

THE MAN WITH THE MOLES 3

The colonel was looking at the newspaper—"Was it money?" said he; for a glance at the dabbled sheet had brought him the headings of the stock quotations: "Another Sharp Break in Stocks. New Low Records." It *had* been money. Later, after what needed to be done was over, after doctors and officers of the law were gone, Colonel Winter heard the wretched story. A young, reckless, fatally attractive Southerner, rich friends, college societies, joyous times; nothing really wicked or vicious, only a surrender of youth and friendship and pleasure, and then the day of reckoning—duns, college warnings, the menace of black disgrace. The young fellow was an orphan, with no near kindred save one brother much older than he. The brother was reputed to be rich, according to Southern standards, and young Mercer, who had just come into a modest patrimony of his own, invested in his brother's ventures. As to the character of these ventures, whether flimsy or substantial, the colonel's informants were absolutely ignorant. All they knew of the elder Mercer was that he was often in New York and had "a lot to do with Wall Street." He wasn't a broker; no, he was trying to raise money to hang on to some big properties that he had;