A Saturday Prize-fight in Cannington

by John Mark Capps

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry....
For he is of the tribe of Tiger.
For the Cherub Cat is a term of the Angel Tiger.
For he has the subtlety and hissing of a serpent, which in goodness he suppresses.
For he will not do destruction, if he is well-fed, neither will he spit without provocation.
For he purrs in thankfulness, when God tells him he's a good Cat.
For he is an instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon.
For every house is incomplete without him and a blessing is lacking in the spirit.
For the Lord commanded Moses concerning the cats at the departure of the Children of Israel from Egypt.
For every family had one cat at least in the bag.
For the English Cats are the best in Europe.
—Christopher Smart, from *Jubilate Agno*, 1763 (first published in 1939)

Geoffrey Saucer was the largest and most sovereign tomcat in the entire universe, which to him was the town of Cannington, in Somerset. At the age of five he weighed a full stone-and-a-half, long-limbed, golden-eyed, sharp-clawed, his fur sleek and black. Geoffrey had belonged to, or was a non-rent-paying tenant of, the elderly widow Emma Penrose, who owned the whole building on the High Street at No. 7. Every morning Mrs Penrose would give a saucer of fresh milk to her mighty panther, who would curl around her arthritic legs and purr. Geoffrey was furthermore the well-beloved rat-catcher extraordinary of the whole row of houses, and came and

went as he pleased, catamount-in-chief of the neighbourhood. But after Miss Penrose died in December of 1794, No. 7 was inherited and occupied by her daughter Alice and her husband Mervyn, who hated cats. Geoffrey was then cast out and homeless, though he continued to haunt his old alleys. He was fed saucers of milk no more, and lost much of his weight on an exclusive diet of vermin and offal. He now suffered the indignity of being chased away by the ungrateful people who never noticed the rats and mice who weren't there, and the envious barking dogs previously held in check were now set at him. The winter was harsh, a cold and cheerless time to be a cat on the streets.

In 1795 the Home Office had only thirty salaried employees, ten of whom toiled in Philip Hales's Secret Service, while eleven were allocated to the rival Alien Office. Perforce much of its work was done by private, lay informants, who volunteered intelligence out of a feeling of patriotic duty, for which they were paid. When the new policies regarding cats were adopted, more irregular assistants were found to take the King's shilling; the going rate was sixpence per cat. For the way that Scrope Bernard's instructions were interpreted was that all stray and ownerless cats loose in the towns and villages were to be collected and given a home by Crown officers. Each county was to have its own central sanctuary to hold these cats and feed them fishy bits, and Cannington was to be the centre for all Somerset.

Cat-catchers now joined rat-catchers on the streets. Few grown men, even those in fear of the workhouse, would so strenuously exert themselves for sixpence, but this was enough to realise an energetic young boy's dreams of tin whistles and sweetmeats. So hundreds of boys with bags crept down alleyways and clambered up trees to stalk their prey and call “Here, kitty, kitty” all over England and Scotland.

Crown officer James Walsh was explaining the duties of cat-catching to one such boy, eleven-year-old Edmund Greenall. “After ye grab the beast by its neck-fur so, as not to cause it any injury, ye place it in the sack, so.” He was demonstrating the method with one

rather large, passive mother cat who did not seem to mind being picked up by her scruff. “This is important—whatever beast ye catch must be put in th' appropriate cage in the Feline Asylum. There is the cage for tom-cats, and the separate one for lady-cats. Important that they be kept apart, else we have more kittens to deal with. The mothers like this one with nursing kits are to be kept in a third cage themselves. Each cage is marked with a label; if ye can't read, ask the caretaker for the right one. Pray scruple and attend to all these divisions.”

“Aye, sir, I will.” Edmund was irritated to be treated as simple-minded by Walsh, whom the boy regarded as an officious fool, albeit one who dispensed Home Office sixpences. Young Edmund was an orphan, a ward of the parish, and always it seemed a truant one step away from and ahead of the beadle whose eye he was supposed to be under. His new scheme of catching cats for the Home Office was unknown to those whose legal responsibility he was. Edmund was determined that the money he earned would be also remain a secret. At odds with this desire to be discreet was Edmund's pride, his urge to boast that he was now himself a Crown officer of a sort, on his Majesty's Secret Service, going about the serious business of the Home Secretary, His Grace the Duke of Portland, so step aside, sir, and hinder not the solemn exercise of this duty. He felt a calling, and a high sense of patriotism.

