had to overcome an extreme and painful timidity about speaking in public. His struggles began at Greenfield in the company of a young man named George Pattison, who had similar difficulties. Together they formed an organization of which they were the only members, the Dark Lyceum. At meetings held in total darkness, where they were not intimidated by probing human eyes, the young men orated to each other on legal matters and current topics. In 1843 Julian accepted the invitation of his older brother Jacob to become a junior law partner. Hence he returned to his native Centerville, where he established a second Dark Lyceum, with a larger membership and more ritual than the original organization. Apparently it helped Julian overcome the almost paralyzing fear that gripped him in his early court room efforts. As Julian himself described it, the purpose of the organization was intellectual improvement and the development of the art of public speaking. But the Dark Lyceum served another purpose of which Julian might not

⁹ Chelsea L. Lawlis, "Changes in the Whitewater Valley, 1840-1850," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLIV (1948), 71-81; Lawlis, "Prosperity and Hard Times in the Whitewater Valley, 1830-1840," *ibid.*, XLIII (1947), 363-378.

have been altogether conscious: it provided him with a sense of belonging as nothing else did. Certainly the practice of law did not provide it for him as it seemed to do for others. Although Julian rode the Whitewater circuit occasionally with others, his introspective nature led him away from participation in the frolic in the taverns where the lawyers lodged or in the practical jokes and story-telling around the campfire. The practice of law per se never had great appeal for him; it might provide him with the means of making a living or give him a start in politics, but once he discovered the allure of politics, this, rather than the law, became his chief interest.¹⁰

By 1844 the Dark Lyceum and practice in the courtrooms of Indiana's sixth circuit had given Julian the courage to take the stump in a presidential campaign. But which party ought he support? On economic issues he was falling away from the Whigs, and had these been the determining factors he might logically have gone over to the Democrats. He was beginning to think of the national bank as an obsolete idea, and he was out of sympathy with the Whigs' use of the public lands as a source for revenue rather than for homesteads for the landless poor. Nor was he any longer attracted by the Whigs' ideas on the tariff, their "pet dogma of 'the higher the duty the lower the price of the protected article.'"¹¹

But for Julian the question of slavery overshadowed all other issues, and, as he later explained it, this alone bound him to the Whigs. His avid reading of the speeches of John Quincy Adams and Joshua R. Giddings had thoroughly aroused him and had led him to the conclusion that Polk's election would be an "irretrievable national calamity."¹² Julian's opposition to the annexation of Texas, which he regarded as a plot of the slave power, was reason enough to oppose the Democratic candidate. In his autobiography he recalled the strong emotional reaction that he suffered when Polk was elected, how he brooded for a week and found it difficult to sleep. He was particularly indignant with those who by voting

¹⁰ Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 52-55; George W. Julian to Monimia Bunnell, April 27, 1843, Samuel S. Boyd Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; William D. Foulke, *Life of Oliver P. Morton* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1899), I, 31-32; Leander J. Monks (ed.), *Courts and Lawyers of Indiana* (3 vols., Indianapolis, 1916), I, 94.

¹¹ Julian, *Political Recollections*, 37, 38.

¹² Quoted in Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 59.

for James G. Birney, nominee of the Liberty party, had assured the election of Polk.¹³

Julian's categorical rejection of the Liberty party in the election of 1844 and his bitter denunciation of those who supported it strongly suggest that personal political ambition was one of the forces tying him to the Whigs, and equally as significant are the clues to his character present in his own explanation of his decision that appeared in his unpublished autobiography and in his *Political Recollections*, written some three decades later.¹⁴

