

# Pastor in Politics: The Congressional Career of the Reverend Gilbert De La Matyr

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Like other middlewestern states, Indiana was deeply affected by the controversy over currency and financial reform in the 1870s. The issues transcended traditional party lines, for neither of the two major parties was immune to the discord generated by the conflict over the role of paper money as opposed to specie, the powers of the National Banking System, and questions regarding the public debt. Ultimately a substantial number of the reformers repudiated the established parties to organize the Independent or Greenback party. The degree of success enjoyed by the new movement varied greatly from one state to another, but it appears to have reached its peak in most sections of the country in the elections of 1878. In Indiana the Greenbackers polled 9.5 per cent of the total vote for the state ticket in 1878 and held the balance of power between the Republican and Democratic parties in the General Assembly. More importantly, they sent the Reverend Gilbert De La Matyr, a Methodist clergyman, to Washington as one of the handful of currency reformers comprising the Greenback delegation in the United States Congress.<sup>1</sup>

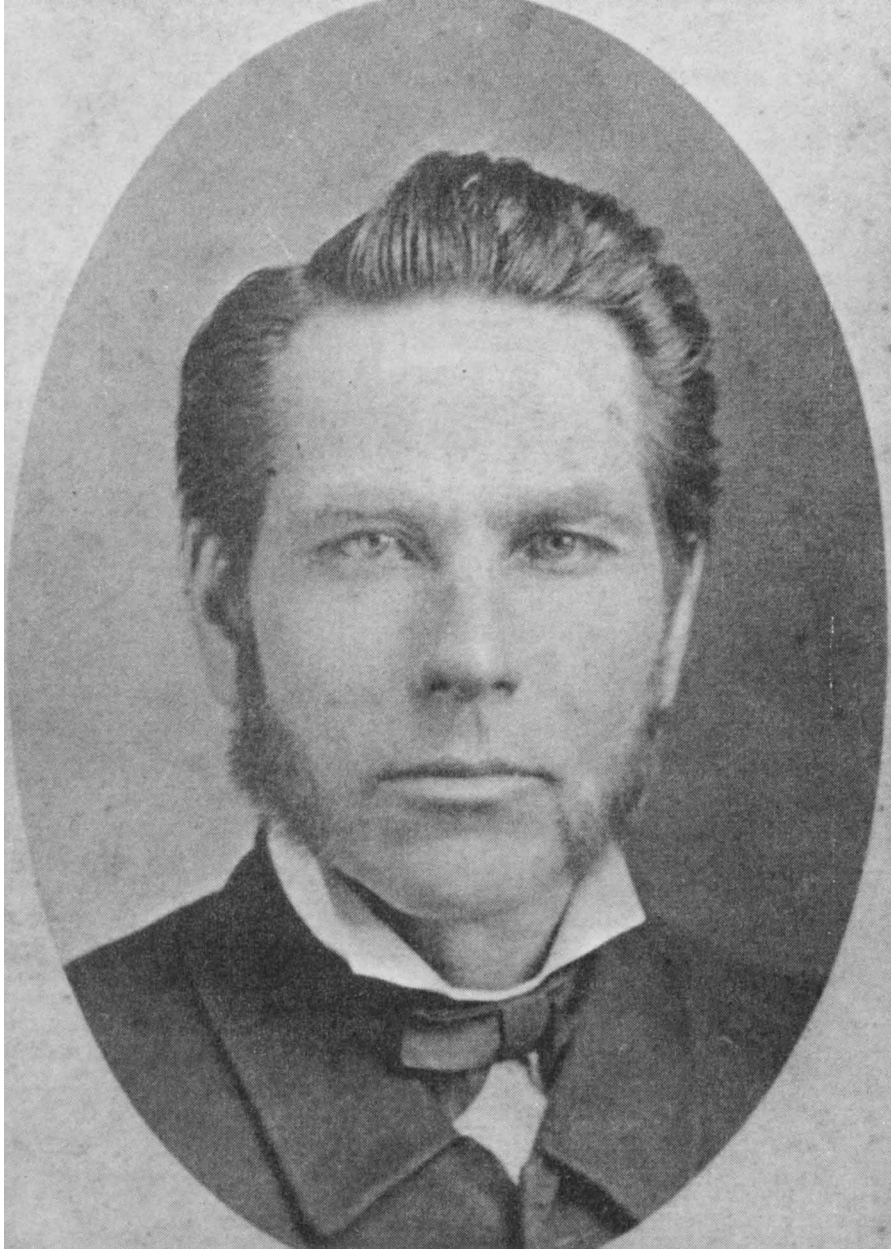
Within the context of his conception of Christian citizenship, it was entirely logical for De La Matyr to seek to extend his activities beyond those customarily associated with a parish ministry. In the process he obtained a wider forum for the dissemination of that special combination of social, political, and theological ideas that constituted his point of view. When he was elected to Congress in 1878, he was a relative newcomer both to Indiana and to its politics, but he had run for office on one prior occasion, in 1867 as the Republican candidate for state prison inspector of the state of New York.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Tribune Almanac for 1879* (New York, 1879), 66-67. The abstract of votes cast in Indiana for state officers in 1878 is on an unpaginated sheet following page 121 in the *Annual Report of the Secretary of State of Indiana for the Year Ending October 31, 1878* (Indianapolis, 1878) contained in Part I of the *Indiana, Documentary Journal* (1879), (Indiana State Library, Indianapolis). Two important recent studies of greenbackism are Robert P. Sharkey, *Money, Class, and Party: An Economic Study of Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baltimore, 1959) and Irwin Unger, *The Greenback Era: A Social and Political History of American Finance, 1865-1879* (Princeton, N. J., 1964). For the Greenback party in Indiana see John D. Macoll, "Ezra A. Olleman: The Forgotten Man of Greenbackism, 1873-1876," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXV (September, 1969), 173-96; William G. Carleton, "The Money Question in Indiana Politics, 1865-1890," *ibid.*, XLII (June, 1946), 107-50; and Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880* (Indianapolis, 1965), 286-317.

<sup>2</sup> From a personality sketch of De La Matyr published originally in the *Washington, D. C., National View* and reprinted in the *Indianapolis Sun*, July 5, 1879; *New York Times*, November 5, 6, December 4, 1867.



**THE REVEREND GILBERT DE LA MATYR**

Courtesy Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives,  
Roberts Park Methodist Church, Indianapolis.

Born on July 8, 1825, in the upstate New York community of Pharsalia, De La Matyr learned the carpenter's trade before entering the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal church as a young man of twenty-four.<sup>3</sup> In the fall of 1874 he arrived in Indianapolis to assume the pastorate at Roberts Park Methodist Church,<sup>4</sup> one of the city's leading congregations. Founded in the 1820s, Roberts Park was referred to as the "mother" of the Indianapolis Methodist churches because of its role in helping to establish other congregations of the denomination in the community.<sup>5</sup> The new pastor came to his duties in the Hoosier capital from a successful pastorate in Kansas City, Missouri. A newspaper man in Kansas City, lamenting De La Matyr's departure, noted that while certain persons had objected to some of the clergyman's pronouncements on public figures and issues, everyone agreed that he was a man of courage and ability. Consolation for his leaving, said the journalist, could be drawn from the knowledge that De La Matyr was going to "a larger place and a wider field of usefulness."<sup>6</sup>

The "wider field of usefulness" marked out for De La Matyr was scarcely discernible when he arrived in Indianapolis. His initial concern seems to have been almost exclusively for the spiritual welfare of his new parish and the improvement of its program. The building serving Roberts Park stood uncompleted in 1874. Occupying a pleasant wooded site at the corner of Vermont and Delaware streets on Indianapolis' near east side, the edifice was of imposing size and design but unfinished inside above the ground floor.<sup>7</sup> In January, 1875, the congregation voted to complete the upper story of the structure which would house the main auditorium.<sup>8</sup> De La Matyr pressed the matter, and in the spring the official board undertook a subscription program to raise the necessary funds.<sup>9</sup> Within a year the new

<sup>3</sup> Indianapolis Sun, July 5, 1879; "Memorial Record of the Members of the South-East Indiana Conference, According to the Roll of 1876," *Minutes of the Twenty-Fifth Session of the South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1876* (Indianapolis, 1876), 56; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1961* (Washington, D. C., 1961), 795.