It was inevitable that the biggest stray cat in Cannington would cross paths with the most ambitious cat-catcher in the town. One Saturday afternoon Edmund saw the streak of black behind the fence in front of No. 11 on the High-street, and went into stalking form. He did not run after Geoffrey, but noted that he went into the alley behind the building, to the side that faced Clifford-park. Edmund quickly walked around the other side of the house-block, and sure enough saw his quarry atop a trash heap. He watched the cat for a minute to see if it found food or not. This picked-over rubbish had nothing on the menu for Geoffrey, so the cat stretched and began to look around for something else. He then saw Edmund approach, and froze still and wary.

“Here, kitty, dear kitty-cat, sir,” Edmund serenaded his quarry while deploying his favourite stratagem. He took out of his pocket an old and extremely fragrant piece of dried pilchard. On the threshold of running away, Geoffrey caught the powerful fish-scent and hesitated. “Dear kitty-cat, would ye not like a little breakfast? Courtesy of Sir Scrope Bernard the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, his master the Home Secretary, and His Majesty himself.” Edmund felt the special thrill of a hunter whose game approaches him willingly. Geoffrey padded over silently, still cautious, while giving the pilchard most of his attention. Edmund slowly crouched, dangling the fish high between two fingers. Geoffrey stood on his hind legs to sniff the lure, and grabbed at it with one clawed paw.

Edmund made his move too soon. “Got yer!” he cried as he reached around to grab Geoffrey's scruff, but the hissing cat twisted out of his grasp easily, turning around and scratching him on the wrist and the back of the hand at the same time. “Ow! H-ll's whores!” the boy swore. “Come back here now, ye G-d-d—ned pussy!” Geoffrey dashed down the alley, and the determined cat-catcher took off behind him, bag in hand. Both were headed towards the western, lower part of town. The chase was on.

Saturday afternoon was the time for a fight as well as a flight. In the western, lower part of Cannington this usually happened in the yard behind the Crown & Rose tavern, which was owned by a quiet man, Martin Davies. Others did the talking here, mostly. “Who here has the bottle to face Sean th' Ape?” asked the man known only as Rascal Henry, as he touted his client to the gentlemen of the boxing fancy. “Those here last night know Sean took the regular purse. But we will not leave until he's licked every man in town, an' taken his money.”

“Who are ye ravin' about again?” asked one wag.

Like Homer, Rascal Henry recited the famous deeds of his hero. “He's th' All-Ireland champion, unbeaten in his last fifteen bouts, victor in one bout out of two in Bath over the famous ‘Gentleman' John Jackson, an' the man who, this May last, gone all

th' way to Whitechapel in London-town to battle ‘the Fightin' Jew' Daniel Mendoza hisself to a draw. Th' hot blood of Finn MacCool of old pumps from his savage heart to his potent limbs. He is without doubt the bravest brawler in all Christendom.” He had discovered that the best way the gull the local boys out in the shires was not to underplay his fighter's prowess, but on the contrary to sing his praises loudly as possible and dangle a rich purse, and men would usually line up to be beaten. “A punter's chance, as might be, but good showing might put a pretty penny in your pocket, if you but step up and shew yourself a man.”

Overshadowing Rascal Henry was the boxer himself, a tall dark-haired man stripped naked to his waist, muscles flexing and rippling beneath his pale skin. Six-foot-tall Sean Linehan seemed a giant, armoured in his own ample flesh, his face betraying no emotion at all. “Let him step forwards, who thinks he has a prospect 'gainst th' Irish Ape. Favourable odds offered to the bettin' man on any who might last more than a round.”

“The Ape, without a doubt,” said one man well-known as a canny bettor, but it did not take genius to pick a favourite in any match here.