The very existence of the Liberty party was predicated on the antislavery movement that Julian had come to regard as paramount, and Wayne County was the center of the Liberty party's activity in Indiana. Yet Julian, even though within four years he was to ally himself with a similar third party movement, seems to have eliminated from his thinking even the possibility that in 1844 the Liberty party offered a feasible alternative for an antislavery man. As he described it, his vote for the Whigs was based purely on his opposition to slavery, with no hint of political expediency; yet Julian was becoming politically ambitious and the Whig party offered the best chance of success, perhaps the only chance, in Wayne County. The presence of men like Joshua Giddings and John Quincy Adams among the northern Whigs makes Julian's choice of that party logical enough, but his effort to convince everybody, including himself, that he acted only on principle is significant because it reveals so much of his personality. The idea that principle could be combined with self-interest never seemed to occur to him, or else he successfully blocked it out of his mind. Throughout his life he seemed compelled to find vindication through a cause outside of himself for his every act. This trait, in combination with his intense ambition, put him under a strain from which he never really felt relief and that he apparently did not fully understand.

Whatever the basis of Julian's decision in 1844, his participation in the campaign apparently bolstered his confidence and gave him something of a local reputation as a stump speaker. Soon he was ready to make his initial bid for political office, and on March 12, 1845, the *Richmond Palladium*, the leading Whig organ of Wayne County, announced his candidacy for the lower house of the general assembly.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-59; Julian, *Political Recollections*, 30-49.

¹⁵ *Richmond Palladium*, March 12, 1845.

Julian's nomination on the Whig ticket came rather easily, but to win the election he had to overcome an insurgent movement from within his own party. The cause of this opposition is not clear, but Julian was able to overcome it and to go into office along with the other Whigs of Wayne County. In electing their entire slate in 1845 the Whigs of "Old Wayne" were still bucking the political trend in Indiana, for in that year the Democratic domination begun in 1843 continued; the state senate was divided equally, but the Democrats maintained undisputed control of the house and elected all but two congressmen.¹⁶

Upon entering the legislature Julian began to display those reforming proclivities for which he would become so well known before the end of his political career. Immediately he became the leader of a successful movement to modify the criminal code dealing with capital punishment. He also became interested in removing divorce from the control of the legislature and placing it under the courts, a change that finally came with the new state constitution in 1851.¹⁷ But by far the most important legislation of the session, and that which most profoundly affected Julian's future, was the Butler Bill, adopted to deal with internal improvements and the state debt.

The history of the internal improvements and debt question dated from 1828, when the federal government granted land to be used toward the construction of a canal to connect the Wabash River with Lake Erie. But regional jealousy was so great that four years elapsed before the necessary legislation passed the general assembly. The Whitewater Valley, which sought appropriations for projects of its own, was especially adamant in its opposition; it was David Hoover, Julian's uncle, who led the delaying faction in the legislature. Disagreements were finally resolved in 1836, and a grand scheme providing for a state-wide system of roads, canals, and railroads was finally adopted. It provided for the extension of the Wabash and Erie Canal, which had been begun four years earlier, construction of the Whitewater Canal, dredging

¹⁶ Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 61; Esarey, *History of Indiana*, I, 538.

¹⁷ Henry C. Fox, *Memoirs of Wayne County and the City of Richmond, Indiana* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1912), I, 202; *Richmond Palladium*, January 7, 1846; *Indiana House Journal*, 1845-1846, *passim*. Julian presented his argument on the divorce question in a letter to the *Indiana State Journal*, December 23, 1845. See Grace Julian Clarke's Scrapbook in the Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; see also Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 62.

to increase the navigability of rivers, and a huge appropriation of \$10,000,000.¹⁸

So great was the optimism about the future of these internal improvements that no adequate plan was drawn up for payment of the resulting debt. Jubilant political leaders and internal improvements proponents were convinced that tolls would soon take care of construction and maintenance; hence no tax funds were set aside even for payment of interest charges. After 1836, depression, mismanagement, and floods combined to disrupt the system, so that in 1839, amidst a general financial and engineering breakdown, all work stopped. Corruption too took its toll; from the bond issues, which amounted to approximately \$15,000,000, the state had received only \$8,600,000 in cash, while state officials and agents made off with an estimated \$2,000,000.¹⁹

In some quarters a desperate fear developed that repudiation might be the final result, and this apprehension brought protests that it ought never be allowed in Indiana. The general assembly reflected these views when in January, 1845, it adopted a resolution that repudiation of the debt would be a blot on the honor of the state.²⁰ It was easy to denounce repudiation as a crime; it was quite another matter to take positive action to prevent it, and as the election of 1845 approached nothing had been done.

