

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1905), and the Carnegie Corporation for the Advancement of Civilization (1911). He is probably best remembered for establishing Carnegie libraries in many small American towns, the community providing site and maintenance, Carnegie constructing and equipping the building. Mark Twain, who looked upon Carnegie as an entertaining human specimen, was both amused and irritated by his misplaced pride in trivial matters, and by his repetitious stories of meeting prominent people. For Mark Twain's comments, see *MTE*:35-60.

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*A Lotos Club dinner for the governor of New York was accompanied by the proper ceremony and good humor for which the club and Frank Lawrence, its president and dinner chairman, were noted. On the toast list were Republican party stalwarts, Vice-President Roosevelt and Chauncey Depew; the independent editor, St. Clair McKelway; and the mugwump, Mark Twain. The latter arrived late in the evening but in time to be the final speaker.*

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## Dinner Speech

*Lotos Club Dinner for Governor Benjamin B. Odell, Jr.,  
New York, March 23, 1901*

I lately had the pleasure and the honor of visiting Governor Odell on matters of public business in his political home in the State House, in the bosom of his political family, the legislature, a family made up in the proportion of three Republicans for business to one Democrat for ornament and social elevation. I went up there without salary to plead against the reduction, the proposed reduction, of the citizen's liberties, and to vote against the Ramapo bill in the Senate, if I could get a chance to enter upon the floor of the House, and to introduce a police bill. Not because they were running short of police bills. And if the governor would promise to sign it, my bill would pass. I am privileged

on the floor of the House anywhere in all the legislative bodies in the world, a thing that happened by accident rather than merit.

I wanted to introduce that police bill. It seemed to me that it was a very good idea. Now it was not like any other police bill that has ever been introduced anywhere. There was a little self-interest in it, here and there, and my scheme was to have none but authors on the police. Let us abolish policemen who carry clubs and revolvers, and put in a squad of poets armed to the teeth with poems on spring and love. Well, for myself, I wanted to be the chief of police, not because I thought I was really qualified for the place, but because I was tired and wanted a rest. I wanted Mr. Howells for first deputy, not because Mr. Howells knows anything about those things, but because he was tired too. A lot of us authors are tired. And now that Mr. Depew has published speeches and other books, and has become an author, I wanted him for second deputy. Not because he is tired, because he isn't, but because he is one of those men who do all things well, and he could run the police business and I could take the salary! And, besides, more than that, he and I have a tie. Indeed, we are members of the celebrated class of '53 of Yale, only he was there before I was. And another thing, he is a Missourian, like me. And in the Missourians there is no guile. And there is a nearer tie still. When I was born I was a member of a firm of twins. And one of them disappeared, and it has been borne in upon me of late that the personal resemblance between Depew and me, and the general handsome style and grace of form and figure and things of that sort, and activity of speech, and—well, it proves to me that that long lost twin is here!

Well, I wanted—I wanted Stedman, and Aldrich, and Brander Matthews, and Crawford, and Cable for the Broadway squad, and others for the red light district, and others still to take care of the pretty manicurists, and to modify the activities of the cadets. Now, Depew could do that.

If my bill passed I'd just fill up the red light district with poets—the best people we've got—armed not with barbaric clubs, but with their own poems, and I would make them corral those poor unkempt people of that locality and I would have my poetic policemen read their poems to them until that region was so elevated and uplifted and reformed that the inhabitants over there themselves wouldn't know it. I would assign the most soulful poets to that district, all heavily armed with their poems. I would station them on the corners after they had rounded up all the depraved people of the district so they could not escape, and then have them read from their poems to the poor unfortunates. The plan would be very effective in causing an emigration of the depraved element.

Now, that bill I drew myself. That was my dream; it was my hope; my ambition; but it failed like so many bright dreams in this disappointing world. Governor Odell wouldn't favor it. He said that authors were well enough in their place, but he said, "It wouldn't do for me to leave the city unprotected." Now, that remark was irrelevant. It wasn't discreet. The very thing I was trying to do was to protect the city. He said the authors as police—that it would be worse than Ramapo, but I can't agree with him. Ramapo is authorized to bring on a water famine—authors never do that.

Well, I shall never forget to be grateful to the legislature up there for the hospitalities extended to me and for the chance that I had to hear a reverend gentleman speak from his impromptu speech which he read from typewritten manuscript, and in which he did for me again what has been done so often before—blasted my character—what was left of it. He said that if I had my just deserts I would not be a guest there, I should be a guest somewhere else maybe, or be dangling from a lamp post somewhere. He was telling about the last time that I broke jail—and said that I carried off several pairs of boots belonging to other folks. This statement was a lie, only that; and he knew that perfectly well. He was there a guest in that place, and so was I; and he was so interested in drawing my character in the past—although he came there to absolutely obliterate me before the people. He hadn't anything personal against me, except that I was opposed to the political war, and he said I was a traitor and didn't go to fight in the Philippines. That doesn't prove anything. That doesn't prove a man is a traitor. Where's the evidence? There are seventy-five millions of us working our patriotism. He did the same thing himself. It would be an entirely different question if the country's life was in danger, its existence at stake; then—that is one kind of patriotism—we would all come forward and stand by the flag, and stop thinking about whether the nation was right or wrong; but when there is no question that the nation is in any way in danger, but only some little war away off, then it may be that on the question of politics the nation is divided, half patriots and half traitors, and no man can tell which from which.

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*Text* / Composite, based upon: "Lotos Club's Welcome to the Governor," *Times*, March 24, 1901; "Poets as Policemen," *MTS*(10):77, a misdated text; "Samuel L. Clemens at the Dinner to Benjamin B. Odell, Jr., March 23, 1901," *Lotos*:12–15.

*Ramapo bill* / A bill to annul the charter of the Ramapo Water Company of Brooklyn. It provoked a long wrangle in the New York legislature (1900–01) and extensive press coverage, in which the