<sup>4</sup> Indianapolis Journal, September 15, 21, 1874.

<sup>5</sup> [Sexson E. Humphreys], *Roberts Park Methodist Church* (unpaginated four page printed brochure, copies of which are available at the church); Indianapolis Sunday Star, June 14, 1925; Indianapolis News, October 17, 1956.

<sup>6</sup> The Kansas City journalist's comments were reprinted from the Kansas City News Reporter in the Indianapolis Journal, September 21, 1874. Prior to going to Kansas City in 1872, De La Matyr had served in various churches in the state of New York during the 1850s and 1860s, held a chaplaincy in the Union army during the Civil War, and served as pastor in an Omaha, Nebraska, church from 1869 to 1872. "Memorial Record of the Members of the South-East Indiana Conference, According to the Roll of 1876," 56; Indianapolis Sun, July 5, 1879.

<sup>7</sup> *Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, Historical Sketch and Dedicatory Exercises August 27, 1876* (Indianapolis, 1876), 11-20.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Book Number 2" (Minutes of the Quarterly Conferences), January 9, 1875, Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives (Roberts Park Methodist Church, Indianapolis).

<sup>9</sup> Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, "Official Board Record," April 1, 26, 1875, Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives. De La Matyr's sermon topic

sanctuary was ready for occupancy, and on August 27, 1876, Bishop Matthew Simpson delivered the dedication sermon in services attended by an estimated eighteen hundred guests and members of the church.<sup>10</sup>

In the course of De La Matyr's three years at Roberts Park the church made substantial progress. The congregation increased from 542 to 693 full members, and, although still under a heavy mortgage in 1877, it had made some headway in reducing its indebtedness.<sup>11</sup> As pastor of Roberts Park De La Matyr received a salary of \$3,250 per year, the highest paid to any of the approximately one hundred Methodist clergymen included in the denomination's South-East Indiana Conference;<sup>12</sup> but the amount was commensurate with the duties and position associated with this, one of Indianapolis' most prestigious pulpits. Only the death of his second wife in the summer of 1877, following a prolonged illness, can have seriously marred an otherwise satisfying term spent by De La Matyr as pastor at Roberts Park.<sup>13</sup> Methodist pulpit appointments were frequently of short duration in the nineteenth century,<sup>14</sup> and in the fall of 1877 the district conference assigned De La Matyr to Indianapolis' Grace Methodist Church, a congregation of 275 full members, located at the corner of

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for Sunday, April 18, 1875, was "Shall We Consent to Worship God in a Basement Another Year?" *Indianapolis Journal*, April 17, 1875.

<sup>10</sup> *Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, Historical Sketch and Dedicatory Exercises August 27, 1876, 27-34*; *Indianapolis Journal*, August 28, 1876.

<sup>11</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, September 17, 1877; Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Book Number 2," September 4, 1877, Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives. This *Journal* report of De La Matyr's farewell sermon presents a statistical report of his three year tenure. Roberts Park's debt remained a considerable burden, however; one which the congregation found difficult to manage in the next few years. Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, "Official Board Record," November 19, December 16, 1877, November 18, 25, 1878, March 10, May 19, 24, 1879; Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Book Number 2," August 26, 1879, Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives.

<sup>12</sup> In his third year as pastor of Roberts Park, De La Matyr received \$3,000 in salary and \$300 for house rent. South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Steward's Book, 1852-1891*, 206-10, 216-20, 226-29, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana Methodism (DePauw University Library, Greencastle, Indiana).

<sup>13</sup> Marietta Osborne De La Matyr (1835-1877) married De La Matyr nine years before her death. The funeral services were held at Roberts Park Church on August 19, 1877. Obituaries are in the *Indianapolis Sentinel*, August 19, 1877; *Indianapolis Journal*, August 20, 1877; and *Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Session of the South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1877* (Indianapolis, 1877), 107-108. De La Matyr's first wife apparently died during the Civil War, for in referring to his military service during the campaign of 1878 he remarked: "I was in the service two years and eight months, and then while we were in winter quarters I resigned to watch beside my dying wife." *Indianapolis Sun*, August 31, 1878.

<sup>14</sup> Indiana Methodist ministers of the period apparently seldom remained more than three or four years in the same pulpit. See, for example, the "Memorial Record of the Members of the South-East Indiana Conference, According to the Roll of 1876," 54-62, and the roster of pastors for each church in the North Indiana Conference for the period 1844 to 1916 in H[orace] N. Henrick and William Warren Sweet, *A History of the North Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church from its Organization, in 1844 to the Present* (Indianapolis, 1917), 268-337.

East and Market streets on Indianapolis' east side.<sup>15</sup> De La Matyr departed from Roberts Park with the best wishes of that body. Noting that they were "unwillingly compelled to separate from" the pastor, the church members, through their quarterly conference, commended him for his ministry:

We recognize in him a true Christian minister, living near the Cross, actuated by a profound sense of his high calling, and whose intellectual attainments mark him, as worthy the Pastorate of any congregation in the Church. . . . and while we Separate in person, yet in affection and church communion we trust to be united to him, wherever he may be sent in the work of the Church.<sup>16</sup>

When he undertook his new ministry at Grace Church, De La Matyr asserted that he would speak the truth as he saw it, responsible to no man, not even to John Wesley himself. His conception of the pastor's position appears somewhat overbearing, perhaps defensive; his sermons, he warned, would not be entertaining but would be directed toward an elucidation of the lessons to be drawn from the Bible:<sup>17</sup> "He who seeks mainly to please and gathers his themes from the suggestions of the people must be cringing and slavish. He who is conscious of being God's messenger rises to a level far above such things."<sup>18</sup> It was well that the congregation at Grace Church was made aware of its pastor's position from the beginning, for within a few months he became a major figure of controversy, outspoken far beyond his pronouncements delivered from the pulpit at Roberts Park. Some of his contemporaries came to regard him as a dangerous radical; a few referred to him as a "communist."<sup>19</sup> Actually, however, De La Matyr defies easy categorization using terminology meaningful either in his own day or at the present time. His sermons and other public statements, widely reported in the newspapers of Indianapolis from his arrival in the city until the close of his congressional career, reflect a mixture of generally traditional views concerning theology and ethical conduct, a suspicion of certain minority groups, and yet a growing awareness of the social problems of the period. Finally, and pervading virtually every aspect of his thinking,

<sup>15</sup> *Minutes of the Twenty-Sixth Annual Session of the South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1877*, 92, 120; *Indianapolis Directory for 1878* (Indianapolis, 1878), 62.

