

The North Branch Democrat.

HARVEY SICKLER, Proprietor.

"TO SPEAK HIS THOUGHTS IS EVERY FREEMAN'S RIGHT."—Thomas Jefferson.

TERMS: \$2.00 PER ANNUM

NEW SERIES,

TUNKHANNOCK, PA., WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 1865.

VOL. 4 NO. 30

A weekly Democrat
paper, devoted to Pol-
itics, News, the Arts
and Sciences &c. Pub-
lished every Wednes-
day, at Tunkhannock,
Wyoming County, Pa.
BY HARVEY SICKLER.



Terms—1 copy 1 year, (in advance) \$2.00,
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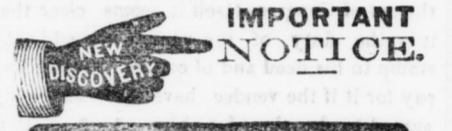
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are recommended, and particularly in all cases arising
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from Weakness and Debility, Uterine Discharges,
Nervousness, &c., &c., and they
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various other remedies in vain, owe a renewal of
their health and strength wholly to the efficacy of
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Select Story,

FRANCIS HALEY.

BY CLARA AUGUSTA.

CHAPTER I.

A long stretch of dull, lured sky—the
fiery sun sinking from view behind a ridge of
gray, blue hills—a dark—musky vapor
hanging over the waste, which was bounded
on one side by a line of rank willows, and on
the other by the sluggish waters of a shal-
low river. The south-east wind blew up
sickly and chill from the distant sea, and sent
a shudder through the leafless branches of
the woodbine still clinging to the casement.
Francis Haley closed the window, let down
the curtain, and turned inward to the scant
fire burning on the brick hearth. The red
glow lit up her face, but the warm light could
not make that face other than it was—pale
and hopelessly ugly, save for the sweet eyes
and heavy masses of golden hair.
"It's time to go to bed, Frank," said
a querulous voice from the depths of the
great arm-chair in the corner. "In my days
girls didn't stand stargazing, and the cows
waiting to be milked."

Francis put some more fuel on the fire,
took down the wooden pails from the "dress-
er," and went out. The cows were not in the
yard; she had to go down into the pas-
ture, through the damp grass and across the
swamp, and drive them up.
Ino, her little gray and white kitten fol-
lowed her. She stooped to pat the silken
head, lifted for its accustomed caress. "You
are all I have now, Ino. There are only you
and I," she said, half sadly.
Ino climbed to her shoulder and laid his
soft head against her cheek. After all, there
was more sympathy in the brute creation than
we dream of. God knows we all see through
a glass so darkly that our wise judgment is a
thing of error.

Francis hugged him tight, then put him
down and went to her work. She had finish-
ed, and was putting up the bars—stopped
to listen to a blated whippoorwill, that forget-
ting his natal June had long passed, was
disturbing the silence of the October twi-
light.
A quick step crushed the crisp grass be-
hind her, Squire Evelyn took the foaming
pails from her hands.
"They are heavy for you, Frank; let me
carry them."
Ino ran away, and sought refuge in the
old oak before the door. Francis followed
the Squire into the dairy. He set the pails
down and touched her arm.
"Come out a moment, I wish to speak with
you."

"Will you not go into the house?"
"No, it is a freer atmosphere outside."
He drew her to a seat beneath the oak,
decayed and old—her dead father had placed
it there for her when she was a mere child.
Squire Evelyn took her hand in his, and
his naturally stern voice softened as he spoke
—"Francis, have you ever heard aught against
my character?"
She looked at him with surprise.
"Never. The whole town knows your
uprightness."
"Thank you. I asked you the question,
because I want to ask you another of far
greater moment to me. Francis Haley will
you be my wife?"
She started back from him, flushing to
the very edge of her hair. Even in the dim
light he saw the swift rush of color.
"Do not decide hastily, as I see you are
about to do. I want your answer only after
mature reflection. Understand me fully.—
I am forty-five and you are twenty-four—
twenty-one years' difference. I am rich and
you are poor; and you are killing yourself
with hard work, while I, a strong man, live
at my ease. Yet do not think I would mar-
ry you because I pity you. Far from it. I
am not so unselfish. I want a wife. I
know no other woman for whom I could
feel sufficient respect to give her that place
—none save you. You know something of
my early life. You know that I have lived
single until middle age, because she whom I
loved in youth fled from me to the arms of
another. And last of all, Francis, I love you.
Not with a young man's passion, but with
the strength of riper years—you only utterly
and entirely. And now I give you a week
to decide. Think of the life that lies before
you—think of the helpless woman you will
care for so nobly to the end—think of all the
burdens your slight shoulders must bear, and
remember how more than willingly I would
carry them all for you. Next Saturday night
I shall be here for my answer."

