



# The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today

*Mark Twain, Charles Dudley Warner*

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## **The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today** Mark Twain, Charles Dudley Warner

"Washington is an interesting city to any of us. It seems to become more and more interesting the oftener we visit it. Perhaps the reader has never been there? Very well. ... "The prominent features you soon locate and get familiar with; first you glimpse the ornamental upper works of a long, snowy palace projecting above a grove of trees, and a tall, graceful white dome with a statue on it surmounting the palace and pleasantly contrasting with the background of blue sky. That building is the capitol; gossips will tell you that by the original estimates it was to cost \$12,000,000, and that the government did come within \$21,200,000 of building it for that sum. "Now you wrench your gaze loose, and you look down in front of you and see the broad Pennsylvania Avenue stretching straight ahead for a mile or more till it brings up against the iron fence in front of a pillared granite pile, the Treasury building-an edifice that would command respect in any capital. ... Beyond the Treasury is a fine large white barn, with wide unhandsome grounds about it. The President lives there. It is ugly enough outside, but that is nothing to what it is inside. Dreariness, flimsiness, bad taste reduced to mathematical completeness is what the inside offers to the eye, if it remains yet what it always has been." The Gilded Age was the only novel Mark Twain wrote with a collaborator, and its title very quickly became synonymous with the graft, materialism, and corruption in public life in post-Civil War America. Although more than a century has passed since its publication, this satire of greed, political corruption and social life in Washington, D.C., still rings with astonishing and deadly accuracy today.

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