<sup>16</sup> Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Book Number 2," September 3, 1877, Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives.

<sup>17</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of September 30, 1877. *Indianapolis Journal*, October 1, 1877. Occasionally the full text of a sermon is printed; generally there are long excerpts accompanied by short summaries of the ideas expressed.

<sup>18</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of October 7, 1877. *Ibid.*, October 8, 1877.

<sup>19</sup> Accusations of "communist" inclinations were apparently first levelled against De La Matyr following his controversial sermon "Remedy for the Commune" delivered at Grace Church on the evening of April 28, 1878. See *Indianapolis Journal*, April 29, May 6, 1878; *Indianapolis Sun*, May 4, 1878; *Indianapolis News*, April 29, 30, May 6, 9, 10, 1878; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, May 6, 7, 1878.

there was simple love of country, intensified by his own services in raising soldiers and as an army chaplain during the Civil War.<sup>20</sup>

De La Matyr's views concerning the Deity, man, and scripture were probably not too dissimilar from those of most Methodist clergymen of his day. Dealing ordinarily with familiar themes—resurrection, the miracles of Christ, or the lives of biblical characters—De La Matyr presented in his sermons a more or less orthodox Protestant conception of Jehovah and His grand design for mankind and prescribed a rigid code of moral behavior for Christians that included abstention from dancing, from attendance at the theater,<sup>21</sup> and from even the moderate use of alcoholic beverages.<sup>22</sup> Disdainful of the ideas of men like Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley, he insisted that man was the special creature of God, not the product of an undirected evolutionary process.<sup>23</sup> Only with respect to his view of Jehovah as judge was there any substantial departure from an essentially literal interpretation of the Bible. To De La Matyr the picture of a wrathful and vengeful god on the one hand and a tender and loving savior on the other seemed incompatible within the context of an harmonious Trinity. Lurking therein was what he termed the old "Persian theory" of two separate deities, the one standing for goodness and symbolized by light, the other epitomizing evil and symbolized by darkness. Rather than dwelling upon the imagined horrors of fire and brimstone, De La Matyr preferred to see Jehovah's judgment as simply the separation of evil men from the just and their banishment into darkness.<sup>24</sup>

De La Matyr's sermons sometimes exhibited a pronounced hostility to Roman Catholicism. He spoke of the role of Catholic priests as evidence of the "power of Satan"<sup>25</sup> and discussed "Romanism" and its eventual destruction in the context of various forces of evil and corruption destined to be overthrown.<sup>26</sup> He admitted that

<sup>20</sup> De La Matyr's views as expressed in his sermons are further elaborated hereafter. A friendly biographer credited him with raising an artillery battery and two regiments of Union soldiers during the Civil War and then serving as an army chaplain from 1862 to the end of the conflict. The information was taken from a sketch of De La Matyr's life published originally in the Washington, D. C., *National View* and reprinted in the Indianapolis *Sun*, July 5, 1879. The biographical sketch of De La Matyr in the congressional directory confirms this in part, citing his assistance in raising the Eighth Regiment of New York Heavy Artillery and his service as the unit's chaplain for three years. *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-1961*, 795.

<sup>21</sup> De La Matyr's sermon topic for January 10, 1875, was announced as "Reasons Why the Methodist Episcopal Church Forbids its Members to Attend the Theater and to Indulge in Dancing." Indianapolis *Journal*, January 9, 1875.

<sup>22</sup> Alcohol, said De La Matyr, was "conceded to be the mightiest and most destructive enginery [*sic*] of the devil." De La Matyr's sermon of October 18, 1874. *Ibid.*, October 19, 1874.

<sup>23</sup> See De La Matyr's sermons of October 24, 1875, October 28, 1877. *Ibid.*, October 25, 1875, October 29, 1877.

<sup>24</sup> See De La Matyr's sermons of January 31, 1875, January 16, 1876. *Ibid.*, February 1, 1875, January 17, 1876.

<sup>25</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of July 1, 1877. *Ibid.*, July 2, 1877.

<sup>26</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of March 5, 1876. *Ibid.*, March 6, 1876.

American Protestant churches were no more free from "superstition" than were European Catholic churches,<sup>27</sup> and he credited Catholicism with contributing significantly to the aesthetic and cultural improvement of its members, noting that "at all times the poorest may enter [a Catholic church] and kneel before scenes of exquisite beauty."<sup>28</sup> But for De La Matyr there was something very dangerous about Catholicism in its effects upon treasured American institutions like the sabbath and the public schools. It, or more specifically the Church's German and Irish sons in America, he declared, intended to replace the day of rest and consecration with a day of revelry and riotous pleasure.<sup>29</sup> The schools, too, were in danger, for atheism and Catholicism were mounting a combined assault on the system of public education.<sup>30</sup> Although he seemed to profess no enthusiasm for concerted Protestant political action, De La Matyr warned that the "political unity of the Roman Catholic Church, under a foreign potentate, and their determined purpose to destroy our State school system, and the political unity of Germans for the purpose of destroying our Sabbaths, if continued, will surely drive us to unite in political action for the purpose of saving these chief corner stones of our liberties."<sup>31</sup> De La Matyr's attitude toward Catholicism was perhaps the least admirable aspect of his thought but one that would undergo a profound transformation in the course of the pastor's later political activities.

Corruption in government had become a major theme in De La Matyr's pronouncements from the pulpit by 1876. His interest in the subject indicates at least a partial dissatisfaction with his own Republican party, for in a sermon delivered early in March, 1876, he referred specifically to "robbery of the government by whisky rings, and salary-grabs, and Indian rings,"<sup>32</sup> a scarcely veiled indictment of the Republican Ulysses S. Grant administration. The pastor's denunciations of bribery and scandal in high places were coupled, however, with an unfortunate tendency to see bad government as also in large measure the product of a suffrage too carelessly extended. Although he did not call for restrictions to be placed upon the franchise, De La Matyr clearly implied that certain classes of newcomers to the electoral process were especially susceptible to manipulation by devious politicians. The former slave and the newly arrived immigrant had obtained the right to vote, he thought, before they knew how to

<sup>27</sup> Remarks by Gilbert De La Matyr following an address by Dr. Levi Ritter at Roberts Park Church on Sunday evening, February 27, 1876. *Ibid.*, February 28, 1876.

<sup>28</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of February 11, 1877. *Ibid.*, February 12, 1877.

<sup>29</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of June 13, 1875. *Ibid.*, June 14, 1875.

<sup>30</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of July 2, 1876. *Ibid.*, July 3, 1876.

<sup>31</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of June 13, 1875. *Ibid.*, June 14, 1875.