Everyone in the walled garden behind the Rose & Crown wanted to see someone volunteer to fight Sean the Ape, but no one wanted to be that man himself. Hesitant looks went back and forth even among the seasoned street-brawlers in this rough crowd. “How 'bout you, Johnny Lawless?” One cried out to another who was sitting on the low wall around the yard. “You've a strong arm to you, strongest in Cannington.”

“I've not a penny to venture myself,” Lawless replied.

“Have some gin,” someone said, “and that will gin you up.”

“I'm well, I'm fine,” Johnny replied. “I need nothing but my beer.”

“Beer would be enough to feague you, if it be enough,” his friend continued, “or I'll stick ginger up your arse to make you trot like a race-horse.”

Johnny laughed, but was having none of it. “And I'm busy on keeping an eye out for Charley, if someone did inform on our amusements.”

“Coward!” someone else shouted at him, remembering the last time he fought against Feargal Leary and lost, in front of most of the same men in this same pub.

“'E's 'ad bad luck wif 'em Irishmen,” a third man said, which prompted laughter. Wiser heads nodded, knowing that prize-fighting was yet illegal in England, and everyone knew that Johnny Lawless's next appearance before a magistrate would likely mean transportation or worse.

“Come now, not one of you fancies a chance at a goodly purse by fightin' th' Ape?” Rascal Henry hefted a sack of coins in his hand, making sure they jingled loudly enough to be heard. “Thirty guineas here, gentlemen, in shiny gold, new-minted.” He tossed the purse to the publican, who put it within the strongbox under his arm.

“I'll take on the gurt fella.” Brave or desperate or foolish, a man stepped forwards and ducked into the roped-off ring, after removing his hat and coat and handing them to a friend, and then rolling up his sleeves. “I'm Ned the blacksmith, an' my hands are my hammers.” He bowed to Sean and to Rascal Henry, and then strutted around the ring holding up his clenched fists. “I'll fight for native English honour 'gainst this brute Paddy. I'll toe the scratch here, an' shew you all.” Ned the Blacksmith was applauded, but being so much a smaller man he did not appear to stand much of a chance.

“How are ye staked, lad?”

“I've a guinea to hazard. True to my name, I've ned in my pocket.” Ned dug a handful of shilling coins out of his waistcoat pocket, counted out twenty-one, and handed them to the publican, who was also taking the more lucrative bets on the side.

“Not much 'gainst thirty guineas. But Sean's not worried, are ye, me boyo? We'll take it off you.” The betting was strongly in Sean's favour.

The two stood in the centre of the ring with Davies, who besides holding wagers would also referee the bout. “Hear all of you,” he announced. “The fighters shall adhere to Broughton's Code of Rules,” he announced. “No dirty Jack Slack boxing here! No knees in the groin or in a man's tallywags, no butting of heads nor gouging, no scratching, no hitting or kicking a man while he's down, no holding the ropes, no stones in the hands, no biting, no casting of dust into the other's eyes, nor casting of aspersions upon the virtue of the other's mother. Any boxer violating these rules forfeits the bout and the purse. No gentleman spectator may interfere in the fight. The count is thirty, and last man standing wins the match. Shake hands, and fight.”

Preliminaries over, the fight began, and Ned came out swinging. Sean hung back at first, fists up before his face, sounding out his opponent. The blacksmith had a shorter reach, but landed a few heavy blows on the Irishman's arms and midsection, though Sean seemed hardly to notice them. Ned's swings were wild and erratic, and he failed to keep an adequate guard around his face. All of this his opponent took in, not even breaking a sweat as they danced around for two minutes. Then in one swift instant, Sean hurled his right fist at Ned's temple, and laid him out on the dirt. The crowd *oooh*'d and grimaced.

“Knocked out!” the publican declared. “Brave Ned is dead insensible, and b'ain't getting up after the count.” Davies counted to thirty anyway, and then held up Linehan's hand as Ned's friends carried him away. “Sean ‘the Ape' Linehan prevails! The winner!”

“Now, 'twere hardly a fight at all,” Rascal Henry complained with a wink. “The gentlemen spectators have been cheated of a show.”

