



# Salvation Army International Heritage Centre



The serial story 'Joe Angus: A Gambling Story of the North' was the last serial story to appear in the *Darkest England Gazette* (DEG), a weekly periodical concerned with the social work of The Salvation Army. It was published in the four final issues, from 26 May until 16 June (after this date the *Darkest England Gazette* was converted to a new format as the *Social Gazette*).

Like much of the fiction published in the *Darkest England Gazette* 'Joe Angus' addressed a social problem – in this case, gambling – to which The Salvation Army sought to respond (see also the *Darkest England Gazette* Research Guide on addiction). The author, John Hollins, was treasurer of The Salvation Army's 'Slum Corps' in Newcastle.

26 May 1894 (DEG No. 48)

## **JOE ANGUS.**

### **A GAMBLING STORY OF THE NORTH.**

#### **CHAPTER I. – IN THE WEB.**

HOW slowly Joe Angus walked away from the factory gates, the fixed frown on his brow showing that his thoughts were not the pleasantest. These said thoughts were revolving round the half-sovereign which had just been handed to him as his week's wage, or rather as his earnings for the three days which he had managed to put in during the week. Joe had a wife and six children, rent was in arrears, food, fuel and clothes must be had, and it seemed like squaring the circle to make a paltry half-quad cover the lot. Joe decided that the thing couldn't be done. There is surely no cry can enter more deeply into a man's soul than that of his children for bread, and more

than once during the past few months the wail of "Bread, mammy, bread," had been heard in the home of the Angus's.

Many of **THE BITS OF FURNITURE** upon which Joe and his wife had prided themselves when they first set up house had already disappeared and altogether things were in a bad way, for although he did not, as he would say, "pretend to be a religious bloke," Joe was not without a heart, and as he sauntered along, the thought of these things brought uncomfortable sensations to the region of his throat and eyes – to be promptly suppressed, of course, that being a sort of thing no man can stand, you know.

But softer thoughts were soon banished in bitter criticism of things social. Anomalies are brought out in clearer outline when a man is poor; his necessities create convictions, tending to make him a revolutionist. It seemed to Joe that the world had got tilted up in some quarters, causing the wealth to roll into corners, there to be jealously guarded by men burdened by its excess, from the poor and starving who perished because of its lack.

Thus brooding and inwardly fuming, Joe reached the stile, from which a first view of his home could be obtained, when, quick as lightning, a thought flashed through his mind. He paused with one foot on the step, thinking deeply, and murmuring to himself, "I don't know, I don't think I'll go; others have won money, why shouldn't I? If all can't win, neither can all lose. There was Jack Hales told me just yesterday that he had pocketed a couple of sovereigns last Saturday by betting. If fortune favours him it might favour me. It would be nice to be able to put a few pounds into Jennie's lap to-night, instead of **THIS PALTRY HALF-SOV.** Still, I might lose, and half-a-sov is half-a-sov. And they are waiting for me at home. Let's see, now, what shall I do? 'Long Tom' said, this very morning, that they were going to Shingly Lane to-day. Hang it all, I'll risk it, I'll go." So saying, he turned on his heel and retraced his steps. He was unwashed, and, of course, in his working clothes, but he dare not go home to change. That would mean parting with his money, and he meant to give his wife a surprise. He would join the gamblers that afternoon, and win. He wouldn't spend it at the "Red Lion," either; he would take it home to his family. Wouldn't Jennie open her eyes? They would have something decent for Sunday's dinner, and that blooming rent would all be paid off. Thus, conjuring up visions of what his half sovereign was going to grow to, if luck went as he desired, Joe made his way to the "Red Lion," to

have a wash and wait for his mates, the gambling fraternity, most of whom were pretty well known to him, some of them working in the same shop.

Something to eat, and a glass or two of whisky, reduced his stock of money a little, but so inflated his hopes that, by the time the men for whom he was waiting turned up, he was in a tolerably cheerful frame of mind.

## **CHAPTER II. – THE GAMBLING CLUB.**

Down the road they came, a gang of about a score of men. Some were of middle age, some were quite young; some bore stamped on their faces the de-humanised expression that results from many years of vicious living.

A few, indeed, were utter knaves, and others were men of the stamp of Joe, they gambled occasionally and generally lost. There existed a rough code of honour amongst them, and any attempt at swindling a partner would have been terribly dealt with, if observed, though it would sometimes happen that an old bird would take a "green-'un" on, and mulct him unfairly of his cash on the sly. As the men caught sight of Joe they gave him a boisterous invitation to join them, and so they went on their way. Needless to say their conversation was none of the choicest. Hilarious laughter, **ROUGH JOKES, AND ROUGHER OATHS**, gave pungency to their talk. Bottles were also produced at times, and thus by the time the party arrived at its destination the ten were pretty well primed.