<sup>32</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of March 5, 1876. *Ibid.*, March 6, 1876.

exercise the privilege properly, a situation that presented an "overwhelming peril" to American institutions.<sup>33</sup> The nation's only hope lay in greater participation by other citizens, particularly Christians. It was they who must help to train the ignorant in responsible citizenship, attend local political gatherings to keep them out of the hands of demagogues, and then, above all, be present at the polls, not only to vote but to keep a watchful eye on proceedings at the ballot box throughout election day.<sup>34</sup>

Good citizenship and Christian conduct were indistinguishable in the thinking of a man like De La Matyr, for he conceived of America as having a special relationship with the Deity. The United States' constitution he termed a "transcript" of God's word, and the Republic's mission he defined as the development of "a people combining all the races of men under one banner and under our God." According to De La Matyr, the central event in American history was the Civil War, and he believed that Jehovah had taken an intense interest in the outcome of that conflict.<sup>35</sup> In defeating the Confederacy, the Union not only eliminated slavery but, even more importantly, established as permanent the American system of popular government: "Our system is no longer an experiment. We have passed from the meekness and vacillation of experiment. With confidence we can devote all our energies to the work God has given."<sup>36</sup>

So long as he confined his concerns to biblical topics, good citizenship, and the need for better men to fill public offices, De La Matyr apparently aroused little outright opposition to his views. In the spring of 1878, however, he stepped boldly into the controversy over financial reform, delivering a Sunday sermon at Grace Church on the evening of April 28, entitled "Remedy for the Commune." The message, far from being a call for revolution, was designed to suggest means for allaying social discord; however, De La Matyr referred to capital as the "power to oppress" and claimed that those who possessed capital in the form of money had been able to expropriate all other forms of property through their control over the nation's finances since the Civil War. Asserting that "the majority" of Americans were impoverished and deep in debt, De La Matyr observed gloomily: "The masses must have opportunity to accumulate homes and property, or the horrors of communism are sure to be developed. There must be an escape for them from the tyranny of capital, or they will wage war upon their oppressors. Such war would be utter madness, but madness seizes despairing masses." His proposed solution for this

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<sup>33</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of November 5, 1876. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1876. See also his sermon of March 5, 1876. *Ibid.*, March 6, 1876.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, March 6, November 6, 1876. See also De La Matyr's sermons of July 2, October 8, November 5, 1876. *Ibid.*, July 3, October 9, November 6, 1876.

<sup>35</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of July 2, 1876. *Ibid.*, July 3, 1876.

<sup>36</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of June 25, 1876. *Ibid.*, June 26, 1876.

unhappy situation was the dispersal of the nation's impoverished masses into the vast and fertile plains of the western states: "Between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains there are farms cleared ready for the plow, or for the herd without the plow, for every homeless man and woman."<sup>37</sup>

It was not his remedy, presumably, which disturbed the critics of the pastor, for it comported fully with some of America's most treasured beliefs with respect to the value of the western lands as a "safety valve" for eastern unrest. Rather, it seems to have been his reference to moneyed classes as "oppressors" and the spectre of mass violence that he raised which incurred the displeasure of conservatives. It was ridiculous to declare that five sixths of the population was penniless, observed the *Indianapolis News*: "It is such wild and absurd assertions as these, made or reported, that form the staple arguments for lying and howling demagogues." References to capital as oppressive and tyrannical and to the masses as prepared to wage violence were "more like communistic catch-phrases than words of wisdom." The best prescription for the current unsettled economic conditions, continued the editor of the *News*, was simply "natural adjustment and individual thrift and the counsel for the hour is submission to law, not incendiary appeals about class oppression."<sup>38</sup> The *News* also published a letter signed "Methodist," ostensibly from a reader who agreed with the position of the newspaper but who went farther in charging that De La Matyr's sermon was "rank communism" and dangerous to the community's well being.<sup>39</sup> De La Matyr replied to the charges of his critics in a sermon delivered to his congregation on the evening of Sunday, May 5. Disclaiming any sympathy with communism, which he observed meant "ravishing, arson, murder and anarchy," he insisted that his concern was only for some means to alleviate the current situation of high unemployment and economic stagnation. The *News* had attacked him, he said, because the editor of the journal was "intensely partisan on the side of the moneyed classes."<sup>40</sup>

The controversy between De La Matyr and the editor of the conservative Republican *News* was apparently crucial in determining the pastor's future political course. Although he had been critical of Republican party excesses during the Grant administration, there seems to be no indication that he was actually contemplating leaving the Republican party prior to the spring of 1878. Then, however, he found a ready defender of his views in the *Indianapolis Sun*, the organ

<sup>37</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of April 28, 1878. *Ibid.*, April 29, 1878.

<sup>38</sup> *Indianapolis News*, April 29, 1878.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, April 30, 1878.

<sup>40</sup> De La Matyr's sermon of May 5, 1878. *Ibid.*, May 6, 1878; *Indianapolis Journal*, May 6, 1878.

of the young Greenback party.<sup>41</sup> The *Sun* had made only casual references to De La Matyr in the past, referring to him once as a "church debt lifter"<sup>42</sup> and on another occasion, publicizing a speech of his to be delivered on behalf of the city's relief fund;<sup>43</sup> but on May 4, 1878, it devoted a lengthy editorial to De La Matyr's sermon on social unrest, endorsing him as one who knew the truth and rightly foretold the actions of the masses should conditions remain unchanged.<sup>44</sup>

For the moment, it seems, De La Matyr avoided any additional pronouncements upon the condition of America's oppressed classes at the hands of capitalists; if he did comment upon this or other topics close to the hearts of financial reformers, the local press failed to take note of it. He was present, however, to deliver the invocation at the Greenback party's state convention in Indianapolis on May 22, 1878, and two months later, on July 24, the Greenbackers of Indiana's seventh congressional district selected him unanimously as their nominee for the national House of Representatives.<sup>45</sup> In an interview the following day with a reporter for the *News* De La Matyr insisted that he had agreed only reluctantly to have his name presented to the district convention but that he would probably accept the nomination; if so, he intended to "conduct the canvass on a plane becoming a Christian minister." In the course of the interview De La Matyr admitted frankly that without the support of the Democrats he faced certain defeat in the campaign. Claiming that he had made no bargain with the Democratic leadership, he reported nevertheless that prominent Democrats had assured him that he would receive their party's backing.<sup>46</sup> On August 30 De La Matyr's expectations were fulfilled when the Democrats of the seventh district formally endorsed his candidacy.<sup>47</sup>

Although such cooperation between parties was not unusual in Indiana during this period,<sup>48</sup> Republicans were quick to point out certain incongruities apparent in the Democrats' willingness to fall in line behind the Greenback clergyman. De La Matyr and the Green-

<sup>41</sup> The currency reformers, originally organized in Indiana as the Independent party, had assumed the name Greenback by 1876. Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880*, 295. By 1878 the party was usually referred to as the National Greenback or Greenback Labor party. Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War* (New York, 1966), 120-24; Howard P. Nash, *Third Parties in American Politics* (Washington, D. C., 1959), 159-63.

<sup>42</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, February 9, 1878.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, February 16, 1878.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, May 4, 1878.

<sup>45</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, May 23, July 25, 1878; *Indianapolis Sun*, July 27, 1878.

<sup>46</sup> *Indianapolis News*, July 25, 1878.

<sup>47</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, August 31, 1878.

<sup>48</sup> Democrats and Greenbackers cooperated in other races in Indiana in 1878, and in the twelfth district, Democrats and Republicans supported the same candidate against the Greenback nominee for Congress. Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850-1880*, 309, 311.

backers favored a high degree of federal control over economic institutions, whereas Democrats had traditionally opposed any tendencies toward a more powerful central government. De La Matyr, moreover, had been outspoken in his criticism of Roman Catholics, a group that comprised a large portion of the Democrats' own constituency.<sup>49</sup> Yet from the standpoint of political opportunism, the Democratic party's decision to endorse De La Matyr was entirely understandable. John Hanna, the incumbent Republican congressman, had carried the district by a margin of only fourteen hundred votes in 1876;<sup>50</sup> joint action by the Democrats and Greenbackers might well redeem the district in 1878, particularly if the fusion nominee were one who could be expected to attract a certain number of normally Republican voters.

