

# “The Turning Point”

ALL IN THE DAY'S RIDING

BY WILL JAMES

ILLUSTRATIONS (FRONTISPIECE) BY THE AUTHOR

THE last bucking horse I rode is, or was a couple of years ago, about as good a bucking horse as there was in the West, I could just as well say in the whole world because there's no fighting ponies nowheres that can come up with the western range horse of the U. S. on bucking ability that way.

Anyway, he was some bucking horse, and many a bronk rider would tell you so. We called him “Happy” because he looked anything else but that. His head was about as long as my arm, which is pretty fair length, and his body matched up with that head, but there the proportions ended, for his neck and legs was short and thick and didn't at all match with that head and body of his. I'd watch him graze once in a while and I'd have to laugh when I'd notice how, on account of his head being so long and his legs so short, he'd hardly have to bow his neck to reach for the grass. He was built like one of these Dutch hounds, two horse long and one horse high.

But that build of him was all a feller could find to grin at about that horse, and the minute a feller got up in the middle of him, all grins, if there was any, faded away, and a mighty concerned interest took place.

The way I come to meet up with this particular horse was very average, but

what all he done to me wasn't at all average.—I'd come up from the deserts of southern Nevada, I'd been breaking horses for an outfit down there, and I'd got to feeling that being at a camp all by myself with them bronks, fifty miles from nowheres, didn't strike me as the best a feller could get out of life. If I'd had somebody to haze the bronks I was riding, and keep 'em out of the deep washes they'd run or buck into, things wouldn't been so bad, but there I was alone, and I was getting leery that I'd soon begin talking to myself.

Another thing is that I was getting fed up on breaking horses. The reckless feeling I'd had a few years before had received quite a few knocks and made my breath come short often. I'd got in a few mix ups with them ponies that left scars and broken bones to remind me, and as time went on and them mix-ups accumulated there'd come a day when, getting on an ornery horse, I noticed as I put my foot in the stirrup that my spur rowel was ringing. My whole left leg was shaking, and I begin to grin, but it was a kind of a serious grin, because to me the ring of that spur rowel was the same as a bell ringing that quitting time had come. I was getting nervous, or scared.

I was only twenty-six years old when I started to draw the line on the raw

ones, and by then I'd spent many years on the backs of fighting ponies. I sat on my first horse when I was about four, and I remember 1900 as the year I got bucked off for the first time and was sent rolling down a hill. I was seven going on eight years old at the time, and I remember the year on account of my foster father buying me my first saddle, all for my own self.

With all the events that followed one another after that I felt by the time I was twenty-six that I'd sure enough done my share in the bronk-fighting game. By then my thoughts kept a going back to different happenings every time I'd climb onto a bowed-back horse, and when finally my spur rowels got to ringing a reminder of my lost nerve—was when I got to thinking of a job with gentler horses, a job where I'd get paid for being a cow-hand and not so much for being a bronk stomper.

I thought of hitting for Oregon, or some good range where there was trees and plenty of water. I wanted a change from the southern Nevada deserts, get a job from some big outfit, not as a bronk-peeler no more, but as an all-around cow-hand, and with a spread where I'd have the company of many riders.

It was while on my way that I met "Happy," that ill built black bucking horse I started telling about. He was the one that finally convinced me for sure that there was nothing in riding bad horses, and that it was high time for me to quit anyhow.

I'd come along to the town of Reno, Nevada. A big Rodeo was being pulled off there, and being I was just in time for the doings, I thought of maybe entering in the contest. But as my luck would have it, and I didn't kick about it, I fell into a steady job of hunting up

some early-days' stage coaches for the stage-coach races, and chuck wagon for the same purpose, all to be used on the rodeo grounds. I had to do so much running around and was kept so busy at that that I didn't get to see only glimpses of the contest.

The rodeo lasted four days, and I'd got to meet many of the boys I'd knowed before, and from near every western state. I'd met a cowboy I rode with before the war, and natural-like him and me got to running together again; then us two run acrost another ranahan, and it was thru him that "Happy" and me got to mix.

Fred Conrardt was this third feller's name. He started to break this "Happy" horse a few months before, and even tho Fred was a mighty good hand with a bronk, and a mighty good rider, him and that pony couldn't get to agree, and "Happy" would try to buck him off three or four times at every saddling. It seemed like that horse's ambition was natural-like against anything that had to do with being under a saddle, and the more Fred tried to make it easy for him the worse that pony got.

