

those who had been most faithful to him would be most sorely slaughtered; and he deemed that he, who had never been seen on a field of battle, had no right to fly without fighting. Probably he felt that when a monarch cannot preserve his throne, nothing becomes him better than to make his grave beneath its ruins." Sir John Acton closed his lecture with the expression of a hope that the United States would not undertake the government of Mexico. "A confederacy," he observed, "loses its true character when it rules over dependencies; and a democracy lives a threatened life that admits millions of a strange and inferior race which it can neither assimilate nor absorb." The warning was unneeded, for the days of American Imperialism were not yet.

Sir John Acton stood again for Bridgnorth, this time unsuccessfully, at the General Election of November, 1868. His personal friend and political leader, Mr. Gladstone, became Prime Minister in December of the same year, and his first legislative work was the disestablishment of the Irish Church. With this policy Sir John Acton, not as a Catholic, but as a Liberal, was in full and complete sympathy. He regarded it as "no isolated fact, but an indication of a change which is beginning to affect all the nations of Christendom, and bears witness to the consciousness that political obligation is determined, not by arbitrary maxims of expediency, but by definite and consistent principles." "The political connection," he added, that is, the Liberal party, "which, in spite of many errors and shortcomings, has been identified with the development of our constitutional liberties, and with the advance of science in our legislation, has entered on a new phase of its existence. And it follows a wise and resolute leader, at whose call the nation has arisen, for the first time in history, to the full height of its imperial vocation."

Although, as has been said, Acton held that the two great political questions of the time were first the relations of the Church with the State, and secondly, the reform of the Land Laws, events were impending which affected him for a time far more deeply than either.