Shingly Lane is a sequestered spot, about two miles from the village of Weston, "far from the madding crowd," and well out of the reach of the police. A poet would, more especially on this beautiful spring day, with buds and blossoms all around, a blue sky above, and the birds singing in the hedges, have considered it a fit place of inspiration for a sonnet on Nature. Gamblers considered it a proper spot to gamble in, and so, having formed themselves into a ring, and set their pickets in case of a sudden surprise, our party commenced operations. At first they simply played pitch-and-toss, and for copper. But this was just a preliminary to get their hands in a bit and whet their gambling appetites for the real business of the day. This was "betting on the throw," and the game was conducted as follows. One of the company, dexterous at the job, was selected as thrower; then bets of large and small amounts were arranged by the others amongst themselves, as to the results of the throw – "heads" or "tails."

But what about Joe? Luck had rather favoured him so far; he found his money increasing a little, and so, when the betting commenced, he made his bet like the rest, feeling that things were going very well. But the **THROWER IS GETTING READY**, and the interest intensifies. Every eye follows the coins as they spin through the air, and then lie shining in the dust.

Before they are picked up again, everyone satisfies himself as to the result of the throw, and, amidst exhilaration or disappointment, the money won or lost is passed from hand to hand. Then follow drinks all round, and then further bets are arranged.

Thus the game went on, everyone being absorbed in the greed of gain and the fascination of speculation; some with flushed cheeks, others pale with excitement, others trembling in every limb with the intensity of passion. Joe was wondrously lucky.

His half-sovereign had gained six; and now and then, as his winnings were increasing, his thoughts wandered homewards; they would be wondering what had kept him, but he would go off as soon as possible; wouldn't his wife be jolly glad?

But the "fun" was coming to an end. Some were cleaned out and looked it, others had won large amounts, to be got rid of at the "Red Lion," before the night was spent. Meanwhile, they all adjourned to a grassy bank, to finish their potations and have a rest before returning. Joe would have liked to have gone off home at once, but that would have looked bad, and so he sat down along with Seamy Blake and one or two others. Blake was an artful dodger, though this fact was merely suspected by his mates. He always seemed to have money, and although he drank he was never drunk. He had won something himself to-day and had noticed, too, that Joe had got hold of a tidy amount, and that he was excited with his good luck and his many drinks.

*(To be continued.)*

2 June 1894 (*DEG* No. 49)

**JOE ANGUS.**

**A GAMBLING STORY OF THE NORTH.**

**CHAPTER II. – (Continued.)**

Joe's companions were also pretty well drunk, and Seamy Blake made up his mind to possess himself of as much of Joe's winnings as he could. So he bet him, even

money, sovereigns, that he would throw the two coins he had in his hand and make them both come down "tails." Joe said, "Done"; the coins span, and lay on the ground "heads." Joe had won. Then the stake was doubled, and Blake bet that they would both come down "heads," and Joe who seemed on the high road to fortune, again said, "Done." They were thrown, and Jay on the ground "heads" again.

The fact is they never could be anything else than "heads," for "tails" they had none. This was a little secret that Seamy Blake hadn't imparted to anybody. Joe had lost two sovereigns. He lost his head, too, but being determined to recover, he bet again and again; still luck went consistently against him. At last, in desperation, he staked every remaining penny on a last throw – and lost all.

Joe Angus sank down on the bank and bowed his head in his hands. Everything swam before him. He heard the voices of the men about him as in a dream. The sudden change of fortune – a few minutes ago almost rich, now penniless – produced in his mind a terrible sensation of despair.

Joe half suspected that he had been swindled, though it would have been dangerous to mention it. How he cursed his folly! What could he do? What would come of his family sitting hungry at home?

Seamy Blake pocketed Joe's cash with smug satisfaction. He had done a "neat" thing, and thought, under the circumstances, that the least he could do would be to stand Joe something up at the "Red Lion." Poor Joe responded to his invitation by bidding him, "Go to the d—l," at which Seamy Blake, looking rather surprised, muttered something about some fellows being "blooming unsociable," and slunk away.

The party, who had been sitting about in little groups, now rose to go, their next destination being the "Red Lion," where those who had lost would be treated by their more fortunate companions, and those who had won would exchange their winnings for alcohol. Joe went with them, hardly knowing what he was doing. He dare not go home; he dared not face his wife. The **BAR OF THE "RED LION"** glittered with lights and resounded with the voices of the gamblers. Joe was getting tipsy, endeavouring to forget his miserable position.