The crowd shouted their agreement, crying “Not enough!” and “Another fight!”

Rascal Henry smiled, and after the publican handed the purse to him he almost handed it to Linehan, before changing his mind and snatching it back. “Shall we earn us more to-day, lad? Let's find

another with a stake, and ye'll fight again?" The Irishman sighed, but shrugged and nodded his assent.

"Is your lad really up to another bout?" the publican asked him.

"Hardly a finger laid upon him, as ye saw, Mr Davies. Sean scarcely noticed he was in a fight at all. Let's have another, and earn a few more quid from some willing lad."

"As you wish." The proprietor Davies looked over at Lawless on the wall. "Any sign of the c-nstable, Johnny?" Some laughed, thinking that he had made a joke.

"None, sir. High Street's empty but for a washerwoman, a boy, and a cat."

"Then we'll have another. Any here willing to put up a few shillings to have the wadding beat out of him?"

"Surely," Rascal Henry put in, "there is one true man here, maybe one who would fight if another puts up the money." No one answered for a few moments.

"I have mine own money," said one stout young man in the plain russet coat and broad-brimmed hat that marked him out as a Quaker. "And I think I know how to take this fighter down."

"Bob, no!" exclaimed the man beside him. "Don't be foolish."

"Worry not, Bob, hold my beer. And my coat, and hat, and my shirt." Robert Lovell disrobed as he spoke. "I say to thee, sir, I have six guineas that say thy thirty are mine."

Robert Southey was astonished. "Bob, he's larger, he must weigh two stone more than you, is a full foot taller, and has a longer arm."

"I saw this chap fight Feargal, Bob. Like my good friend I shall employ the system of Mendoza, and shall duck and weave about him. I shall be the faster man."

"A Quaker!" Rascal Henry was amused. "A peaceful Friend of God, all *thee* and *thou*, who wants to doff his hat all polite and step into a boxing ring? This will be quite diverting. What is thy name, my fearless fellow?"

“Moschus the Poet, the best boxer in Bristol, in all Somerset and Gloucestershire.”

The crowd laughed at this. “Ye b'ain't in Bristol now, Quaker!” someone shouted. As well as against Irish fighters there was also considerable animus against those from Bristol. Many glanced over at Johnny Lawless and remembered his loss against Feargal Leary earlier in '92. But no one here, except Moschus the Poet, remembered that Linehan himself had also lost to Leary.

“I'll not take your stake, Mr—Poet,” Davies said. “I fear you will simply be maimed or murdered, and this I cannot condone on my property. Keep your money and depart a whole man.”

“No, sir, I am accepting this challenge. You keep the purse in thy box? Add to it these gold guineas.” He put the coins into the unwilling proprietor's hands. “This is my stake. I shall defeat this man.”

“As you wish, young fellow.” Mr Davies thought for a second. “There's no shame in conceding defeat and calling out ‘Hold, no more!' before such an opponent as the Ape.”

“I thank thee for thy concern, sir, but I shall not yield.”

Robert Southey despaired. The Travesty Club had the day before decided that an excursion to Cannington to see a prize-fight would be an agreeable day out. Southey had only been dissuaded from wearing his dress and cartwheel hat by Lovell reminding him that ladies were not allowed at such events. Now, Bob Lovell was about to be pummeled, perhaps to his death, by a man-mountain who seemed to feel no pain. At best Lovell was going to lose six guineas; at worst—Southey saw no way it might end well. “Please reconsider, Bob. This is rash and ill-considered folly.”

“If only,” Lovell replied, “all pugilists made as close a study of another's tactics and methods as I, people might see some proper boxing on the day. As I said I have seen my fine adversary fight, a few years ago up in Clifton, when he fought in Symmonds's theatre. Confidentially,” he whispered, “I noted a vulnerability in him when Feargal knocked him out. Come, and watch me perform.”

“Must you take off your shirt was well?” Southey asked, while holding much of Lovell's clothing, and his beer.

“This is how a proper fight is done, Bion, unencumbered by clothes above the waist. This is no place for false modesty, or to play the shrinking violet. This is man's work!”