On the crucial currency and financial questions, De La Matyr's views differed more in degree than in kind from those of his Republican opponent. Hanna was essentially a moderate, rather than a conservative or "sound" money man. Like De La Matyr, he advocated the remonetization of silver and believed that those federal bonds which were redeemable by contract in "coin" should be payable in either gold or silver rather than in gold alone. Hanna did not share De La Matyr's deep aversion to the National Banking System, but, like many others in the Indiana Republican party, he opposed the national Republican administration's policy of a forced return to the gold standard and contraction in the volume of legal tender paper currency in circulation. On the latter point Hanna favored a modest increase in the volume of greenbacks to a fixed level of four hundred million dollars and preservation of them as a permanent portion of the nation's circulating medium, together with gold, silver, and the national bank notes.<sup>51</sup> De La Matyr, on the other hand, wished to eliminate the national bank currency entirely, reserve gold and silver largely for use in foreign trade, and place primary reliance for the nation's domestic currency needs upon the greenbacks, their volume to be limited only by the requirements of commerce at any given time.<sup>52</sup>

The campaign for the seventh district seat focused more upon the person and reputation of De La Matyr than upon specific issues dividing him from Hanna. In referring to the power of capital to oppress and in warning of the possibility of violence on the part of impoverished classes unless government took steps to ameliorate

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<sup>49</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, September 3, 9, 1878.

<sup>50</sup> *Tribune Almanac for 1877* (New York, 1877), 75; *Annual Report of the Secretary of State, of the State of Indiana, for the Year Ending October 31, 1876* (Indianapolis, 1876), 126, contained in Part I of the *Indiana, Documentary Journal* (1877), (Indiana State Library).

<sup>51</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, August 15, 1878.

<sup>52</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, August 17, 31, 1878.

social conditions, the minister challenged prevailing views concerning property rights and left himself open to repeated charges that he was a dangerous radical. De La Matyr, said the Republican Indianapolis *Journal*, "preaches the fundamental doctrines of communism with as much apparent conviction as he ever preached the gospel. . . . Other people may call it what they please, we call it communism, and it is none the less so because presented in decorous language and in the dangerous disguise of calm argument."<sup>53</sup> The Greenback candidate was a "communist of the most dangerous type," a man who, while disparaging the use of violence, was actually suggesting it as a course of action, warned the Reverend Thomas A. Goodwin, another prominent local Methodist clergyman, speaking before the Indianapolis Colored Republican Club.<sup>54</sup>

An incident involving an alleged conversation between the pastor and his barber illustrates the type of campaign waged against De La Matyr. In August the *Journal* reported that a prominent local businessman had overheard the clergyman remark to his barber that he hoped to see the day when the law would prevent any man from accumulating a fortune in excess of \$20,000 and that any surplus above that amount ought to be put to public uses. If the story were true, the editor noted, De La Matyr "should wear a red flag in his button-hole."<sup>55</sup> De La Matyr denied the story as did the barber,<sup>56</sup> but James H. Baldwin, the businessman in question, insisted that while the conversation was in confidential tones, he had distinctly heard the pastor utter his "communistic sentiment."<sup>57</sup> The *Journal* subsequently acquired the statements of several other individuals, including a member of De La Matyr's former congregation at Roberts Park, all to the effect that he had at one time or another expressed such views with respect to property accumulation.<sup>58</sup>

De La Matyr's critics were anxious to depict him not only as a radical extremist but also as one who was not entirely aware of what he was saying. In part this latter desire derived from a certain naivete

<sup>53</sup> Indianapolis *Journal*, August 12, 1878. See also the Indianapolis *Sun* which replied on August 17, 1878, that the majority of the people in the congressional district knew that De La Matyr was speaking the truth and calling him a "communist" would not suffice to answer his charges.

<sup>54</sup> Indianapolis *Journal*, September 7, 1878. Thomas A. Goodwin (1818-1906), an early abolitionist and Republican, was well known in Indiana as the editor of the *Christian Advocate* during its existence in Indiana. He also wrote articles from time to time for the Indianapolis *Journal* using the initials "U.L.C." as a pen name. *A Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men of the State of Indiana* (2 vols., Cincinnati, 1880), I, 7th District, 46-48; [George S.] Cottman, comp., "Indiana Scrapbook Collection" (9 vols.), II, 89-90. The Cottman scrapbooks of newspaper clippings are located in the Indiana Division (Indiana State Library).

<sup>55</sup> Indianapolis *Journal*, August 21, 1878.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, August 24, 1878; Indianapolis *Sun*, August 31, 1878.

<sup>57</sup> Indianapolis *Journal*, August 24, 1878. James H. Baldwin (1835-1916) was a successful Indianapolis merchant, bank director, and dealer in real estate. Cottman, "Indiana Scrapbook Collection," I, 16-18.

<sup>58</sup> Indianapolis *Journal*, August 27, 1878.

on the part of the clergyman, a tendency to speak without checking his facts or perhaps to speak rather more broadly than the facts would justify in order to emphasize his point. In any case, the result was to make him vulnerable to the charge of uttering ignorant or irresponsible statements. For example, he had asserted, in commenting upon the oppressions of the forces of capital in his controversial April 28 sermon, that "five-sixths of our population are utterly penniless, and four-fifths have mortgaged all their future labor,"<sup>59</sup> an assessment easily dismissed by his opponents as greatly overstated.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in the course of his congressional campaign De La Matyr contrasted United States financial policy with that of France in the period following the Franco-Prussian War, claiming that France had been able to pay her war debt without impoverishing her people, whereas the American war debt remained unpaid, a burden upon the people of the United States.<sup>61</sup> As Republican editors were quick to point out, however, it was the war indemnity to Germany which the Parisian government had paid, a feat accomplished through borrowing from the French people, thus contributing to a large national debt still unpaid.<sup>62</sup> De La Matyr later insisted that he had always understood that France had paid her indemnity to Germany not her entire national debt,<sup>63</sup> but his protestations could not remove the impression that he had spoken in haste on a matter he only imperfectly comprehended at the time.

Although De La Matyr had continued to meet his pulpit responsibilities during the campaign, critics among his fellow ministers moved to force his retirement either from politics or the pastorate at the September, 1878, annual session of the South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Church. The session, an assembly of the clergymen in the conference, met in Jeffersonville to transact various items of church business that included passing upon the character and qualifications of the ministers in its jurisdiction and determining pulpit assignments. De La Matyr's opponents thought it unlikely that a clergyman could perform his pastoral duties satisfactorily if at the same time he attempted to participate extensively in secular affairs. Clearly they expected him to withdraw from the congressional campaign or to request a "location," that is, surrender his position as a parish minister. De La Matyr informed the conference that he had not really expected to be elected when chosen to run for Congress and had accepted the nomination out of a sense of sacrifice. "If my brethren judge [that] I would be a disadvantage to them I will locate,"

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, April 29, 1878; *Indianapolis Sun*, May 4, 1878.

<sup>60</sup> *Indianapolis News*, April 29, 1878.

<sup>61</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, August 17, 1878.

<sup>62</sup> *Indianapolis News*, August 17, 1878; *Indianapolis Journal*, August 26, September 30, 1878.