He pressed the hand he held, almost shud-
dering at its iciness; folded the shawl she
was letting slip to the ground, over the pas-
sive form of Francis, and left her to herself.
She leaned back against the tree, her eyes
looking straight forward into the gathering
gloom, but seeing only inward. Ino came
down and purred around her now that the
stranger was gone, but he got no answering
caress from his mistress. Francis was
thinking—thinking deeply.
She took in the subject fully. She was

weighing it in all its bearings, just as he had
told her to do.

Poor, yes, so she was, her only heritage
the few acres of barren land, and the dilapi-
dated old homestead, where the brief, happy
life of her parents had been spent. She
thanked God sincerely that they had died
before the evil days had come. The property
her father left was ample; but his only
son, and her brother, was a reckless spend
thrift, and at the early age of twenty he had
squandered everything save his poor home,
and that had been bequeathed to Francis
solely.

Five years previously—Francis shivered as
she recalled it—George Haley had been mis-
sioner from his home. Three weary days—oh,
such desolate, fearful days!—the search
went on, and then—they found him early
one November morning, stark and dead—
drowned in the sluggish stream that skirted
the farm. Whether he met death accident-
ally, or whether he took his wretched life
into his own hands and sacrificed it, God
only knew!

After that, Francis led a dreary life. Her
grandmother—so she called her always,
though she was in fact only the step mother
of Francis' mother, was a sour-tempered
woman, given to fault-finding; and, being
nearly helpless from a paralytic shock, was
a sad burden on the feeble strength of the
girl.

True, Francis might have renounced her,
and let the town look after its poor, but
such a thought never entered her mind.—
The sense of duty was strong with her. She
must meet that old woman, one day, before
the face of God and the angels, and she want-
ed to be able to stand up with unshrinking
eyes and tell them that she had done what
she could.

To night she reviewed the painful past
and then she looked into the future. Oh,
how gaunt and grim it appeared to her!
She was beyond her first girlhood. Care
had made her old before her time. Already
the gray, rosy village girls called her an old
maid. She looked still a little beyond, and
saw her life going down to the grave—alone,
uncheered, uncared for. No voice of kindred
to soothe her, no pitying hand of affection to
smooth the cold forehead which death had
touched with his frozen lips.

But it was not so much dying alone—for
God would be there—it was living without
love that she dreaded. Years ago, in her
shy, girlish heart, she had dreamed of the
time when she should have a lover. That
time had just come to her, but oh, how sadly
different from what she had pictured. She
had received her first offer, probably her last.
She looked at the decaying, gloomy old
house before her, and thought of Evelyn Hall
with its sunny parlors, its spacious cham-
bers, the grand, ancestral trees around it, and
lastly of its generous master.

Francis knew Evelyn for more than kind.
She remembered whose hand had put flow-
ers on the coffin of her erring brother, and
who had drawn her away from the new
made grave to remind her that life still had
duties for her, and still claimed of her exert-
ion.

Do not blame her if she thought of all
these things, if they influenced her decision.
She was a woman, with a woman's hunger
for love and care, and if she sinned, it was
only because nature craved it for her. She
went into the house fully decided, and when,
a week afterwards, Squire Evelyn came for
her reply, she met him at the door.
"I will marry you," she said quietly, but
do not ask me yet for love. I, who know so
little of it must wait to learn."
"God help you in the lesson!" he said,
serenely, and kissed her. So they were betrothed.

CHAPTER II.

Squire Evelyn listened to the expressed
wishes of Francis, and the wedding-day was
deferred to the first of May. She wanted to
get familiar with the thought of the new
life she was to begin, she said.

She had very little care now, thanks to
the oversight of her lover. A trusty woman
managed the household affairs, and laborers
from the Hall kept the farm in good order.
The Squire came down daily, directing Fran-
cis' reading, walking with her, or taking her
to ride over the wild, bleak country. How
very kind and tender he was she hardly dar-
ed to think, when she remembered that her
heart never beat quicker at its approach, never
her pulse thrilled when his hand touched
hers. She was too old for such manifesta-
tions, she said, guiltily.