Two minutes later Bob Lovell was staggering back, blood dripping from his mouth, as the third of Linehan's blows crashed into his head and face. Lovell escaped to his left side as he narrowly ducked another sledgehammer blow. He thought he was faster than the Irishman, but Linehan was surprisingly swift himself when confronted with a ducking and zig-zagging opponent. The Irishman had also learnt from Daniel Mendoza, Lovell realised too late. He was no mere toe-to-toe slugger, but adjusted his tactics to those of his opponent. Lovell sought to exploit the vulnerability he mentioned to Southey, but his foe's longer reach prevented him from landing his blows where he wanted. It did not look well for Moschus the Poet.

After several minutes of chasing him around the ring, Linehan finally knocked him down to the ground. Lovell got up as the count passed nine, though he was unsteady on his feet, and had blood coming out of his mouth and left ear. His knuckles bloody, the Irishman wiped sweat from his brow with his forearms and looked over at Rascal Henry, who nodded and winked, which meant: *Finish him off*. Sean Linehan faced Robert Lovell head-on, and left everyone guessing which of his fists would be the one to deliver the *coup de grâce* (there were also side bets on that). There was some sort of scuffle ringside as the match seemed about to conclude, and a boy was calling out something. The Ape's huge muscles tensed. Then a cat jumped on his back.

Seaghán Ó Laidhghneáin was not always a big man called demeaning nicknames like “the Ape” by Englishmen. He had been born a premature and underweight baby twenty-two years earlier in a tiny house near Killorglin in County Kerry. His mother Ráichéal did not survive her labour, few thought that her babe would either. But after ten days passed and the infant clung tenaciously to his wet-

nurse and to his life, his father Liam Linehan finally took him to the priest to be baptized and christened Seaghán. He was the fifth child and second son of Liam, a tenant farmer, and Ráichéal, daughter of an itinerant tin-smith and an unknown woman. All but one of Sean's elder siblings had died of small-pox or cholera before he was ever born. The boy grew up quickly, and was helping his father in the fields by the age of eight. Sean did not go to a school but was taught letters by the priest, whose small Catholic parish church he attended every Sunday. He learnt to write his name: *Sean*. He did not learn to speak English, nor did he even hear it spoken, until he turned seventeen, when it became his turn to pay money to Mr Reilly. This was the stern, bad-tempered land agent who collected rents for the landlord, who lived at Castle Conway. The landlord was a rich Anglo-Irishman named Harman Blennerhassett, who had the freedom to take a lively and mostly kindly interest in the welfare of his tenants.

Sean's surviving older sister was named Mairéad, and she had a sable girl-cat she called Cáit. Sean loved his sister, but hated the cat, whose name he would never say (she was simply an cat dubh, the black cat). He did not think animals had either souls or names, and did not consider anger towards an animal to be quite as sinful as towards a person. So when Cáit the Cat would jump on him and shred his flesh with her claws he would pick her up and throw her across the room. Mairéad would scold him whenever he did this, though he would only shrug and say she's lucky he doesn't kill the beast outright. Then Mairéad married a man in another village, and took Cáit with her, and Sean was pleased.

By the time Sean was seventeen he had sprouted startlingly into a tall young man, his dark eyes and hair standing out against his fine paperlike skin, a young man to whom all the local girls paid homage with wishing eyes. Sean was stronger than any of the other lads thereabouts, who were a poorly-nourished and scrawny lot, and he could carry a plough over his shoulder like it was a stick. His muscles were noticed by everyone, and he was acclaimed in village

games in which he could throw round shot farther and lift the anvil higher than anyone. The landlord noted it all with approval.