<sup>63</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, August 31, 1878.

he continued, "but I want them to understand if I am elected I won't lose my conscience. I have not descended to the muddy pool of politics. . . . I expect to preach every Sabbath whether located or not. I can find plenty of ministerial work to do and get more than twice over what I get at Grace church."<sup>64</sup> Following prolonged discussion De La Matyr agreed under pressure to request a location. The conference, in voting to grant his petition, noted that its action should not be interpreted as casting any reflection upon the pastor's personal character or his performance as a clergyman; moreover, the conference declared it would welcome De La Matyr back to the active ministry whenever "the reasons for requesting location shall have ceased."<sup>65</sup> Although De La Matyr's Indianapolis congregation petitioned the conference to reverse its decision and restore him to his post as their pastor, the clerical body reportedly refused to take further action in the matter<sup>66</sup> thereby terminating De La Matyr's brief association with Grace Church.

Greenbackers and Democrats interpreted the action of the conference as evidence of extreme partisanship: De La Matyr had simply been driven from his pulpit because he chose to oppose the Republican party.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, so far as voter sympathies were concerned, the conference may have performed something of a service to De La Matyr in separating him from his clerical post, for the pastor himself had endeavored to avoid any denominational trappings surrounding his candidacy. He had not been nominated for Congress by the Methodist church, he told a crowd at Martinsville in August, and if elected he "would do just as much for a Mohammedan or infidel as for a Methodist."<sup>68</sup> Perhaps emboldened by the actions of the ministerial conference, De La Matyr expanded his appeal on the

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<sup>64</sup> Indianapolis *Sun*, September 21, 1878. De La Matyr's salary at Grace Church was \$2,000, substantially less than the \$3,250 he had earned at Roberts Park but exceeded in the conference in 1878 only by the salary of \$2,750 paid to the new pastor at Roberts Park, Jeremiah Bayliss, and the total salary and housing allowance of \$2,300 paid to the pastor of Indianapolis' Central Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, Reuben Andrus. *Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Session of the South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Year 1878* (Indianapolis, 1878), 188-90. An account of the proceedings of the conference is found in the Indianapolis *Sun*, September 21, 1878. See also the Indianapolis *News* comments, September 13, 14, 16, 1878.

<sup>65</sup> South-East Indiana Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, "Minutes," Vol. III (1877-1889), 30. This is the manuscript volume in the Archives of DePauw University and Indiana Methodism. See also comments in Indianapolis *Sun*, September 21, 1878; Indianapolis *Sentinel*, September 14, 1878.

<sup>66</sup> Indianapolis *News*, September 16, 17, 1878. The quarterly conference of the Grace Church congregation had passed the following resolution on September 10, 1878: "Resolved that it is the sense of this Board that we will gladly welcome the Rev. Gilbert De La Martyr [*sic*] back to this charge providing he is willing to be returned to us." Grace Methodist Episcopal Church, "Minutes of the Quarterly Conference 1868-1882." The Grace Church materials are in the Roberts Park Methodist Church Archives.

<sup>67</sup> Indianapolis *Sun*, September 21, 1878; Indianapolis *Sentinel*, September 14, 1878.

<sup>68</sup> Indianapolis *Sun*, August 17, 1878.

eve of the election promising that if he were sent to Congress, he could legislate on behalf of both saloon keepers and temperance men, as well as Methodists, Catholics, and agnostics.<sup>69</sup>

A majority of those who voted in the seventh district race apparently agreed that the Methodist preacher could be trusted to represent them. He carried three of the four counties in the district defeating Hanna by a slim margin of 18,720 to 17,881 votes. Although he seems to have been particularly attractive to rural voters, his appeal was apparently not limited to that constituency. In Marion County, for example, he defeated Hanna by a margin of nearly six hundred votes in the townships but trailed him by only eighty votes in Indianapolis, the single major city in the congressional district.<sup>70</sup> Interpreting the results as a victory over the forces of intolerance and bigotry, the new congressman-elect expressed special gratitude to Irish Catholics for their support and promised that he would not permit religious prejudice to influence his own actions in Washington.<sup>71</sup> Because Indiana throughout the 1870s scheduled its state and congressional elections in October, De La Matyr was now free to work on behalf of third party candidates in other states which held their contests in November. Traveling east, he campaigned for Greenback tickets in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts during the remainder of October and filled pulpits on Sundays as a visiting man of the cloth.<sup>72</sup>

Because De La Matyr owed his victory substantially to the Democratic party's endorsement of his candidacy, speculation developed that he would forsake the Greenbackers to vote and act as a member of the Democrats' own delegation in the House.<sup>73</sup> De La Matyr insisted, however, that he would not betray the Greenbackers,<sup>74</sup> and throughout his term of service in the Forty-Sixth Congress (1879-1881), he maintained his Greenback identity. Seated on the floor of the House in close proximity to James B. Weaver and others in the third party's small but vocal contingent, he participated fully in the activities of the Greenback delegation.<sup>75</sup>

Much of the new congressman's time was consumed in handling the personal requests of his constituents, some of whom desired passage of private pension bills, while others submitted petitions related

<sup>69</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, October 6, 1878.

<sup>70</sup> *Annual Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Indiana for the Year Ending October 31, 1878*, 117; "Official Canvass of Marion County, October Election, 1878," *Indianapolis Journal*, October 11, 1878.

<sup>71</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, October 19, 1878.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, October 19, 26, November 2, 9, 1878.

<sup>73</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, November 9, 14, 1878; *Indianapolis Sun*, October 19, 1878.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, October 26, 1878.

<sup>75</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., Index, 6-8; *Indianapolis Sun*, March 1, 22, 29, April 5, 1879.

to a variety of matters ranging from important items of pending legislation to the establishment of additional local postal routes.<sup>76</sup> De La Matyr attempted to look after the interests of his home city by introducing legislation to establish a branch of the federal mint in Indianapolis and to make the city a port of delivery to facilitate its import trade. The mint proposal failed to pass, but the bill to make Indianapolis a port of delivery, strongly supported by the city's board of trade, was enacted and signed into law before the termination of the Forty-Sixth Congress.<sup>77</sup> As a gesture to his Catholic constituents, De La Matyr introduced legislation authorizing St. John's Church in Indianapolis to import free of duty an altar from Italy. The bill was passed by both houses and approved by the President early in 1880.<sup>78</sup>

On at least two occasions De La Matyr was called upon to open sessions of the House of Representatives with prayer.<sup>79</sup> He also embellished his speeches and remarks with religious allusions, for example, referring to the concentration of wealth as "the great hinderance to the success of the gospel of Christ" and repeating Jesus' pessimistic observation concerning the chances for a wealthy man to enter Paradise.<sup>80</sup> De La Matyr's attitude toward churches was somewhat ambivalent, however; he opposed the taxation of church property, citing the valuable services performed by religious organizations in the area of education, but he described the pulpit and religious press of the country as "largely on the side of the absorbers of the products of other men's labor."<sup>81</sup> So far as clergymen were concerned, he declared at one point that, in his view, it was "not well to trust ministers any further [*sic*] than other men."<sup>82</sup>

Although a freshman member of the legislative body, De La Matyr entered freely into debates before the House, speaking at length on subjects related to the money question and submitting several items of legislation concerning currency and financial reform. Relying primarily upon arguments developed in his 1878 congressional canvass, he depicted a United States rapidly degenerating to the level of conditions in Europe where, he said, the lords of capital largely determined the course of nations. The economic policies pursued by the federal government since the Civil War, he charged, had been disastrous to America's producing classes, creating conditions less tolerable than those under which the black slaves lived in the antebellum South. Calling attention to his own service as a chaplain with the Union army, De La Matyr insisted that the old sectional issues were no