In the summer of 1845 Charles Butler appeared in Indiana as the agent of the bondholders to find a way to salvage at least part of their investment in the internal improvements system. After speaking in various localities, he finally met with a joint committee of the general assembly, from which emerged the first Butler Bill, passed in January, 1846. Under its provisions, the state was to pay half the interest on the debt, while the bondholders were to rely on the profits of the Wabash and Erie Canal for the other half. The bondholders were to complete the canal to the Ohio with their own means and with the congressional lands which had been granted for the project. The debt was to be funded, and the governor was

¹⁸ See *Laws of Indiana, 1828-1829*, pp. 10-12, for the act of acceptance of the federal grant. See also Esarey, *History of Indiana*, I, 404, 406, 408-414.

¹⁹ Esarey, *History of Indiana*, I, 427.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 430; *General Laws of Indiana, 1844-1845*, p. 92.

to convey the lands to the bondholders whenever one-half the bonds had been surrendered.²¹

Although the settlement was generally accepted as a fair one, cries of repudiation came from some quarters, both inside and outside the state. In no quarter was it louder than in Wayne County, where David P. Holloway, Whig editor of the *Richmond Palladium*, launched a vicious attack against the bill and against Julian for supporting it. Julian's argument was, essentially, that the debt could not be paid off in full by the state because the people were already being taxed to the limit of their ability to pay. In addition to a scourge of sickness and crop failure, they were burdened with a heavy delinquent tax list under a rate of only 20 cents per hundred dollars' valuation. His painstaking efforts to explain his position were useless, and the heated controversy between Julian and Holloway in the columns of the *Palladium* was the beginning of an enmity between the two men that never healed.²²

In alienating Holloway and men like him Julian was doing inestimable harm to any chance for immediate political advancement in his home district, for he was making enemies of the outstanding political leaders in that Whig stronghold. Only by a complete recantation could Julian have got back into the good graces of men who might have been expected to assure him a political future. Although political expediency seems to have been a factor in 1844 and in some of his later political decisions, he stood firm on the Butler Bill because he thought that he was right. In 1847 Julian sought the Whig nomination for state senator from Wayne County, but his consistent stand on the Butler Bill was one factor contributing to his defeat; his successful opponent was Holloway.²³

²¹ Esarey, *History of Indiana*, I, 432-434; *Indiana State Sentinel* (Indianapolis), January 24, 1846; Logan Esarey, "Internal Improvements in Early Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Publications* (Indianapolis, 1895-), V (1911), 137-138. This first Butler Bill was found to be impracticable, and a second was enacted in 1847; it relieved the state of one-half of the principal as well as interest on the debt. Julian also supported this measure. *Ibid.*, 139.

²² See, for example, the *New York Journal of Commerce*, January 25, 1846, quoted in *Indiana State Sentinel*, March 14, 1846: letter from Julian to *Wayne County Record*, February 11, 1846, Grace Julian Clarke's Scrapbook, Indiana State Library; *Richmond Palladium*, February 18 and July 9, 1846.

²³ *Richmond Palladium*, March 16, 23, April 6, and August 17, 1847; Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 67-68. One might wonder whether Julian foresaw, as early as 1845 or 1846, the future alignment between antislavery men and Democrats that made possible his election to Congress in 1849 in spite of Whig opposition; there seems to be no positive evidence to suggest that he did.

Thus ended a phase of Julian's life that had begun in 1844. Since then he had tasted both victory and defeat in politics, and he had tested himself in an area bigger than the local courtroom or lyceum. His name was no longer unknown in Indiana, and his political metamorphosis, of which his defection from the Whigs on the internal improvements issue was an important part, was well under way. The antislavery crusade would complete it.

