

# THE CHALLONERS :

## THE LAST LEAVES OF A FAMILY HISTORY.

BY MRS. R. ROTHWELL, AMHERST ISLAND.

(Continued.)

### CHAPTER III.

A brilliant June sunshine gleamed over Charlote. The warm beams shone into the room where Mrs. Falconer was seated, and were reflected, as from marble, from her pale, grave features, now more pale and grave than ever, to be absorbed in the heavy folds of her sombre widow's dress. Widowed! Yes, though even yet she cannot believe it. Though three weeks have elapsed since her husband was carried to his last home, she still thinks she hears his step in the hall; still looks up when she hears the opening door, in the expectation that she shall see him enter; still thinks of him as alive—not as in his last days, a helpless invalid, dependent on her for the fulfilment of his last desires, but as in the days gone by, in the days of his strength and manhood, when she had happiness within her grasp and slighted it. She dreams that he has but left her for a little time, and will soon return; but her eye falls on her black robes, and she wakes to the truth. Too late!

She is seated now before a desk which lies open on the table, filled with papers that he has left for her to examine, select from, and destroy. She touches each gently as though it were a sentient thing; they have been in his hands, his eyes have looked upon them, and they are hallowed by his memory in hers. Why is it so? Why are we so careless of those we love while with us, thereby laying up such store of repentance when we lose them? Why cannot we give the living, loving presence—the heart so keen to feel, and the brain so quick to understand—some of the tenderness we bestow on the senseless relics of the dead?

A visitor—an unwelcome one evidently,

from the expression that crosses her face. It is her brother, Allan Challoner.

"Are you very busy, Charlotte, or can you hear a message from your father, of which I am the bearer?" He sat down as he spoke, not in the stream of sunshine, but in a shaded corner of the room.

"I am at your disposal," she replied as she closed the desk; something in the action brought to his mind (did she remember it too?) her closing of that other desk six years before. His manner was perceptibly colder when he spoke again.

"I was never a good hand at diplomacy," he said. "I had better give the message in plain words. Charlotte, your father wants you and the boy to come and live with him."

"Why?"

"Because, in the first place, I suppose he thinks you might prefer it to remaining here alone; also there can be no doubt that he would be very glad. He has missed you very much, and of course he finds it dull when I am obliged—when I am away. Perhaps, too, my being Percie's guardian—"

"I do not see that that makes any difference," she interrupted.

"Very little indeed," said Allan. "I am going to give up the guardianship."

"You do not mean that, Allan?"

"That and everything else, Charlotte;" he sighed, though he spoke firmly. "I came to tell you that I can live this life no longer. The truth must be made known."

Mrs. Falconer could scarcely become paler, but her face took a leaden hue, and she trembled very much. Allan, absorbed in his own gloomy thoughts, did not remark her scared looks and agitation, and as she continued silent he spoke again:

"I can bear it no longer. The constant