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ARAMINTA

CHAPTER I

THE OLD WOMAN OF HILL STREET

AN old lady who lived in Hill Street was making arrangements to enter upon her seventy-fourth year.

It was a quarter to nine in the morning by the ormolu clock on the chimney-piece; and the old lady, somewhat shrivelled, very wide-awake, and in the absence of her toupee from the position it was accustomed to grace—at present it was in the centre of the dressing-table—looking remarkably like a macaw, was sitting up in bed. Cushions supported her venerable form, and an Indian shawl, the gift of her Sovereign, covered the aged shoulders.

There were people who did not hesitate to describe her as a very worldly-minded, not to say very wicked, old lady. The former of these epithets there is none to dispute; in regard to the latter, let our silence honour the truth. It is far from our intention to asperse the character of one who has always passed as a Christian; nor do we ascribe to human frailty the sinister significance that some people do. But as far as this old lady is concerned it is a point upon which we have no bigotry.

If sheer worldliness of mind is akin to wickedness, the old woman who lived in Hill Street must have come