Harman Blennerhassett considered himself a philosopher and man of modern ideas. He owned a telescope, and immodestly considered himself the best astronomer in all Ireland, though his undertakings in this field consisted almost entirely of disputation with other astronomers concerning their discoveries. Where they saw bright points of light in the sky, he saw globes of pale fire, vaporous nebulæ, unresolved luminescent clouds. For he was profoundly near-sighted, and without his spectacles he could not tell a man from a horse at ten paces. Harman Blennerhassett would never see the stars clearly, though with his excellent telescope (the best in Ireland, he was told) he thought he had solved a mystery. He declared that all stars were incandescent balls of gas, which amused every astronomer from Herschel on down as the most preposterous thing they had ever heard. The myopic Irish amateur was nicknamed “Sir Nebula” in the Royal Society, and generally disregarded as a crank.

Blennerhassett subscribed to journals in many subjects besides astronomy, and read all the latest literature in all manner of progressive fields. He read *The Complete Farmer: Or, a General Dictionary of Husbandry*, and also the Reverend Dickson's *Treatise of Agriculture*, and had his tenants practice crop rotation, contour plowing, and other modern farming methods. He stocked his greenhouse with the species recommended by Erasmus Darwin. He regularly read the *Northern Star* and even the *Watchman*, for he was more than merely Whiggish in his political opinions. He was an ardent supporter of the French Revolution, and disapproved of the government of Ireland. He was a secret backer of the United Irishmen, and gave them money.

Blennerhassett was deeply, and he believed most romantically, in love with his own niece, Margaret. She was a great beauty, though Harman mostly took this on faith. The blurry image of his angel dominated his dreams at night, and he contrived a hundred ways to be near her, and made excuses to give her extravagant gifts.

And Blennerhassett was an avid fan of boxing, having himself inexpertly boxed as a youth. As his vision deteriorated as he aged, even he had to admit that he would never be a gentleman pugilist, but only a spectator. His other past-times painting him an æsthete and dabbler, belonging to the boxing fancy gave him the air of a man, he believed. So it was as an aficionado that Blennerhassett pulled Sean aside and asked him (by way of Reilly, who spoke Irish) if he had ever been in a fight. Sean crossed himself and replied "No, riamh." That would be the sin of wrath, committed all too often in this wicked world. Then the landlord told him about boxing, and took him to his house-yard, and taught him the elements of the prizefighter's art. Sean still thought that it might be sinful, but Blennerhassett taught him that boxing had nothing at all to do with wrath, and that it was simply a contest of strength and skill, no different, really, from lifting an anvil or hurling a cannonball or climbing a pole, all things that Sean did well, and was proud of doing well. Against Reilly's advice, Blennerhassett also enticed the reluctant adolescent with a promise of reducing rent for his father if he would fight for money. Sean then began his boxing career in barns and in courtyards outside of pubs, and beat every amateur and aspiring prize-fighter he was matched against. Then Blennerhassett gave him money, and in return required Sean and his father, witnessed by the whole village, to put their Xs on a piece of paper he called a *five-year contract*. No one in the village knew these words in English, though plenty would have known its true name, *indenture*. The piece of paper was cut in two in a jigsaw pattern, the landlord keeping one half and Liam Linehan the other. Sean would box exclusively for Blennerhassett, who would sometimes let Sean or his father keep some of the prize money earned. The landlord became a bit wealthier from Sean's fighting, and treated the lad better with every victory. Sean wore fine new clothes now, and owned two pairs of shoes. He won more matches, and was soon acclaimed the unofficial champion of all County Kerry. Blennerhassett saw his chance, and in September of 1793 took Sean to Dublin to compete for the (illegal and unsanctioned) All-Ireland

title, and the substantial purse that came with it. Sean won, and thousands of pounds changed hands because of it.

Sean himself also changed hands. A flash-dressed fellow known to gentlemen of the boxing fancy only as Rascal Henry made Blennerhassett a very generous offer for the boy's indenture, which the landlord hesitantly accepted. Unknown to all but a few men, Blennerhassett was in Dublin primarily to raise money for the United Irishmen, and any additional cash would buy Lord Fitzgerald more pikes and muskets and keep the printing presses going longer. Blennerhassett said a tearful goodbye to his fine boy, and in stumbling Irish asked him to come back to Galway one day. Sean now found himself the virtual property of a cruel and deceitful man who took him aboard a sailing-ship to England, a land where he knew no one and did not speak the language. He was miserable, and missed Killorglin.

