



# INNOCENT: A TALE OF MODERN LIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE OLD HOUSE.

**T**HE Eastwoods lived in an old house in one of the southwestern suburbs of London. It was one of those houses which, dating only from the prosaic age of Queen Anne, have come to be picturesque in their way—which they were never intended to be—and are comfortable, which they were intended to be, to a degree rarely attained by all our modern efforts. What advances we have made since then in every way! And yet all Belgravia did not hold a house so thoroughly good for living in, so pleasant, so modest, so dignified, and so refined, as the big brick house, partly whitewashed, partly retaining its native red, lichened all over with brown and yellow mosses, in which, at the outset of this history, Mrs. Eastwood lived with her children. It had been built by the Eastwoods of the time, more than a century and a half ago. It had given shelter to various generations since then—their mortal inn and lodging, the everlasting dwelling-place of their memory. They had left layers, so to speak, of old furniture, from the japanned screens and cabinets of the founder, to the hideous haircloth and mahogany of George IV.; and pictures and knick-knacks, and precious old china for which collectors would have given its weight in gold. All these riches were not shown off to advantage, as they might have been. You stumbled on them in corners; you found them in out-of-the-way cupboards, in rooms that were rarely used. In short, you could not