<sup>76</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 70, 311, 371, 397, 591, 1059, 1271.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Sess., 110, 322, 2004; 3 Sess., 2065, 2442, 2471.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Sess., 189, 319, 1077, 1230.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 Sess., 604, 675.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Sess., 884, 885.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 2626, 886.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 555.

longer relevant, and that continued reference to them by Republican and Democratic orators was only a device to divert attention from the economic crisis confronting America. Protesting his own aversion to violence as a means for social change, he warned nevertheless that the poor would not forever stoically bear their misery.<sup>83</sup>

De La Matyr offered several pieces of proposed legislation in pursuit of Greenback party objectives. Among these were bills to provide for payment of the interest on the federal debt in greenbacks, while refunding the debt itself in greenbacks, and to eliminate national bank notes as a circulating medium replacing them with greenbacks.<sup>84</sup> The legal tenders, he argued, were far superior as a means of exchange to either precious metals or bank currency, for they were less cumbersome than specie and cost the government practically nothing to issue or replace when worn. Moreover, since money was but a creature of law, its legal tender qualities historically determined by governments, authority for issuing the nation's currency should be vested directly in the federal government alone rather than permit private banking institutions, which were frequently unresponsive to the public's monetary needs, to emit a major portion of the currency.<sup>85</sup> The National Banking System was repugnant to De La Matyr not only because of its alleged malevolent influence upon the economy but also because it gathered what he defined as a double measure of interest on its holdings of federal bonds. All national banks were required to own federal securities as a part of their capital, but against these holdings, the banks could issue currency up to ninety per cent of the value of those same bonds. The banks therefore received not only the interest paid them by the federal government on the bonds they owned but also the interest paid by borrowers of the banks' currency in their operations as commercial lending institutions.<sup>86</sup>

More controversial than any of De La Matyr's own proposals was a scheme authored by a Kentuckian, John Chiles, and introduced on his behalf by the Indiana congressman.<sup>87</sup> De La Matyr later said he presented Chiles' petition because he believed it was at least worthy of consideration by the House Committee on Banking and Currency, to which it was referred.<sup>88</sup> Chiles' plan envisioned a vast program of

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 884-87; 1 Sess., 818, 2277, 227, 816-18.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 Sess., 1059, 962.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Sess., Appendix, 56-61.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 59. The Greenback party position on the bank question is stated in the platforms adopted by the party's national conventions in 1878 and 1880. *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1878* (New York, 1883), 807; *Appletons' Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1880* (New York, 1883), 696-97. A brief but useful description of the National Banking System as organized under the legislation of 1863 and 1864 is found in Unger, *The Greenback Era*, 18-19.

<sup>87</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 591.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 819.

internal improvements, financed through the issuance of up to one billion dollars in greenbacks and undertaken both by the federal government itself and by private corporations supplied with federal loans. It would serve the double purpose of placing in circulation a substantial issue of greenbacks and at the same time of putting large numbers of unemployed persons to work on projects like river improvements and flood control.<sup>89</sup> De La Matyr insisted on the floor of Congress and later in an address delivered to an Indianapolis audience that he had introduced the proposals only at the request of Chiles and that, while he approved of the general idea, he did not endorse that portion of the plan involving loans to private companies.<sup>90</sup> His opponents, however, held him responsible for the scheme and took delight in ridiculing it; one Republican member suggested that the money was to be used "for building up all the old, worn-out canals and burst-up railroads in the West" while another claimed that a group of his own constituents desired funds to be appropriated "for the laudable purpose of constructing a narrow-gauge air-line railway to the moon, to ascertain whether or not that luminary is made of green cheese."<sup>91</sup> Indianapolis' Democratic journal, the *Sentinel*, was critical as well: De La Matyr's bill appeared "wild and visionary in the extreme," the editor commented.<sup>92</sup>

The Forty-Sixth Congress enacted none of the legislation sponsored by De La Matyr dealing with the money question.<sup>93</sup> Still, in spite of his inability to influence federal financial policy, he could draw some satisfaction from his role as one of the leading figures in the Greenback delegation. In March, 1880, he willingly accepted re-nomination by the Greenbackers of the seventh district, remarking that he had "no misgivings whatever" as to his duty and promising to work even more diligently for his constituents if elected to a second term.<sup>94</sup>

De La Matyr's chances for reelection in 1880 were contingent upon his success in maintaining the backing of the coalition which had supported him two years earlier, but the Democrats were no longer

<sup>89</sup> De La Matyr explained the provisions and ramifications of Chiles' proposals in a speech to an Indianapolis audience on August 4, 1879. *Indianapolis Sun*, August 9, 1879.

<sup>90</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 819, 951; *Indianapolis Sun*, August 9, 1879.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 1236, 1164. See also the editorial of the *Indianapolis Journal*, April 21, 1879.

<sup>92</sup> *Indianapolis Sentinel*, April 22, 1879.

<sup>93</sup> De La Matyr introduced the following items of legislation related to financial reform in the Forty-Sixth Congress: a bill to replace all National Bank currency with greenbacks, a bill to provide that municipal debts might be funded in greenbacks, a bill to employ greenbacks in a public works program, and a bill to provide for paying the interest on the federal debt and refunding the debt itself in greenbacks. *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 962, 1059.

<sup>94</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, March 10, 17, 1880. A report of the Shelbyville convention and its resolutions is printed in the *Indianapolis Sentinel*, March 5, 1880.

enthusiastic in his behalf. In Congress he had voted with the Democrats on a controversial army appropriations bill,<sup>95</sup> but he had not supported their candidate for Speaker of the House<sup>96</sup> and had been sharp in his criticism of both major parties during House proceedings.<sup>97</sup> His actions for the most part, therefore, were apparently not sufficiently in keeping with Democratic party objectives to warrant an endorsement.<sup>98</sup> The contest in 1880 thus became a three cornered race involving Stanton J. Peelle, the Republican candidate, Casabianca Byfield, the Democratic nominee, and De La Matyr.<sup>99</sup>

The Greenback incumbent canvassed enthusiastically hitting hard at the old issues,<sup>100</sup> but his candidacy was overshadowed by the battle between Byfield and Peelle and by the larger contest for the Presidency, also a feature of the campaign of 1880. For a time Republicans speculated that Byfield would withdraw in favor of De La Matyr in exchange for Greenback concessions in other races,<sup>101</sup> but such an arrangement, if ever contemplated, was not consummated. In August De La Matyr proposed a series of joint public debates with his opponents, but neither Byfield nor Peelle apparently accepted the challenge.<sup>102</sup> An additional factor complicated De La Matyr's task, for his district had been redrawn since 1878 and was now partially unfamiliar to him. The seventh district now included only Marion County (Indianapolis) of his former constituency together with two new counties, Hancock and Shelby.<sup>103</sup>

Indiana's Greenback vote declined sharply in 1880 from the level attained two years earlier. The state ticket received substantially less than half as many votes in 1880 as in 1878, and Greenback representation in the new state legislature was reduced from fourteen to three. The Republican party, which carried Indiana narrowly in both the presidential contest and in the state races, was victorious in the

<sup>95</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 270; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, April 9, 1879.

<sup>96</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 5; *Indianapolis Sun*, March 22, 1879; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, March 28, 1879.

<sup>97</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Cong., 1 Sess., 227, 816-17; 2 Sess., 886.