Rascal Henry taught him a little English, and also some tricks and cheats in the art of boxing, and then set Sean to fighting all comers. At first he indeed took Sean to Bristol and Bath, north to Liverpool and Manchester, and southeast to Brighton, Maidstone, and London itself. But these cities had many famous prize-fighters, some of whom (like Leary, Jackson, and Mendoza) could and did beat Linehan. Rascal Henry did not like his fighter losing matches, even if he was improving his technique by fighting the best boxers in the world. So he took Sean to tour the shires, the small towns and villages, billing him as “the Irish Ape” and fighting for smaller purses that he was assured of winning. Sean kept none of the money, despite Rascal Henry's promises that he would retire from prize-fighting a rich man once his indenture had expired. Sean earnestly awaited his twenty-third birthday, when he would become a free man.

That day was yet six months away when an cat dubh jumped on his back at the Rose & Crown in Cannington. Sean felt the panicked cat's claws and turned around in half-remembered fear. The cat was of course Geoffrey Saucer, who was just then being pursued by an extremely eager young Crown officer. Edmund

Greenall had hunted him throughout lower Cannington, and followed the cat over the wall past Johnny Lawless into the crowd outside the pub. “Hoy, lad,” Johnny said to the boy climbing over, “ye need to pay sixpence t' watch the match.”

“Busy earning it, me acker,” Edmund replied.

Geoffrey was a clever cat, and knew that he could evade his pursuer by hiding among the many legs of the men standing there. Waving his bag, Edmund shouted even as the fight was going on, “That's my cat! Stop that cat! Grab him! I am a sworn officer upon the business of the Home Secretary, do not hinder me in the exercise of my duties! You are required by ministerial order to help me seize that pussy!”

The gentlemen spectators who noticed Edmund just chuckled. Then one of them in the front row of spectators picked up Geoffrey. “'Oo's bloody kitty is this 'ere? A bloody nuisance an' underfoot an' all.”

“That's my cat! Hand over that animal; he's for Sir Scrope Bernard himself.”

Geoffrey had never tolerated being picked up by anyone besides Mrs Penrose. The cat squirmed and twisted violently, yowling and hissing. His claws raked across the man's face, and he exclaimed and cursed in surprise, and let go of him. Geoffrey was suddenly aloft, having launched himself like a diver from the man's shoulder, and landed three yards away inside the ring, on the back and right shoulder of Sean Linehan.

Sean, who had a strong sense memory of the pain of cat's claws, briefly forgot he was in a boxing match. About to carry a topper to the head of the groggy Moschus the Poet, he instead wrenched his body around in alarm. He threw the cat off and recovered himself, turning his head back to the fight before the rest of him. Geoffrey then disappeared in the crowd, to the discomfiture of the Home Secretary's sworn officer, who could not find a way through the gathering.

Lovell saw his chance, and more quickly than anyone thought possible delivered a sharp blow to Linehan's hitherto untouched jaw.

The Irishman collapsed, and stayed down for the full count of thirty. The courtyard was then filled with shouts of incredulity and mirth.

Lovell went over to Linehan when he recovered and extended his hand to help the man up. The Irish Ape had been knocked out, but it was Sean Linehan who then stood up and shook the hand of the man who beat him fairly. “That were never fair!” Rascal Henry protested to the publican. “He were interfered with, Mr Davies, and so distracted. I've no doubt that someone with money on th' other man tried this childish ruse.”

Davies was strict and proper. “No person whatsoever interfered with your fighter. There is nothing the the rules concerning accidents like wind, weather, sun in the eyes, sudden unexpected cats, or other acts of God. Your man went down by a blow from his opponent, and was down for the count. There were no interference from no gentleman spectator.” He went over to Lovell and held his hand up. “The winner by a knock-out blow, Mr—Muscular Poet.”

Some spectators cheered for Lovell, at least those two men who had bet on him, who had earned real money with their wagers. “Here's a Quaker with pluck, an' a fist of iron, no mistake!”

“A fine fight, sir.”

“That were the d—ndest thing ever I saw,” said a man who lost money.

