

ROSE-BELFORD'S
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THE FALLEN LEAVES.

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The Prologue.

I.

THE resistless influences which are one day to reign supreme over our poor hearts, and to shape the sad short course of our lives, are sometimes of mysteriously remote origin, and find their devious ways to us through the hearts and the lives of strangers.

While the young man whose troubled career it is here proposed to follow was wearing his first jacket, and bowling his first hoop, a domestic misfortune, falling on a household of strangers, was destined nevertheless to have its ultimate influence over his happiness, and to shape the whole aftercourse of his life.

For this reason, some First Words must precede the Story, and must present the brief narrative of what happened in the household of strangers. By what devious ways the event here related affected the chief personage of these pages, as he grew to manhood, it will be the business of the story to

trace, over land and sea, among men and women, in bright days and dull days alike, until the end is reached and the pen (God willing) is put back in the desk.

II.

Old Benjamin Ronald (of the Stationer's Company) took a young wife at the ripe age of fifty, and carried with him into the holy state of matrimony some of the habits of his bachelor life.

As a bachelor, he had never willingly left his shop (situated in that exclusively commercial region of London which is called 'the City') from one year's end to another. As a married man, he persisted in following the same monotonous course; with this one difference, that he now had a woman to follow it with him. 'Travelling by railway,' he explained to his wife, 'will make your head ache—it makes *my* head ache. Travelling by sea will make you sick—it makes *me* sick. If you want change of air, every sort of air is to be found in the