In the complex of motivations that may have led Julian into the abolitionist crusade the most obvious, and probably the most important, was his struggle with personal religious problems that had plagued him for years. Since his adolescence Julian had found that he was not altogether satisfied with the faith of his family. Several years before reaching manhood he had struck up a friendship with an old Universalist preacher, Jonathan Kidwell, who had journeyed from time to time through the vicinity of Centerville. Kidwell and his ideas were anathema to most of the members of the community, but Julian found him fascinating; his invective against orthodoxy seems to have spurred young Julian to investigation and reading on religious matters.²⁴ Even while entering into politics he was still searching for spiritual satisfaction. Too much of the orthodox Quakerism taught by his mother seemed to him to be folklore, fantasy for bolstering up those not capable of thinking for themselves. Yet this faith had been the source of much of the strength of his mother, who had cared for her family and managed through years of trouble following the death of the father. Understandably, Julian found it difficult lightly to lay aside the religion of this beloved parent.

It was while he was still trying to work out these personal difficulties that Julian discovered the writings of William Ellery Channing. Here he finally found many of the answers for which he was searching; here was a reasonable faith and a logical argument to support it. Before long Julian had consumed the six volumes of Channing. The effect was magnificent. "I felt," he wrote, "like one coming out of a fearful darkness into the full light of day." Here, indeed, was support for Julian's own conclusions about religion from a great

²⁴ George W. Julian, "A Search After Truth," *Unitarian Review* (36 vols., Boston, 1874-1891), XXIX (1888), 48-57, reprinted in *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXII (1936), 250-258; Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 41-42.

authority of the day. Such doctrines as the Trinity, total depravity, and vicarious atonement Channing treated as corruptions of the pure Gospel. From the religious works of the great Unitarian Julian turned to the antislavery tracts, and they became his "constant companions. . . [and] ceaseless trumpet-call to battle against oppression."²⁵ Channing did more than merely undermine the old superstitions that Julian was growing to distrust; he provided something better, something positive, in their place. The belief, closely related to the idea of progress, that man was a rational being with some measure of control over the society in which he lived must have appealed very strongly to Julian. From it followed logically Channing's reflections about good works.²⁶

In seeking a way out of his religious perplexities Julian also turned for advice to Lucretia Mott, who remained a warm friend, and he began reading the works of Harriet Martineau. He found that he could not, with Miss Martineau, reject religion altogether or follow her into "positivism and the denial of a future life," but she, along with Channing, gave him more "tranquility of mind." As he became more deeply involved in the antislavery cause and gave his "whole heart to its service, . . . doctrinal doubts and anxieties . . . seemed unworthy of one who loved his neighbor and believed in the brotherhood of man."²⁷

An additional factor, and one that cannot be omitted from an examination of his adoption of the antislavery crusade, was the very milieu in which he lived, for as a resident of Wayne County and of the Whitewater Valley he had been in the midst of antislavery activities for many years. The Quakers of that area were, of course, leaders in the antislavery movement; in 1836 they had organized the State Anti-Slavery Society of Indiana, an organization whose membership was virtually confined to the Valley. Into this region Levi Coffin had come to carry on his antislavery activities, and by 1836 his house in Newport was already an important station in the underground railroad.²⁸ One might even speculate that Julian's

²⁵ Julian, "Search After Truth," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XXXII, 252, 253.

²⁶ William E. Channing, *Works* (Boston, 1891), 233-246.

²⁷ Julian, "Autobiography," quoted in Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 72-73.

²⁸ Smith, *Political History of Slavery*, I, 9; Lawlis, "Prosperity and Hard Times in the Whitewater Valley," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XLIII, 373; Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences* (Cincinnati, 1876), 106ff, 128-129, 223-225, and *passim*.

involvement in the abolition movement eased his departure from the Quaker faith; while turning away from the doctrine of his fathers, as a crusader against slavery he was upholding what had become practically a tradition of the Quaker church. Conceivably, therefore, his breaking away from religious ties was less irrevocable, less final, than it otherwise would have been.

