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DOCUMENT A: John Millington Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, 1907

WIDOW QUIN [*to Mahon, with a peculiar look*]: Was your son that hit you a lad of one year and a score maybe, a great hand at racing and lepping and licking the world?

MAHON [*turning on her with a roar of rage*]: Didn't you hear me say he was the fool of men, the way from this out he'll know the orphan's lot, with old and young making game of him, and they swearing, raging, kicking at him like a mangy cur.

[*A great burst of cheering outside, some way off.*]

MAHON [*putting his hands to his ears*]: What in the name of God do they want roaring below?

WIDOW QUIN [*with the shade of a smile*]: They're cheering a young lad, the champion Playboy of the Western World.

[*More cheering.*]

MAHON [*going to window*]: It'd split my heart to hear them, and I with pulses in my brain-pan for a week gone by. Is it racing they are?

JIMMY [*looking from door*]: It is, then. They are mounting him for the mule race will be run upon the sands. That's the playboy on the winkered mule.

MAHON [*puzzled*]: That lad, is it? If you said it was a fool he was, I'd have laid a mighty oath he was the likeness of my wandering son [*Uneasily, putting his hand to his head.*] Faith, I'm thinking I'll go walking for to view the race.

WIDOW QUIN [*stopping him, sharply*]: You will not. You'd best take the road to Belmullet, and not be dilly-dallying in this place where there isn't a spot you could sleep.

PHILLY [*coming forward*]: Don't mind her. Mount there on the bench and you'll have a view of the whole. They're hurrying before the tide will rise, and it'd be near over if you went down the pathway through the crags below.

MAHON [*mounts on bench, Widow Quin beside him*]: That's a right view again the edge of the sea. They're coming now from the point. He's leading. Who is he at all?

WIDOW QUIN: He's the champion of the world, I tell you, and there isn't a hap'orth isn't falling lucky to his hands to-day.

PHILLY [*looking out, interested in the race*]: Look at that. They're pressing him now.

JIMMY: He'll win it yet.

PHILLY: Take your time, Jimmy Farrell. It's too soon to say.

WIDOW QUIN [*shouting*]: Watch him taking the gate. There's riding.

JIMMY [*cheering*]: More power to the young lad!

MAHON: He's passing the third.

JIMMY: He'll lick them yet!

WIDOW QUIN: He'd lick them if he was running races with a score itself.

MAHON. Look at the mule he has, kicking the stars.

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WIDOW QUIN: There was a lep! [*Catching hold of Mahon in her excitement.*] He's fallen? He's mounted again! Faith, he's passing them all!

JIMMY: Look at him skelping her!

40 PHILLY: And the mountain girls hooshing him on!

JIMMY: It's the last turn! The post's cleared for them now!

MAHON: Look at the narrow place. He'll be into the bogs! [*With a yell.*] Good rider! He's through it again!

JIMMY: He neck and neck!

45 MAHON: Good boy to him! Flames, but he's in! [*Great cheering, in which all join.*]

MAHON [*with hesitation*]: What's that? They're raising him up. They're coming this way. [*With a roar of rage and astonishment.*] It's Christy, by the stars of God! I'd know his way of spitting and he astride the moon. [*He jumps down and makes a run for the door, but Widow Quin catches him and pulls him back.*]

50 WIDOW QUIN: Stay quiet, will you? That's not your son. [*To Jimmy.*] Stop him, or you'll get a month for the abetting of manslaughter and be fined as well.

JIMMY: I'll hold him.

MAHON [*struggling*]: Let me out! Let me out, the lot of you, till I have my vengeance on his head to-day.

55 WIDOW QUIN [*shaking him, vehemently*]: That's not your son. That's a man is going to make a marriage with the daughter of this house, a place with fine trade, with a license, and with poteen too.

MAHON [*amazed*]: That man marrying a decent and a moneyed girl! Is it mad yous are? Is it in a crazy-house for females that I'm landed now?

60 WIDOW QUIN: It's mad yourself is with the blow upon your head. That lad is the wonder of the Western World.

MAHON: I seen it's my son.

WIDOW QUINN: You seen that you're mad. [*Cheering outside.*] Do you hear them cheering him in the zig-zags of the road? Aren't you after saying that your son's a fool, and how would

65 they be cheering a true idiot born?

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DOCUMENT B: William Hazlitt, obituary notice for John Cavanagh, *The Examiner*, February 7th, 1819

Died at his house in Burbage Street, St. Giles's, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies who does any one thing better than any one else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come — for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him.

5 It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall — there are things, indeed, that make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them, making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation for the mind.

10 The Roman poet said that "Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts." But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor future "in the instant." Debts, taxes, "domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further." He has no other wish, no other thought, from the moment the game begins, but that of striking the ball, of placing it, of making it! This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball there was  
15 an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it; took instant advantage of his adversary's weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that every one gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness and judgment. He could either outwit his antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball  
20 with the full swing of his arm, he would by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight, horizontal line; so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it.

As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a ball, and the precise direction in  
25 which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease; never took more pains than was necessary; and while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling.

He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than any one else could even affect to do.  
30 His blows were not undecided and ineffectual — lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the Quarterly, nor let balls like the Edinburgh Review. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best up-hill player in the world; even when his adversary was fourteen, he would play on the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness  
35 and conceit, he never gave it through laziness or want of heart. The only peculiarity of his play was that he never volleyed, but let the balls hop; but if they rose an inch from the ground he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat him with his left hand.

His service was tremendous. He once played Woodward and Meredith together (two of the best  
40 players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's Street, and made seven and twenty aces following by services alone — a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace.

Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He died from the bursting of  
45 a blood-vessel, which prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton,

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that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be persuaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

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Let no rude hand deface it,  
And his forlorn "Hic Jacet."

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Document C: John Scott-Sixon, *The Rugby Team, Mill Hill School, London, 1930* (The National Archives)