Early in March, a visitor came to the Hall,
Max Chesney, from New York, the Squire's
nephew. Max was a physician of great
promise; and to severe attention to the du-
ties of his profession and somewhat disturbed
his health. He had come down for a breath
of the fresh air of Evelyn, and a month's re-
creation.

As a matter of course, the Squire brought
him to see Francis, his aunt that was to be.
He wanted the two to be very good friends.
Max was his favorite nephew, and his tastes
were much like those of Francis'; he was
sure they would get on together.

So it happened that the two young people
were almost constantly in each other's society.

Max was but one year her senior, gay, hand-
some, generous, and high soured. Before
she had been a week in his presence, Francis
found out whether she was to old and grave
to love. His step would crimson her face
with blushes, the touch of his fingers on her
thrilled her for hours afterwards with a sub-
tler sense of delight. She awoke with a sort
of helpless horror. She could not speak and
send him away, for her lightest word would
reveal that she had given her heart unsought.

So the farce went on. The Squire still
played the generous lover, and was genial and
happy; Francis grew pale and wretched and
Chesney was never at ease. They mutually
avoided each other, Francis Chesney but one day
in April they met on the fields, a couple of
miles from home, Francis had been search-
ing for blue violets, Chesney had been down
into the coal mine to look at the operations
of the miners.

He had just emerged from the shaft when
Francis paused. He spoke to her, telling her
something of the gloomy darkness below.
Some impulse moved her to go and look down
the shaft.

"I should like to look up at this," she said
inadvertently.

The miners had just come up to dinner
One of them overheard her. "Nothing easi-
er, Miss," he said, touching his cap, "we let
down dozens of ladies every week. Just
step into the basket, and you can go down
and back again in a moment."

She stepped in; Chesney followed her
quickly. She would have stopped him, but
it was too late. The cord was being rapidly
unwound. They were descending swiftly.—
They touched the bottom, and, looking up,
saw only the minute circular hole filled with
daylight.

Chesney spoke to his companion. "Will
you get out and look father?"
"No, no!" she said with a shiver. Let us
go back instantly."

He put up his hand to give the signal
of return to those above, but it fell back pow-
erless to his side. A pale blue flash of light
illuminated the blackness—there was a noise
as if the solid universe were rent—a fearful
sense of suffocation filled the air, and then
afar off they heard the rush and gurgle of
water.

"Good God!" cried Chesney—"the fire-
damp!"
Francis clung to him blindly—she forgot
in that terrible moment of peril, the existence
of John Evelyn—forgot everything but that
she loved better than life or hope Max Ches-
ney. Max realized every thing at a glance.—
To hope for aid from above was futile.—
The whole shaft had been filled up. The
only avenue to safety was cut off. The best
he could do was to labor for a few more mo-
ments of life. It would end in death even-
tually.

He lifted Francis some feet above to a shell
of rock, and climbed up beside her. She
clung to him like a child—he took her into
his arms and soothed her as if he had been a
very babe.

She spoke at last, quietly he started to
hear her.
"I am not afraid, Max. I am only hap-
py."

He clasped her convulsively.
"Francis, darling! May I speak now?
Oh, I have loved you from the very first, but
I tried to be honorable for his sake. He is so
noble, and so generous. But now it is no
wrong to him to understand each other, Kiss
me, Frankie."

"On the other side," she said simply. "In
this world my lips belong only to him. [Have
patience a little longer.
He acquiesced, and restraining the impulse
that craved her close against his breast, he
only sat with his arm around her, her hands
in his.

It seemed ages to them, but it was only a
few moments, ere the terrible stillness that
had come upon the place was broken by a
dull thud. The very darkness quivered and
danced before them; a second and a third
stroke, and a mass of earth fell over them
from above, stunning and blinding them, and
then a breath of heaven's own air swept in—
a ray of sunshine dropped its gold into the
gloom.

The miners had broken in the top of the
mine, and they were saved. A rope was let
down—Chesney fastened it around the
waist of Francis—she was drawn up, and he
speedily followed. But when full of joy, he
sprang forward to lift her up, she sank a dead
weight in his arms—without life or moti-
on.

Long weeks of anxious watching elapsed
before Francis Haley rallied, and they knew
that she would live. All through the spring
months she lay in the great guest chamber,
at the hall, whither they had carried her—lay
quietly, taking no notice, and uttering no
word of complaint or recognition.

Squire Evelyn watched over with the ten-
derness of mother for her child. His face
was the first to greet her return to conscious-
ness—and his eyes the first to drop on her
wan face the tears of gratitude. She turned
uneasily.