Undoubtedly Julian's disagreements with fellow Whigs over internal improvements and state debts, as well as his adoption of the antislavery crusade, weakened his affection for the Whig party; yet even after the nomination of Zachary Taylor Julian hoped for a resurgence of northern Whiggism that would repudiate Taylor and establish itself as the anti-slavery party. This failing, he saw no choice for antislavery Whigs except to repudiate the party. In a letter to the *National Era*, under the pseudonym "A Northern Whig," he rebuked northern party men who would vote for Taylor and branded the candidate himself as "merely a military chieftain . . . exclusively in the hands of the South, and the undoubted exponent of Southern . . . policy and interest." Taylor had waged an unconstitutional war, Julian raged, in which he had "waded up to his eyes in the blood of a people with whom we were at peace. In plain Saxon truth, he stands before the country as the chief of our national cut-throats; and while his hands are yet reeking with the blood of his victims, and the gore is still dripping from his garments, he asks the American people, *in return for his sweet services in the merciless work of death, to elect him President of the United States!*"²⁹

On this bitter and hyperbolic note Julian quit the party of his youth and made his way, along with Joshua R. Giddings of Ohio, Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, and others, into the newly formed Free Soil party. On July 24, 1848, a Free Soil convention in Indianapolis selected delegates, Julian among them, to go to the Buffalo convention. Although his role in Buffalo was not an active one, it was a stimulating and encouraging experience. He found no element of compromise at the convention, for it was unhampered by a southern wing. Any doubt as to Martin Van Buren's adherence to northern principles, he felt, was more than compensated for by the platform, which called on Congress to exert its constitutional

²⁹ *National Era* (Washington, D.C.), August 31, 1848.

power to prohibit slavery in the territories. Moreover, he was convinced that Van Buren, who had been driven to political retirement by southerners, would never again align himself with the slave power. These were the arguments that Julian used as he stumped Indiana's sixth congressional district as a Van Buren elector in the autumn of 1848.³⁰

But for Julian the great significance of the campaign was his conception of it and his interpretation of his individual role in it; for he saw himself engaged in the greatest crusade of his life, and he never abandoned this interpretation of the experience. Decades later he described it with the same fervor that he had felt in 1848. Whig leaders had tried to force him back into the party, he said, but "I was obliged to offer them open defiance. . . . I was subjected to a torrent of billingsgate which rivalled the fish market. . . . The charge of 'abolitionism' was flung at me everywhere. . . . I was an 'amalgamationist' and a 'woolly-head.' I was branded as the 'apostle of disunion' and the 'orator of free-dirt.' It was a standing charge of the Whigs that I carried in my pocket a lock of the hair of Frederick Douglass, to regale my senses with its aroma when I grew faint."³¹

In the midst of the campaign Julian's brother Jacob requested that their law partnership be dissolved, so that Julian found himself not only an outcast from his old political party but "thrown entirely upon [his] own resources" professionally. "Men who *know* that I am honest in my convictions and that I could have no sinister motives," he lamented, would prostrate him. "And now even a brother, chiming in with the popular clamor, sees proper to join the general cry of 'mad dog.'"³² But the cause for which he worked, Julian believed, was a source of strength that made the contest less uneven than it otherwise would have been. Or, as he stated it: "I was so perfectly swallowed up in my work and dominated by the singleness of my purpose, that I took no thought of anything else. . . . With the truth on my side, I was delighted to find myself perfectly able, single-handed, to fight my battle

³⁰ Smith, *Political History of Slavery*, I, 96-97; Whitehurst, *Martin Van Buren and the Free Soil Movement*, 159-160; Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest*, 126-130; *Richmond Palladium*, August 2 and 23, 1848; Julian, *Political Recollections*, 59-60; Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 78-79.

³¹ Julian, *Political Recollections*, 65.