Rascal Henry was quivering, furious at Sean Linehan. “Ye *lost*, ye fool? Spooked by a bloody *cat*? Knocked out by a *Quaker*? G-d *d—n* you for a fool of a Paddy! For shame, ye *ignorant* ox!”

Sean rubbed his jaw and looked at him.

“You're *worthless*. And don't think to run back to Ireland and your croppy landlord. He ain't a-going to help you none. I regret me the money spent in buying you. Ye'll have to work longer than your term, to pay me back the money ye owe me, now.”

The hitherto silent Sean then succumbed to the sin of wrath. “Go n-ithe an cat thú is go n-ithe an Diabhal an cat!” he cried. *May the cat eat you and the Devil eat the cat*. He stepped over and threw his right fist straight into the left eye of Rascal Henry, who collapsed

beneath the blow and lay wimpering in pain on the ground. Linehan kicked him repeatedly while he was down, and he wisely stayed prone as his Ape kicked and cursed him, his indenture, England, and all Englishmen. “Spailpín,” Linehan called him, *rascal* indeed. The courtyard was now utterly silent. Sean then walked over to the fear-stricken Davies and took the unlocked strongbox from him. He took the thirty-guinea purse out of it, and tossed it to Lovell, adding to it the victor's original six guineas. Sean Linehan then put on his fine shirt and hat, and taking the strongbox full of every gentleman's wager with him he strode out of the courtyard. Head held high, he marched down the High Street, and walked out of town headed west towards Nether-Stowey. No one dared stop him, no one even dared to speak until he had gone.

Rascal Henry later went to the magistrate and laid information against him as a thief and absconder, authorities in Bristol were notified, and every berth in Harbourside was watched in case Sean Linehan attempted to take a ship bound for Ireland. Some time later it was ascertained that Sean had simply walked to the quay at Minehead and searched until he found sailors who spoke Irish, and went with them in a fishing boat back to Ireland. Accounts differ as to his subsequent fate. It is certain that he did return to his home and then left again with his father Liam and his widowed sister Mairéad McCann, and his old Killorglin neighbours speculated they used the stolen wager money for passage to America. But one “Sean O'Linehan” fought for Fitzgerald and Wolfe Tone in the '98 Rebellion (as did Harman Blennerhassett), and aided in the landing of Général Hoche at Bantry Bay, according to court records in County Kerry. He enrolled in the army of the Irish Republic and fought beside the French in Connacht, later becoming a captain of infantry in 1803. This may be another man altogether, the name not being uncommon. What is certain is that our Sean Linehan was never again in another prize-fight after that day in Cannington.

Edmund Greenall did in the end catch Geoffrey Saucer that day, though the cat was not put into the tom-cat cage after all. First of all, the Feline Asylum in Cannington was about to be closed and

moved nearby to Bridgwater. Also, Edmund was quite taken with the animal, and wanted to keep Geoffrey as his own pet. *For he is an instrument for the children to learn benevolence upon*. He called him “Scratchy Jack” (cats do not much care what people name them) and fed him all the smelly pilchards he could buy or steal from the fish market in Bristol. For Edmund had left both the orphanage and the Home Office behind, and departed Cannington for the city. He and Scratchy Jack lived hand-to-mouth at first, as Edmund took what work he could find, both legal and not. But then he went to work for an old costermonger, a childless man who took pity on him, and who came to admire Edmund's enterprise and determination, and paid him well. This was steady work for years. After the costermonger died in 1798 Edmund inherited his cart and business, and from then on Scratchy Jack ate fish every day until the cat died in 1801. Edmund was soon a successful green-grocer, and by 1820 the firm of E. Greenall & Sons was the largest grocery in all Bristol. He also invested in shipping, and in canal and rail schemes, and the orphan eventually became a wealthy man and a member of the Society of Merchant Venturers. He was always fond of cats, and was a patron of charities that helped in their rescue and care.

I've got sixpence, jolly, jolly sixpence,
I've got sixpence to last me all my life,
I've got tuppence to spend and tuppence to lend
And tuppence to send home to my wife.
—Traditional song, date unknown