Then Fred, finally losing patience had started to knocking on him. Maybe he thought, that would bring the orneriness out of him, but it didn't, and ever after a long day's ride that pony would tear things up just the same as if he'd just had a long rest. He'd got to buck so good that Fred begin to wonder often if he'd be able to stick on the next time.

Fred didn't stop to think about it while he was trying to make "Happy" behave that he was setting on a natural born bucking horse, a bad horse that'd always fight and never be good for anything but buck and tear things up. Good treatment had been tried on him to the limit, I know, because Fred likes horses

oo much to ever mistreat any of 'em, but this pony was just plain bad, just like you find a bad man sometimes amongst the best of people.

Them is the kind of ponies that go to make up the bucking horse strings that's hipped to all the big Rodeos like them hat's held every year in such places as Chicago, Calgary, New York, Pendleton, and Cheyenne. They are the western range horses. Most of 'em are half-breds and big, fine looking horses, but being born and raised in the open, seldom seeing a human till they're four years old or more, they get every bit as wild as a deer, as strong and powerful as ho they was built of tempered steel, and as active and dangerous as a cornered tiger. When one of them horses is inclined to be bad, he is sure enough *bad* and no fooling.

“Happy” was turning out to be that kind. The more he was rode the more he got to know how to buck, and nothing else but. If while riding the hills Fred started him out after some bunch-quitting critter that pony wasn't at all interested in heading 'er off, and instead he'd bog his head and make the cowboy buckle down to some real riding.

Fred rode that horse off and on for about a month, then work being over with that outfit for a spell, he turned him loose, caught up his private ponies and hit out for new range. Two months went by and then come time for the Rodeo, and after another month something came up which made Fred think of Happy.”

By that time me and Fred and this other feller I used to know before the war, his name is Elmer, we all got pretty thick, and the way the three of us kept together you'd think we was all handcuffed to one another. We never

mixed with nobody else much unless it was some other cowboy, and we'd have the fun of our lives playing tricks amongst ourselves, and arguing about things that didn't amount to nothing.

It was while we was feeling rollicky that way one day that one of us suggested a little riding. Not riding along a path or nothing like that, but real riding, a good bucking horse or anything that was hard to set. Then, natural-like, Fred thought of “Happy.” He got on his horse and rode out to get him, then two more horses was hunted up, one was “Hell-Morgan,” a good buck, and the other “Solera,” he was no slouch either.

“Hell-Morgan” was one of the buckers they'd had at the Rodeo, he done a good job there, and me being sort of fed up on bronk riding, and, as I said before, wanting to set on gentle horses for a change, I didn't crave so much for “Hell-Morgan” as a mount. I thought I'd like that long-bodied black best which Fred brought in. That was agreeable all around, so I drew “Happy,” Fred was to take “Hell-Morgan,” and Elmer “Solera.”

The happenings that followed might go to show that when a feller makes up his mind to quit a thing he'd better do it or something most always happens which makes him wish he had. Of course I hadn't for sure made up my mind to quit as yet, but I'd thought about it and that amounted to the same thing.

Then again, and being I'd sort of figured to leave rough horses alone, I'd got me a new saddle made. It was a saddle for roping and not so good for bronk riding. It was a full flower-hand-carved double rig, a daggone pretty little saddle and with a low fork and extra low cantle. The boys used to kid me about that cantle, saying all it was good for was

to keep a feller from setting down.—I found that out.

And, to be real stylish, I'd ordered a pair of long twenty-six inch tapideros to go over the stirrups of that saddle and hang down. They're fine to work a herd with, but they're not so good on a bucking horse and I'd never rode one with tapideros before. Any rider will tell you that that's *some* disadvantage, specially with a stiff pair like mine was, and I figured I was as much handicapped getting on a hard bucking horse with that outfit as Dempsey would be entering the fighting ring with gum boots on.—But being it was all for fun I didn't think about it.

This all might sound like a lot of excuses for what all goes on, and maybe it is, but I don't think there's anybody can face the sudden facts that he's a "has-been" without putting up some excuse about it, not if he's been in the game deep enough. And I still allow that I could of scratched that pony every jump he made if I'd had my old saddle, not that my old saddle was sure proof against getting throwed, because no such saddle can be made, but, if I do say it myself, no bronk got out from under me while I used that old "kak" and I'd rode and stomped some bronks in it that was as tough as "Happy" ever was. It was a kind of a slick rig too, but I knowed every inch of it—I knowed just how much room I had in it, and how loose I could ride without having it go from under me. And being I never rode on main strength, and never hung on a spur, I had to have *something* to go by which would give me a halfways even break with the horse I was riding.