He was drinking at Seamy Blake's expense after all. That gentleman felt more comfortable as he saw Joe partaking of his liquor, and when cards were proposed, with wondrous generosity, advanced him half-a-crown to "put on."

### CHAPTER III. – JOE'S WIFE.

Joe's wife sat in the house fretting; wondering what was keeping her husband. She was wan and thin, and anxious-looking, very different to the blooming lass of twenty, who ten years ago had united her fortune to those of Joe Angus.

She had seen some trouble since then; but the last six months were the darkest in all their married life. To-day she had had nothing to eat, though she wouldn't have mentioned that fact to anyone. The children had been fed, and that was the main thing. Besides, now, her increasing anxiety for her missing husband kept her from feeling the pangs of hunger. Ah! poor, loving, suffering wives and mothers, your quiet heroism and self-sacrifice have greater renown in the true-seeing eye of Heaven, than in the blurred vision of a selfish world!

Twice during that long Saturday afternoon had she been to the "Red Lion" to see if Joe were there, and now, as night drew on, she bade her little daughter run up again. Her husband's visits to the "Red Lion" had been rather frequent during the last two or three years, and this was not the least cause of the anxiety that seemed weighing her down daily. Pollie went off as she was bid, and her little hand was soon pressing open the swinging door of the bar, and her little white face peered anxiously in, to see if father were there. She soon caught sight of him amongst his pals, and saw that he was well-nigh tipsy; so, with timid voice, laying a gentle hand at the same time upon his sleeve, she said, "**FATHER, COME HOME;** mammy wants you." Joe started, and looked wildly at her. Her little face and pleading voice condemned him. His folly, almost forgotten in the carousal, appeared again to mock him. Stung to madness, he put his fist into her face, and swearing, bade her "Get out, or he would kick her out." Pollie had never seen her father act like this before, and, frightened almost out of her wits, ran borne as fast as her legs could carry her.

*(To be concluded.)*

9 June 1894 (*DEG* No. 50)

**JOE ANGUS.**

**A GAMBLING STORY OF THE NORTH.**

**CHAPTER III.**

Joe stood a moment, and then, animated by some mad impulse, rushed into the street, and hurried with blood-shot eyes and unsteady steps to the neighbouring

fields. The cool air sobered him somewhat; but this only tended to bring out in clearer outline the utter wretchedness of his condition. The tremendous strain of varied passions and feelings; stimulated by drink, had almost unhinged his mind, and caused every circumstance connected with his position to appear distorted and exaggerated. He walked on as in a nightmare. The twilight closed calmly around him, a distant bell rang sweetly out, a dog barked at a neighbouring farm, in the hedge a lone bird twittered. The fresh, fairy green of spring was fading into night, the tiny shoots of corn could scarcely be seen. Then all was quiet.

A deeper shadow crossed his mind; the Evil One passed by, and threw therein a thought, a seed-germ of suicide. It rapidly generated in the heat of his brain, until it became a set purpose.

He crossed the fields and made his way to the river-side. It was almost dark; in his soul it was midnight. He soon reached the river, and cursed his luck, as he discovered that he was close to the ferry, and saw Jones, the boatman, standing at his cabin door. That worthy, thinking he wanted to cross to the other side, hailed him. Joe paused irresolute, and then, struck by an idea, signified that he wanted to be rowed across. With unsteady steps he clambered into the bow of the boat. They were soon off.

Nothing was heard but **THE MURMURING OF THE RIVER** and the splash of the oars and their creaking as they moved in the rowlocks. They were about half way across. Jones, rowing steadily away, felt his boat suddenly lighten, and then immediately after heard a big splash. He turned sharp on his shoulder. He was alone. "Good God, he's over!" was the exclamation that rose to his lips. He paused, waiting till the man should come to the surface; and soon a dark body was visible, luckily, just beyond the stern of the boat. Rapidly placing his oars, he leaned over, grasped Joe by the collar and round his body, and dragged him into the boat, a helpless, dripping heap.

\* \* \*

"I'm a soldier bound for Glory,  
I 'm a soldier going Home! "

thus sang Uncle Jack on his way from the corps.

We all love uncle; he is so humble and so genuinely good, so evenly cheerful in his temper, so ready with his testimony. Just the sort of man that is the backbone of a corps. "Hasn't much to trouble him," perhaps I hear you say.

Hasn't he, though! Possibly if you had half as much, you wouldn't be singing, "I'm a soldier bound for Glory." Why, he's been out of work four months, and has other troubles not a few; yet he rejoices always. He "endures as seeing Him Who is invisible." That's the secret of his patience and cheerfulness. And so as he lays himself down to sleep, he murmurs: "I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety."

