



AN EARLY PHOTOGRAPH OF JOSEPHUS PHY

JOE PHY---GLADIATOR

By JOHN A. ROCKFELLOW

In reading Con P. Cronin's interesting account in the July issue of the ARIZONA HISTORICAL REVIEW of the Pete Gabriel-Joe Phy duel at Florence in 1888, I have been reminded of a humorous incident which was very characteristic of Joe Phy. I knew Joe intimately in Tucson during the years of 1881-1882-1883. At that time he was supplying the town with water, getting it from the spring at the gardens in the southern part of town. He had large tank wagons for delivery at so much per bucket; he also sprinkled the streets with a regulation tank sprinkler. He was prosperous and also very generous; he had warm friends and some, also, of course, who took advantage of his generosity. In spite of his congenial disposition, he had a combative bump that was perhaps his undoing.

The introduction of the city water system put an end to his business. He claimed that the company had agreed to pay him for his equipment, that he had furnished them water free during the progress of their work, but that they had dropped him when they were ready to sell water. Phy told me this himself; I have only his statement, but I always had faith in his word. This business coupled with other misfortunes broke him and left him morose and with a grievance.

Joe spent some months with Walter Servoss and me at the old N. Y. Ranch, in the Sulphur Springs Valley, during the spring and summer of 1885. He enjoyed helping with the ranch work, but would become gloomy when unoccupied, and I really think his mental machinery slipped a cog. Among our cattle was a cow which had been shipped from Mexico, and she always seemed to see red. We had named her Old Broncho because she was always on the prod. I saw her once, without apparent provocation run at a horse and horn him in the ribs, knocking him clear over on his side. The rider was pinned down and would have felt Old Broncho's horns in another instant had it not been for a rope thrown deftly around her leg by another mounted rider. We thought the old fighter was too mean to bring a calf, but at the time of this particular incident we had found her with a calf, away from her usual range. They moved her to the ranch, and I put her in a large corral. Joe had occasion to cross the corral, and was paying no attention to the scrappy cow. She made a dash and nearly caught him. He

lost no time getting to the top of the fence; then with a look of defiance said: "You old hell-cat; do you think you can bluff me?" Going to the woodpile he got a club three or four feet long and larger than a man's wrist. Coming back into the corral and taking a position about the center, he did not have long to wait. As the old fiend charged, Joe side-stepped and gave her a blow on the top of the skull that nearly finished her. Lining up again, the cow came at him groggily. Joe beat her on the head until she was licked; she turned tail and ran but Joe was close behind beating her at every jump. Thoroughly exhausted, Joe stopped, and when he had regained his breath conceived a new idea. "Old Sweetheart," he said, "I'm going to milk you." He got his rope and tie her to a post, secured her hind legs, got a cup and actually squeezed a few drops from the unwilling creature. By this time the calf had been branded and the cow was released. She limped off through the open gates, keeping her weather eye on Joe and his big stick. Shame and humiliation were new emotions to her, and she disappeared, and in so far as we knew no one who knew Old Broncho ever caught sight of her again—she must have left the United States.

Phy went direct from our ranch to Florence, expecting to line up with Gabriel, whom he regarded as a very particular friend. I have never heard a reasonable explanation for the break, neither have I ever heard a friend of either man question the bravery of the other, nor was it believed for a minute that either of them would take unfair advantage of an enemy.

Joe's savage slash at Gibson was due to the fact that he despised an assassin, which Joe strongly suspected Gibson of being on account of the latter's part in the killing of Levy, who was killed in the door of the Palace Hotel in Tucson by gunfire from hidden foes.

After the tragedy in Florence, when Pete Gabriel had been brought back to life, I met him. However, we met as we always had, and through a short and pleasant conversation not a word was said about Joe or the fight. Pete was a good sport.