With that new saddle, which was all different from the old one, I feel that "Happy" had all the advantage and me

none, and I'll never forgive myself for getting on him so careless like, because that was the last hard horse I ever rode and I'd sure like to feel now that I did ride that last one to a fare-you-well.

Anyway, as I slapped my new saddle on "Happy's" round back, I didn't think about no such a turning point as happened in my life a short while after.

I was the first rider up, and Fred done the snubbing while I done the saddling. I looked at them long tapideros then while and had a hunch I should take 'em off, but the hunch wasn't strong enough, and anyway I didn't want to take the time.

A blindfold over his eyes, "Happy" stood spraddle-legged and hardly moved. He was a true bucking horse, and he was saving all there was in him till the time come for him to put in his good work. And he was in mighty good shape to do that too, because it'd been three months since he'd been rode last, and all he'd had to do in that time was to feed up on tall bunch grass, get fat, and stack up on orneriness.

Fred didn't reckon on that then, neither did any of us, and we wouldn't care anyway. So, as it was, and as Fred figured, I was only getting on an average bucking horse, hard enough, but nothing special. He reckoned he'd be easy pickings for me.

We was all joking and grinning as usual when I eased my leg over the saddle and stuck my toe in the stirrup on the other side. "Happy" sort of squatted as I reached over and yanked the blindfold off his eyes, and then things started from there.

It was a wicked start, and the boys, as they told me afterwards, was just as surprised as I was. That pony seemed like to just blow up. He went up in the air from where he'd squatted, his head dis-

appeared, and nothing was in sight but the saddle, which hit me from all sides and whirled as it hit.

Being I felt kind of rollicky myself, and was riding for fun, I had to laugh at the time on account of the confusion of things. That saddle seemed greased, and that little cantle at the back was all that kept me knowing of my whereabouts, only, sometimes it'd remind me too well and near knock me off. It'd pound me a few times and then it'd miss, and when I thought I was getting onto the hang of that pony's tactics he'd change 'em just that sudden and bring in new styles, but I kept track of that cantle some way and stayed straight up, even if I couldn't get lined out to riding.

Most horses when they first go to bucking bow their necks and make a long hard forward jump, but this “Happy” horse done just the opposite. He bowed his neck sure enough and ducked his head out of sight, but he didn't go forward and up, instead he went up and whirled backwards. He'd hit the ground as hard as he could and three or four times at each whirl, and each time backwards. He was what the bronk riders call a “spinner” and I was just beginning to realize that and ride according when he went to side-winding, then other ways which, far as I know, is not described by names.

I sure missed my old saddle thru all that commotion, but somehow I was having a lot of fun a trying to figger out the puzzle of sticking to this new one, and the deeper the puzzle got the more I had to laugh. I'd never seen myself ride in that style before, not since I was a kid.

Them long tapideros on my stirrups was some more for me to laugh at which sure kept me interested in trying to keep my feet inside of, for about the

first thing that pony done as he whirled was to kick one plum off my foot, the wind had took the other, and there I was, foot loose, and setting on twelve hundred pounds of dynamite that kept exploding several times to the second.

I thought if I could get my feet inside them tapideros again and find the stirrups I could still put up a halfways decent ride, but them daggone long taps was just like a popper at the end of a whip, couldn't get a hold of 'em, and they kept a sticking up under my nose all the time and smacking me on one side and then another.

Being, as I said before, I wasn't much for hugging a horse or ride on main strength, I sure didn't have much to go by as to where and how I was setting. Everything was going up and snapping, even my shirt tail, all a whirling to hit hard and snap some more. Then seeing how I sure could never put up a ride without my stirrups that way, I went to trying to get 'em down from under my nose so I could put my foot in 'em. I grabbed the old nubbin (the saddle horn), a disgraceful thing for a bronk-peeler to do, but what could you expect of a has-been like me, and anyway, being I was riding for fun, I was going to grab it just long enough to get my stirrups—after that I was going to show 'em how riding is done.

But I didn't get to show off that way, because getting them daggone tapideros down where I could slip my feet inside of 'em was like trying to thread a fine needle with boxing gloves on your mitts while shooting the chutes.

But I was bound and determined to get my feet inside them taps if it was the last thing I ever done. I choked the nubbin a little more and went to fishing for 'em. “Happy” had done his worst by then, and I was sure leery he'd quit buck-



ing entirely before I got them stirrups, because if he did, that sure wouldn't be no ride for me to be proud of. All on account of that strange saddle and them daggone tapideros too.

