

XX

THE LITTLE GREAT WORLD

MR. MALCOLM PIERS stood before the mirror tying a white bow at the top of an effulgent shirt bosom. It was a room in Prince George's best hotel, and it had been his room for six weeks. His brown ruddiness had paled a little, and his face looked harder and older than the wear of only two months warranted. Unhappiness or perplexity, or indeed any emotion, caused Jack to look like a hardy young villain. Only the eyes told a tale; a profound discontent lurked in their blue depths.

He finished dressing and took down his overcoat and topper. Evening dress became him well, and he knew it, and took a certain satisfaction in the fact, for all that the world was going badly. His abounding health and his hardness marked him out from the usual dancing man. Hunching into his overcoat, he put out the light, and with the act the night out-of-doors leaped into being. Struck by it, he went to the window and flung it up.

The stars were like old friends suddenly brought to mind. So they shone over his own country where there were no grosser lights to outface them impudently; so