\* \* \*

Half-a-dozen men are carrying Joe Angus home. You see their forms dimly in the darkness. You hear his voice. He is cursing them, saying, "Why did you save me? I wanted to die." They bear him over the threshold of his home. His wife runs forward shrieking, the children clinging to her skirts. "My husband!" she cries, "my poor husband!" He is put to bed, muttering and cursing, and turns his haggard face to the wall. Soon the mutterings cease, his breathing grows even, and he falls fast asleep. Surely he is better so, than sleeping his long sleep in the slimy bottom of the river! Surely, too, "the ways of the transgressor are hard"; but "the path of the just is as a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

#### **CHAPTER IV. – UNCLE JACK VISITS JOE.**

There was great excitement in the village next morning, when it became known that Joe Angus had attempted suicide. This was something big for the gossips to talk about, and they made the most of it. Joe had told his wife all about it, and she, poor soul, felt more sorrow than anger at the recital. She scarcely even reproached him, only saying, "Well, Joe, you should have come straight home; then we would have had something to get a bit of bread, now we have nothing, and it might have been death to you into the bargain." To the neighbours who flocked in, some with genuine sympathy in their breasts; others with a mere craving for news, she detailed as briefly as possible how it all came about.

Very soon there was plenty to eat in the house. Kind friends brought bread and tea and butter, and many other good things until the kitchen began to present the appearance of a small grocer's shop. More than that, didn't Harry Stobart, the Salvationist, who worked in the same factory as Joe, go round from door-to-door, Sunday though it was, and make a collection for the family, which soon mounted up to a decent thing ?

*(To be concluded).*

16 June 1894 (*DEG* No. 51)

**JOE ANGUS.**  
**A GAMBLING STORY OF THE NORTH.**

**CHAPTER IV. (*Concluded.*)**

The Angus family was overwhelmed with all this kindness, and Joe, as he sat in a corner of the kitchen, pale and weak, with his face hidden in his hands, began to experience softer and solemn feelings than he had ever done before.

His folly, his nearness to eternity, the thought of what would have become of his poor wife and family had he that morning been lying drowned in the slimy bed of the river; all these things made him feel very queer and humble, and he wasn't sorry when Uncle Jack dropped in to have a bit of a talk with him – for, if there was anybody he respected it was uncle, and he made up his mind, as soon as his wife told him that he was coming up the road, to pour out his heart to him, and get some guidance in the matter of his soul's salvation.

"Oh, uncle," said Mrs. Angus, as he appeared on the threshold "we're so glad to see you; there's Joe." Joe hid his face in three-year-old Lucy's hair, who had timidly crept to his knee, and blurted out something in the shape of greeting. Uncle Jack drew a chair close to Joe's, and sitting down, placed his hand gently on his shoulder.

"Well, lad," said he, "I'm glad it's nea wuss. Thee maight 'a been bait for t' fishes, this blessed Sunday morn, and thee soul maight 'a been where hope and massy never comes."

"It's quite true, uncle," answered Joe lifting his face, which was working with emotion.

"I've been a great fool and a big sinner, but, by God's help, I'll do different now."

"Bless the Loard, lad! Bless the Loard for that word thee's just said; the devil sometimes gets caught in his own traps, and, mebbe, he has this time. I know that the dear Master had a tough job with me; and the two greatest massies to me is, how I got clear of being drowned, or shot, or hung, when I was wild and bad; and how the Loard could take trouble with a worm laak me and show His massy to me. But, bless the Loard, He did! Hallelujah! and He'll do t' same to thee."

"But I've been such a sinner, uncle; how can He have mercy on such as me?" – and here Joe burst into a fit of uncontrolled weeping, and placing wondering little Lucy on the mat, flung himself on his knees, and cried out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Then, with open Bible and loving counsel, Uncle Jack pointed the poor repentant sinner to the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"; and very soon weeping was turned into praise, as the blessed light of salvation filled Joe's heart, and he arose "a new creature in Christ Jesus," wondering at the change, and why it was that he hadn't come long before, and feeling so happy that he must needs kiss his wife and family all round, and give Uncle Jack a grasp of the hand, that, under ordinary circumstances, would have caused that worthy to give vent to sundry "Oh, oh's!" But pain was forgotten in the mutual joy, and as soon as he could get his hand loose, he executed a step-dance round the kitchen, and history relateth that this step-dancing was intermittent with him all the road home.

It is unnecessary almost to say that from that eventful Sunday things began to wear a very much brighter aspect in the home of the Angus's.

Joe soon began to find that godliness hath a promise for this life as well as that which is to come. His wife, too, got saved, and they both joined the corps where Uncle Jack was an honoured member. And now a happier home than theirs is not to be found in all the village of Weston.

John Hollins.

**THE END.**

**The Salvation Army International Heritage Centre,**

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