"The mine, Max!" She whispered faintly.
"You are safe with me, Frankie, dear.—
And Max has been here all the time. He
will come soon!"

Obedient to his uncle's eager summons,
Max did come in. He took the hand of
Francis, muttered a few incoherent words
intended for a congratulation—fled from the
room, mounted a horse, and was absent all
day.

"There's no accounting for the conduct of
such a hot headed fellow as Max, said the
Squire, meditatively. "Why, Frankie, dear,
when we thought you would die, it seemed
as if the boy would go wild, and now you are
better, he takes it as coolly as an iceberg.
Well, well, Max's heart is right."

Francis mended slowly. She remained at
the Hall. There was nothing to call her home
now, for her grandmother died while Francis
was lost to the world.

June came, mild, and rich in cloudless skies
Francis went down stairs for the first time
one soft bright morning. The Squire was
under the necessity of going to the next town
do business, and he exacted a promise, unwill-
ingly enough giving, from Max, not to leave
her during his absence.

"Max will stay with you, and don't get
lonely, dear. He stooped over and kissed
her, Max colored hotly. Francis gave no
sign.

The Squire withdrew, and for little time
there was silence. Then the girl spoke—
"Max you are an honorable man!"—
"Oh, Frankie!" he began, passionately.
"Hush! do not tempt me. God knows I
want to do my duty. But I am weak, and
you must help me with your strength. Max
you must go away from here. At once. I
cannot keep up this wretched disguise before
him, so generously unsuspecting. Go away,
Max, where I shall not see you again, and
Heaven's help I will be true to him to whom
my plighted word is given."

Max came forward and touched her hand.
"God Bless you, Frankie, and pity us both
Good by."
He was opening the door, when the Squire
stepped out from the folds of a curtain, and
drew him back. Evelyn's face was pale but
his fine eyes glowed with the light of a gen-
erous purpose.
"No, my boy," he said, his deep voice broken
by emotion, "you are not going away.
Unwittingly I have been a listener. I came
back for some papers, but you did not ob-
serve my presence. Many things that I did
not hitherto understand are now clear to me.
I have been an old fool! Frankie, you love
him, and he loves you, and your two lives
shall not be wrecked by the selfishness of an
old fellow like me. I have lived without love
forty-five years—it will only a little while
longer.
Max put his arms around his uncle's neck.
The old man's eyes grew moist.
"There, there, Max! don't offer to kiss
me! Kiss Frankie, and remember, no fool-
ish pride. I give her to you."
He went out of the room and left them
together. Went out into the bright sunshine
and thought it never had seemed so goldenly
bright as then. He was a little sad, but his
heart there fell a great calm peace.
He went down the flower bordered path to
the honeysuckle arbor at the foot of the gar-
den. The tall, graceful form of a lady in
half mourning, stopped his progress. She
threw back her veil revealing a face pale and
worn, yet singularly sweet. John Evelyn
shook like an aspen as he saw that face, and
shrank back against the trellis for support.
"John," said a soft voice with an undertone
of infinite sadness, "do you know me?"
"Annie—Annie Brest, why have you re-
turned to torture me? Is it not enough that
you have made my life loveless—my—"
"I have come back to tell you how deeply
you wronged me. Sit down and listen."
He yielded to her touch, and there in the
warm sunshine of that June day, he heard
the story of her life, of letters intercepted by
a wily rival suitor—of cunning forging,
stinging her womanly pride to madness—of
maiden pique which had, in a moment of des-
pair, driven her to be the wife of a man she
did not love. He listened like one in a dream
—listened while she cleared herself from all
spot or blemish; and he knew it, at last, that
the young Annie he had so deeply loved, was
never false to him.
"And where is your husband?" he asked
when she had done.
"Two years dead."
He gathered her up in his arms.
"My Annie as of old?"
"If you will take her," she said softly.
So at the end of that bright summer there
was a double wedding at Evelyn Hall—the
Squire rejoiced in the young love youth and
Dr. Chesney married the woman who
was to have been his aunt.

The correspondent of a Boston pa-
per says he has visited the great falls on the
Snake river, the southern fork of the Oregon.
A breadth of water of 2,500 feet falls a dis-
tance of 200 feet in one sheet, above which is
a minor fall of 25 or 30 feet. He has many
times visited Niagara, but pronounces these
falls far more grand. Unfortunately, they
are too far away for a summer trip.

"I'll pay your bill at sight," said the
blind man to the doctor, who in vain attempt-
ed to cure him of blindness.
"You should never wink at faults,
and not too often at the ladies."