³² George W. Julian, "Journal," September 19, 1848, quoted in Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 80-81.

against the advantages of superior talent and the trained leadership of men of established reputation on the stump."³³

One might logically ask why, if Julian's crusading impulse was so overpowering, he did not join an abolition society where he would have been in the company of other crusaders. One reason why he did not must certainly have been the influence of Channing, who vehemently opposed the agitation and the defiance of law fomented by Garrisonians. Channing firmly believed that slavery could be abolished legally if it were kept constantly open for discussion as a great national issue. Too often, he discovered, the emphasis had been placed on abolitionist agitation rather than on the issue of slavery itself.³⁴ Julian certainly took many of these views, or modifications of them, as his own. He was probably thinking of the abolitionists when he wrote to a local paper in 1846 criticizing the tendency toward too much organization in place of individual action. "Solitary thought and independent *individual* action, have done more for the world than all other agencies combined." Indeed, too much association, he believed, was in opposition to the very tenets of Christianity "whose great Author came into the world to teach the natural equality of man . . . and the indispensable necessity of individual rectitude."³⁵

This rejection of co-operative and organized effort represents Julian's acceptance of the individualist credo so persistent in the development of an American democratic faith. From it logically follows his championing of the homestead law, not merely as land policy but in accordance with the law of progress and as a corrective for social ills. Consistent with it, also, was his adoption of Unitarianism. Moreover, Julian could never have accepted the Garrisonian view of the Constitution as a proslavery instrument; rather, in accordance with Free Soil doctrine, the Constitution was an antislavery instrument that had merely been distorted by the slave power successors of the founding fathers. While not eschewing agitation, Julian would have used that agitation to encourage political activity that would lead to the readoption of the rightful interpretation of the Constitution. Such views were, of course, well suited to the purposes of a politically ambitious

³³ Julian, *Political Recollections*, 67.

³⁴ Channing, *Works*, 688-743.

³⁵ *Dollar News-Letter* (Centerville), June 6, 1846, Grace Julian Clarke's Scrapbook, Indiana State Library.

young man who had also been caught up in the antislavery impulse. Hence the existence of the Free Soil party was fortunate for him personally, for here was no mere experiment of a group of cranks; here was, possibly, a force that might bring untold recognition to those who abetted it.

In 1849 Julian was nominated by the Free Soilers as candidate for Congress from his district and, with the aid of Democrats, won a hard-fought victory. In Congress he took his place with Giddings, John P. Hale, and other Free Soilers as an antislavery advocate and an opponent of the Compromise of 1850. Although defeated in his bid for re-election in 1851, Julian became the vice-presidential candidate of the Free Soil party in 1852, on the ticket with John P. Hale. Out of office during the remainder of the fifties, he was one of the formulators of the Republican or People's movement in Indiana; before the end of the decade he was undisputed leader of the radical faction of the party in opposition to Oliver P. Morton's conservative wing. Re-elected to Congress in 1860, Julian took his place in the ranks of the Radical Republicans and served as a member of Ben Wade's Committee on the Conduct of the War.³⁶

Julian's conversion to Free Soilism in 1848 and his activities in the movement during the next four years remained, in his own mind, the most significant experience of his life. Here, he believed, he had fought the hardest in what he saw as a continuing battle for human rights; here he made his greatest sacrifices; to the rigors of these years he attributed the illnesses that burdened him throughout the remaining years of his life. Julian's decision of 1848 and his role in the Free Soil movement did indeed bring an end to a period of doubt and uncertainty, and it helped him to establish a set of guides and standards that were to serve him well for the next quarter century.

With the recrudescence of the political antislavery movement after the adoption of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it was logical enough that Julian, and men like him, should be among the leaders in the formation of the Republican party. They had behind them valuable experience in the application of politics to the slavery question; they were not afraid of new political organizations. From them came much of the vital leadership in the formation and early stages of the Republican party.

³⁶ Riddleberger, "George W. Julian," 52-174; Clarke, *George W. Julian*, 85-86, 92-110, 117-138, 219, and *passim*.