

# Biographical Sketch of Hy Schramm

by Walter Robb

Hy "Calvo" Schramm\* is dead, but it took Asiatic cholera to get him—the most picturesque 70-year-old in all the Far East. If a lawyer, doctor, merchant, or chief in Manila is as low as second in his profession, then he is less successful than was Hy "Calvo" Schramm—who in his profession was first; and so with all: the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers. For Schramm was a fight referee, in his heyday 20 years ago so close to the top that it was more than hinted that the New York State Boxing Commission would gladly give him a license.

But pshaw! Schramm was much more than that; he was all that the term "a remarkable character" implies; that is to say, all that a pub-prophetor means when he tags a man "a great guy, no foolin', bo." Hy, for Hiram of course; and the word means noble. There was Hiram of Tyre, Solomon's friend who sent cedar timbers from Lebanon for the temple at Jerusalem; and Solomon accounted it a noble generosity.

Hiram Schramm, during his 71 years, sent many precious cedars to the temple-builders. If this is to speak in parables, it means that he often gave just the right word, just the right help to the discouraged; and he gave the cedars of Lebanon, because he gave from the bottom of his purse as well as from the bottom of his heart. In such manner he helped men build stateries mansions of their lives than they otherwise would.

"Buck up, buddy!" he often said, "Buck up, the bell may save you!"

His speech was of the ring and the gilly show (defined a moment forward), superimposed on a native Yiddish brogue and an early cockney. But where is the man or woman east of Suez who didn't find it charming? It glowed like friendly coals, because it was never harsh but always infused with kindness. Schramm kept his watching friends amused even while he died. It was in the pest hospital, of course—San Lazaro. Rallying from a paroxysm, he grinned and admitted sheepishly: "By gad! I almost slipped the cable that time, boys!"

He danced late as usual at Manila Hotel on Saturday night, and spent Sunday night as usual at Tom's Oriental Grill. Monday morning the malady came on him, slowly; he called up his office to say he guessed he'd have to take the day off. By the time Eddie Tait and other friends reached him, his condition was desperate. They took him to St. Luke's, and upon diagnosis, to San Lazaro. There he closed the show, sundown, Tuesday, September 3. There was a great clock in the hallway outside his room, and it struck the hour, seven, like the gong at a ringside; and at the seventh stroke exactly, Schramm was out.

He was born in San Francisco, August 22, 1864. When he died he had no living kin. He left home, sailing to South Africa, when 11 years old, beginning a career of 60 years of following wide horizons. He was with the British in the Boer war, and he went from Africa to Australia and New Zealand; but he had drifted back to the Pacific coast when the Spanish-American war broke out, when, not physically fit to be recruited, lacking the right index finger, he went into the army-transport service and came to Manila. The turn being soon over, he came ashore to manage Clarke's, the famous oldtime Escolta restaurant patronized by everyone who was anyone.

Tom Pritchard, in time to succeed Clarke's with his Oriental Grill, was Clarke's chief when Schramm was Clarke's manager. Such a friendship is more than curious, between the kitchens and the diningroom, yet this one happened.

At last Schramm left Clarke's to have a place of his own, the Red Star Café and Hotel in Sampaloc, soon the headquarters of Schramm's string of fighters; for with the advent of American sailors and soldiers, and marines, Manila was introduced to the fight game.

Louis Albert, one of Schramm's string, became light-weight champion of the Orient. Bud Walters was another good fighter Schramm trained. About 1920 Schramm joined Churchill & Tait in the Olympic club, as match-maker and referee; and as referee soon won his fame for fairness and for discipline in the ring. He also won his nick-name, "Calvo", the Spanish for bald. Everyone liked to rag the referee, especially the "gente" on the 2-bit seats back of the barbed-wire, and "Calvo" was a full-sounding epithet.

"Hey, Calvo! What round is it?"

It might be the fifth. It would look like the sixth. Schramm would hold up his right hand, fingers wide-spread, and 1 finger of the left. The anxious one would of course give the right hand 5 fingers, but that was his fault! He should have known about the Boers.

About 1924 Churchill & Tait started their gilly shows, and Schramm always managed one of them—Edwin Tait, usually managing the other, is out with one now. A gilly show is a tent-show not provided with its-own transportation, but getting about on circuit by whatever means it can find. Schramm and Edwin made their shows up at Manila, after the spring carnival, every second year, and traveled with them through the Dutch East Indies, India, Burma, Siam, French Indochina, Ceylon, the Federated Malay States and a few more places—the circuit taking 2 years and being the longest and oddest in the world.