Thinking "Happy" was about ready to quit, one of the boys, Elmer, rode up alongside of me and asked between jumps if I wanted him to "pick up." I laughed at him and never answered, for I was still in hopes of getting my stirrups and putting up some sort of a ride before the horse was ready to quit.

But I was too late now. Gradually, "Happy's" head begin to come up, the hard hitting jolts eased up to long easy crowhops, and I knowed that any minute his head would come up all the way and he'd go to stampeding with me. Now was the time to quit him, before he started to run, because he was heading for a patch of heavy timber, and what would happen to me in there on top of that horse would be left for the pine limbs to tell.

There was nothing for me to do now but step off, for the ride, as bum as it was, was over. There was no use looking for stirrups no more, so I sort of eased to one side figgering to throw my leg over the horse's neck as he went and let him go out from under me. But glancing ahead a little to make sure of my footing, I got a glimpse of a railroad track, and then I thought of sticking on a little longer. I didn't want to take no chances of stumbling on that.

It was about then that something happened, and it was all on account of me getting set to step off and then changing my mind. "Happy" had felt me easing to one side, and being the wise horse he was, he took advantage of it. He brought a crooked hard hitting jump of the kind he'd started out with, and it felt to me like he'd stuck both feet in a badger

hole that had no bottom to, of a sudden hit solid bedrock, and me being set to step off instead of being set to ride I sure wasn't prepared for no such. I was throwed hard and landed in a heap between the railroad tracks, my head hit one of the rails, "Happy" planted one foot in the middle of my back and went on, then I didn't know no more.

The boys told me afterwards how they was sure scared that I was a dead one. They said I was all twisted, chest down, face up to the sky, and half of my scalp tore up and hanging over the rail.

But I fooled 'em, and after they straightened me up, and got air in my lungs, it wasn't long when I begin to grin at 'em— The first thing I thought of was how I'd spoiled the fun by going to work and getting hurt, and I figgered on making up for that in a way so it wouldn't strike 'em as very serious. I went on grinning, started to brush the dirt off my clothes unconcerned like and even went to singing an old song the cowboys all know, "Bury me not on the lone prairie."

A little crowd had gathered around by then, and one feller hearing me sing remarked, "He's out of his head."

"You'd be out of your head too," I come back at him, "if you'd tried to bend a railroad track with it."

The boys kidded me about that for a long time afterwards and said that the railroad company was going to sue me for damages, but they wasn't kidding much when the accident happened, and I couldn't fool 'em none as to how bad I was hurt. Blood was streaming down from my head plum down to the toe of my boots, and after trying to put all the hide back in place over that dome of mine, somebody around who had a car was kind enough to offer to take me to a doctor.

That was the wind up of the last bucking horse I rode. I felt the effects of that for a couple of years afterwards on account that during that last ride an old internal injury had been stirred, and it began to bother me again.

And that's how come I didn't go to Oregon, as I'd first planned. "Happy" had proved to be my turning point, a mighty rough one maybe, but my turning point sure enough. While I was recuperating I happened to think of a mining man I'd met who said he'd give me a grand letter of introduction to an editor of a magazine on the west coast. This mining man knowed the editor vell, and being he'd seen some of the drawings I'd made and which I'd jacked 'round from cow camp to cow camp, he'd thought I was foolish not to try and get some of that work in the magazines and make a living that way instead of riding.

I didn't pay no serious attention to that man's good advice right then, most likely if I hadn't met up with "Happy" I'd forgot all about it, and right to-day I'd still be riding for a living—not that I'd mind that so much, but this ain't so bad either, and being a has-been I'd rather draw and write about that life than take a back seat as a rider.

So, if I'm to be thankful, "Happy" is the one who'd get the first thanks. He's the one who jolted the mining man's advice back to my memory, and fixed me so I'd have time to think about it afterwards. He's the one that showed me for sure that I'd rode one too many bronks, and that it was high time for me to quit and be sensible.

I often thought about that afterwards, and when I bought my little outfit here in Montana and had Fred come up to run it for me, I wanted to get "Happy" and turn him loose amongst the tall grass

of my best range, and just have him to look at as a reminder. But Fred tells me that "Happy" got valuable after I left the cow country and hit for the art world. He tells me, and so does a few other riders, that "Happy" made a big name for himself amongst the Rodeo bucking horses, maybe not as big a name as some of 'em did, but he was as good as any, and bucked his man off as often as the best of 'em.

And come to think about it, that careless ride I put on "Happy" proved to be his turning point too, because up till then there was talks of putting him in the harness and breaking him to work. "Happy" would of been pulling a wagon for the rest of his life, and I know that wasn't his calling because he put too much heart in his bucking.