<sup>98</sup> The Indianapolis Democratic organ had been sharp in its criticisms of De La Matyr's actions in the House on several occasions. *Indianapolis Sentinel*, March 28, April 22, May 24, 1879. In March, 1880, the editor commented that although the Greenbackers had renominated De La Matyr for Congress, he was inclined to believe that De La Matyr, "after March, 1881, will be urgently called to reenter upon his great life work of preaching." *Ibid.*, March 5, 1880. See also the editorial of the *Shelbyville Democrat* opposing an endorsement of De La Matyr, reprinted in the *Indianapolis Journal*, July 5, 1880.

<sup>99</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, March 10, July 28, 1880; *Indianapolis Journal*, July 22, August 4, 1880; *Indianapolis News*, August 4, 1880; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, March 5, July 22, August 5, 1880.

<sup>100</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, August 11, 18, 25, September 8, 15, 22, 29, October 13, 1880; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, August 30, September 25, 1880.

<sup>101</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, September 17, 18, 20, 1880; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, September 18, 1880.

<sup>102</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, August 18, 25, September 1, 1880.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, March 3, 1880.

seventh congressional district as well; Peelle received 17,610 votes to 16,806 for Byfield and only 2,135 for De La Matyr.<sup>104</sup>

Disappointed in his unsuccessful bid for reelection, De La Matyr promised to continue his work by devoting his time over the next two years to lecturing on the topic of "political economy."<sup>105</sup> When the Forty-Sixth Congress adjourned in March, 1881, he set out on a speaking tour that carried him from Maine to Missouri, reportedly drawing large and enthusiastic audiences including one estimated at seven thousand which heard him conduct the Sunday morning services held on July 3 in conjunction with a Greenback camp meeting in Lansing, Michigan.<sup>106</sup>

De La Matyr was in need of more than large audiences, however, for his family responsibilities had grown in the past year. In June, 1880, he married for the third time. The new Mrs. De La Matyr, the former Mrs. W. C. Sylla, was a Brockport, New York, widow and teacher. She brought to the marriage three daughters, and together with De La Matyr's own son from his second marriage, they comprised a large family to support.<sup>107</sup> The Greenback Lecture Bureau had planned to maintain De La Matyr and others in the field through the sale of reprints of their speeches, but results in this regard were not encouraging.<sup>108</sup> The Greenback party was rapidly declining, its organization deteriorating in all but a few states; crowds of the faithful might still gather to hear the old gospel of paper money proclaimed, but reformers generally were turning to other issues, like "anti-monopolism" and, eventually, "free silver."<sup>109</sup>

Only meager information has been located concerning De La Matyr's whereabouts and activities between 1881 and 1884 although one source places him in Florida during that period as the proprietor of a plantation.<sup>110</sup> Ultimately, he returned to his former calling. Re-admitted to the full time Methodist ministry in September, 1884, he served as the pastor for two Denver, Colorado, congregations: the Lawrence Street Methodist Episcopal Church from 1884 to 1886 and the Evans Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church from 1886 to 1888. In 1889 he was listed as an "endowment agent" for Denver Univer-

<sup>104</sup> *Tribune Almanac for 1879*, 66; *Tribune Almanac for 1881* (New York, 1881), 48-49; *Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Indiana, for the Year Ending October 31, 1880* (Indianapolis, 1881), 104, unpaginated sheet following page 130. Contained in Part I of the Indiana, *Documentary Journal* (1881), (Indiana State Library).

<sup>105</sup> From an interview with De La Matyr published in the Chicago *Tribune* as reprinted in the *Indianapolis Sun*, November 3, 1880.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, March 23, April 13, 27, May 4, 11, 25, June 8, July 13, 1881.

<sup>107</sup> *Indianapolis Journal*, July 5, 1880. De La Matyr's son Charles was still living with his father when De La Matyr died. Charles was employed in a twine factory. *Akron City Directory, 1892-93* (Akron, Ohio, 1892), 250.

<sup>108</sup> *Indianapolis Sun*, March 9, 23, 30, June 8, 1881.

<sup>109</sup> Haynes, *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, 144-52, 202 ff.; Nash, *Third Parties in American Politics*, 163-70.

<sup>110</sup> *Indianapolis News*, May 18, 1892.

sity, but in that same year he moved to Akron, Ohio, where he became pastor of First Methodist Church, a congregation of more than nine hundred members.<sup>111</sup> Although retired from active politics, De La Matyr apparently never abandoned the doctrines of Greenbackism. In February, 1892, he addressed the Summit County, Ohio, Evangelical Association on the topic "Christian Socialism." Confining his remarks almost entirely to the financial question, he depicted a grasping money power and rehearsed its activities over the past thirty years in gathering wealth and power into its hands. "There has got to be a revolution here," he warned with the old fervor. "Be assured of it, it's coming. There's peril in the air. You cannot permanently make slaves of the American freemen." To alleviate the republic's distress De La Matyr prescribed a large dose of legal tender paper currency, administered gradually and to a final figure of sixty dollars per capita in circulation.<sup>112</sup>

De La Matyr's address to the county evangelical association was apparently his last major pronouncement on the currency question. He died three months later in Akron on May 17, 1892, at age sixty-five. His death, attributed to cancer of the bladder, followed an extended illness of several weeks and a final period of intense suffering. A large number of persons attended the funeral services where the remains of the deceased lay surrounded by floral tributes from religious and military organizations, together with various objects that represented in rather heavy symbolism the many facets of his career, including a Bible, an army canteen, a shock of wheat emblematic of a fruitful life, and a stack of rifles beneath Confederate and Union flags.<sup>113</sup>

Remembered in death as "Christian, sage, preacher and reformer,"<sup>114</sup> Gilbert De La Matyr had pursued a career touched with responsibilities not typically associated with a man of the cloth, nor universally appreciated as compatible with the profession of a clergyman. For De La Matyr, however, there was no conflict of interests

<sup>111</sup> *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1884* (New York, n.d.), 221-22, 346; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1885* (New York, n.d.), 229; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1886* (New York, n.d.), 234, 364; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1887* (New York, n.d.), 309, 471; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1888* (New York, n.d.), 243, 382; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1889* (New York, n.d.), 266; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Fall Conferences of 1890* (New York, n.d.), 288, 305, 306, 457.

<sup>112</sup> *Akron (Ohio) Beacon and Republican*, February 8, 1892.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, May 20, 1892. Obituaries for De La Matyr are also in the *Indianapolis Journal*, May 19, 1892; *Indianapolis Sentinel*, May 19, 1892; *Indianapolis News*, May 18, 1892; *New York Times*, May 18, 1892; and *Cincinnati (Ohio) Western Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1892.

<sup>114</sup> *Akron (Ohio) Beacon and Republican*, May 20, 1892.

or loyalties apparent in his activities. Conceiving of America as a nation special in the sight of God, he obviously saw nothing reprehensible in blending political and clerical talents in a life of public service.

As a controversial but highly regarded member of the Indianapolis clergy, De La Matyr probably brought to his adopted Greenback party a certain degree of respectability that contributed to its legitimacy in the eyes of the voters. In Congress he favored programs that were ridiculed by his opponents as impractical or dangerous but from a later perspective appear only somewhat ahead of their time. His subsequent return to the ministry seems not to have been made at the expense of his political convictions, for he remained a vocal currency reformer at the end of his life. In a larger sense De La Matyr's career reveals a comparatively early perception by a clergyman of some of the problems associated with large concentrations of wealth and the plight of disadvantaged classes in the new urban and industrial order.