Java had never seen a carnival tent-show till Schramm took his there, to find he liked the Dutch and the Javanese and to go back time and time again—never failing either to make Sumatra. He would build up the show as he went along, when good acts were to be had. The countries making up the circuit are peopled with local dignitaries; but sultans, even with British aides standing by, went quickly under Schramm's geniality. The Sultan of Jember will miss his showman-friend, who slapped his knee and told him rare anecdotes garnered along the road; often true ones, of the antics of animals. So will the Sultan of Selangor, and many another in whose capital Schramm's show and its romantic tents has been looked forward to.

With no authority, however strange to him, did Schramm ever quarrel. He might not know a word of the local law, or of the language, or the value of the money, or what labor should be paid; but he knew something better than all this, he knew how not to be intrigued of woman. There would often be a woman with him, but not twice the same woman; and he and the woman would be openly at table, openly dining and chatting, perhaps dancing; and he would take her openly to her abode, on leaving, and openly repair to his own. Therefore strange men, rulers jealous that no foreigner intrude scandal into their estates, knew him as a man's man and put faith in him as such.

He left the road 2 years ago, when he was 69 years old, to be with Eddie Tait and George F. "Doc" Harris in the biggest moving-picture enterprise in the Far East, Philippine Films, Inc., where he soon had charge of the laboratories. The only apprenticeship he had for this was his amateur appreciation of photography, but he soon mastered the job—the rising quality of the studio's output showing it. It was from this work that he guessed, as he put it, he would lay off for a day. The funeral services, unpretentious, were at the Army mortuary. There was practically no estate. Hy "Calvo" Schramm, knowledge of whose passing will give ex-governors of the Philippines a quick breath, as it will coheros in Manila's streets and rickshaw pullers in Singapore's, left of goods to rust and corrupt practically nothing.

\*Readers will remember that Hy Schramm died in Manila about 6 months ago. This story has been waiting for a hole where we could plug it in. But it was featured by the Chicago Daily News syndicate.—W. R.

## Biographical Sketch . . .

*(Continued from page 13)*

The body was cremated.

Alejandro Roces, Manila's wealthy publisher and globe-trotter, must find another angler to share his week-end fishing trips on his yacht, the *Vanguardia*. It may be suspected that Sr. Roces got this boat mainly for the pleasure of Schramm's company on it. His type liked Schramm best, men who esteem their fellows for their genuine worth: for their diligence in hewing cedars and offering them for ennobling aspirations: for the way in which, as Schramm's lingo had it, they buck the game.

A man like Schramm should have had some fights. He had them, of course—though not many. As he was past 70 and looked hardly 50, he was heartily strong. As boxing had been his exercise, and gillying a tent-show over a 2-year

circuit had been his work, he was hard as nails. So when a coward tackled him, as happened sometimes, the coward was invariably worsted.

Once it happened at Santa Ana; the young aggressor was the athletic husband of a Hollywood star. He crashed the table where Schramm and other oldtimers were sitting, over drinks and talk. Schramm steered him back to his own table, twice, explaining kindly that he was annoying oldtimers; that he might be anything he claimed, in Hollywood, but he was just a man off a boat in Manila; that he wouldn't enjoy the oldtimers' conversation anyway, nor understand it, since it was a dialect of gentlemen well-seasoned to the East; and in short, that he had better go play with the girls. But he came back a third time, and another man among the oldtimers wanted to handle him, only he said he just wanted to have it out with "that old cuss", meaning Schramm. So Schramm rose, the young cavalier squared off . . . and then they picked him up, half-way down the dance floor. (Sober the next day, and sailing, his right eye treated, and with colored glasses on, he thought it a great joke that a man in Manila 65 years old had knocked him out. He took it in good part, and went to Schramm and apologized. Had he liked a mannish civilization and stayed in the East, he might have become an oldtimer himself).

Other men Schramm had to fight were usually men butting into his show, but they were few—Schramm could talk them out of it if they weren't very, very stubborn. He never liked to harm anything, his nature was kind. That is why he had such fondness for animals, and why they liked him. He could never understand, when he lived at the Manila Hotel, why people in the lobby grew nervous when he came in with a pet lion or leopard on a leash. Showmanesque? Certainly. Schramm was a showman, the like of whom the East will never see again.

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