John Morley

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THE ROMANES LECTURE
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THE greatest of the Florentines has likened worldly fame to the breath of the wind that blows now one way and now

another way, and changes name as it changes quarter. From every quarter, and all the points of the historical compass, the veering gusts of public judgment have carried incessantly along from country to country and from generation to generation, with countless mutations of aspect and of innuendo, the sinister renown of Machiavelli. Before he had been dead fifty years, his name had become a byword and a proverb. From Thomas Cromwell and Elizabeth; from the massacre of St. Bartholomew, through League and Fronde, through Louis XIV., Revolution, and Empire, down to the third Napoleon and the days of December; from the Lutheran Reformation down to the blood and iron of Prince Bismarck; from Ferdinand the Catholic down to Don Carlos; from the Sack of Rome down to Gioberti, Mazzini, and Cavour; in all the great countries all over the West, this singular shade is seen haunting men's minds, exciting, frightening, provoking, perplexing them, like some unholy necromancer, bewildering reason and conscience by riddles and paradox. So far from withering or fading, his repute and his writings seem to attract deeper consideration as time goes on, and they have never been objects of more copious attention all over Europe than in the half-century that is now closing.

In the long and fierce struggle, from the fifteenth century onwards, among rival faiths and between contending forces in civil government, Machiavelli was hated and attacked from every side. In the great rising up of new types of life in the Church, and of life in the State, his name stood for something that partisans of old and new alike professed to abhor. The Church first tolerated, if it did not patronise, his

writings; but soon, under the double stress of the Reformation in Germany on one hand, and the pagan Renaissance in Italy on the other, it placed him in that Index of forbidden books which now first (1557), in dread of the new art of printing, crept into formal existence. He speedily came to be denounced as schismatical, heretical, perverse, the impious foe of faith and truth. He was burnt in effigy. His book was denounced as written with the very fingers of Satan himself. The vituperation of the sixteenth century has never been surpassed either among learned or unlearned men, and the dead Machiavelli came in for his full share of unmeasured words. As Voltaire has said of Dante that his fame is secure because nobody reads him, so in an inverse sense, the bad name of Machiavelli grew worse, because men reproached, confuted, and cursed, but never read. Catholics attacked him as the enemy of the Holy See, and Protestants attacked him because he looked to a restoration of the spirit of ancient Rome, instead of a restoration of the faith and discipline of the primitive Church. While both of them railed at him, Catholic and Protestant each reviled the other as Machiavellist. In France national prejudice against the famous Italian queen-mother hit Machiavelli too, for his book was declared to be the oracle of Catherine de Medici, to whose father it was dedicated; it was held responsible for the Bartholomew massacre and the Huguenot wars. In Spain opposite ground was taken, and he who elsewhere was blamed as the advocate of persecution, was abominated here as the enemy of wars of religion, and the advocate of that monstrous thing, civil toleration. In England, royalists called him an atheist, and roundheads called him a Jesuit. A