

delivered on the 18th of January 1866, is now only to be found in the *Bridgnorth Journal* for the 20th. Its subject is "The Civil War in America: Its Place in History." Nothing can be more characteristic than the tone and temper of this discourse. Though dated only a few months after the fall of Richmond, when, as Acton says in one of these letters, he "broke his heart over the surrender of Lee," it is as calm and judicial, not to say as dry, as if he were investigating an antiquarian problem. Its dryness never becomes dulness. Unless, however, the Literary and Scientific Institution of Bridgnorth was far above the ordinary level of such bodies, they must have been puzzled and perplexed by the paradoxical subtlety which traced the causes of the war back to the birth of the American Constitution. "Slavery," he said, "was not the cause of secession, but the reason of its failure." Then what was the cause of secession? According to Sir John Acton, it was the failure of Jefferson, Hamilton, and their colleagues to provide against the omnipotence of the majority, which he regarded as inconsistent with true freedom. They might have answered, if they could have been heard, that they had made the method of choosing a President indirect, and had given the Supreme Court control even over Congress itself. The first expedient had, no doubt, entirely failed, and the electoral college was a mere machine for registering the popular vote. But the Supreme Court was a substantial reality, and it had before the war decided that a fugitive slave could be reclaimed by his master even in a free State. Nobody will now dispute Sir John Acton's proposition that by the middle of the nineteenth century slavery was an anachronism. Yet, if the Southern States had been more instead of less numerous than the Northern, they would have probably won, and they would then undoubtedly have set up a great Slave Power in the heart of western civilisation. The immediate, or proximate, cause of hostilities was not slavery, but the claim of South Carolina to secede from the Union. Not till the third year of the war did Lincoln proclaim the abolition of