The next year I was pushing a crayon in my rope hand and making pictures of bucking horses and such for the magazines. In the summer of that same year "Happy" was entered as a bucking horse at a big rodeo and when he come out of the chute he bucked his rider off in the first jump. That rider was a good one too, he'd rode many hard buckers and qualified high at many contests, but when he came out on "Happy" that day he didn't get nowheres, and he was heard to say afterwards that he'd never seen so many horses at one time as he seen in that black horse.

Off and on I'd hear some more about "Happy's" bucking ability. He got to be a wanted horse at many a rodeo thru Northern California and bucked many a good man off. Good riders who'd come from far and near to compete for the prize money that was offered, and these men was serious in their riding, they didn't straddle "Happy" nor none of the buckers with no low forked, low cantle, roping saddle, and there was no tapi-

deros on their stirrups to interfere with their riding; but "Happy" bucked many of 'em off just the same, and as I heard it often, about every other man fell by the wayside when they came out of the chute on that horse.

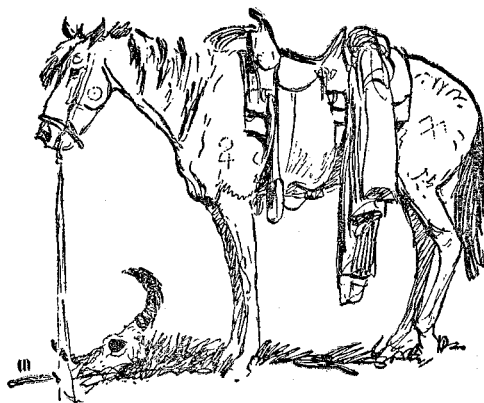
"Happy" was right in the thick of what he was cut out for. It was an art with him, the same as it is with any good bucking horse—he was born to it. He kept a going up at that game, and then one day I heard that he was in the bucking string at the Pendleton round up, one of the biggest contests in the world and at such an event where none but the world's fightingest bucking horses are gathered.

"Happy" had reached the top of the ladder as a bucking horse, and he was at the same standing a prize fighter was when under Tex Rickard's wing, only maybe not as profitable— But "Happy" didn't care, not as long as he could buck a man off.

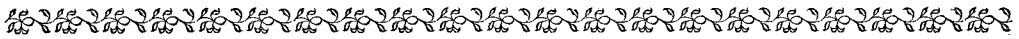
I was mighty glad, and sort of proud,

at hearing of "Happy's" high standing as a bucking horse, because I feel that I had a lot to do in the turning point in that pony's career, and also mine, because if it hadn't been for him maybe I wouldn't be writing and drawing about him to-day. We was more or less one another's object which turned up from aimless ramblings to the way our natural talents pointed; and now, somehow, I don't feel so bad for getting on that horse with a saddle that gave him all the advantages.

I don't feel so bad that I'm a has-been that I put up such a bum ride, and was hindered with them long tapideros, or the last bucking horse I straddled, because now I see where providence played a hand, and some day I'd like to see "Happy" again, and I'd like to touch his black hide in a sort of a handshake from one artist to another— But sometimes, as I feel the scar that runs over the top of my head, I do wish I'd had my old saddle that day when I straddled "Happy."







# Elijah

THE PROPHET OF TRAVEL BY AIR

BY JOHN FINLEY

"And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"

His "plane" was called "The Spirit of the Lord"  
(See chapter two, the Second Book of Kings);  
Its fuselage had semblance of a flame,  
Or fiery cloud, flung up the morning sky  
From Edom where the vats of Bozrah stood  
Which He had trod alone with garments dyed.

As one of Solomon's war-chariots  
'Twas fashioned, such as they have lately found  
At Armageddon. So man shapes the new  
From what has been, the steam-car from the coach.

Ezekiel beheld the cherubim  
Mounted on wheels that "went up" with the wings—  
No doubt such wheels as bald Elisha saw,  
The landing-gear of that first heaven-car.

"Horses of fire,"—for motors had not come;  
Horsepower was still the stallion's strength, nor had  
As yet been harnessed to a piston-rod,  
Or in a locomotive engine pent.

As "by a whirlwind" it ascended till  
Elisha saw no more; nor found they trace  
Though fifty prophet-men went out in search  
Three days, "lest peradventure," as they said,  
"The Spirit of the Lord" hath taken him  
And cast him on some crag or in some vale."

. . . . .

They found him not. Thus he became the first  
Of those who skyward flew and ne'er returned.  
But his gray mantle that had Jordan cleft,  
So that he passed unwetted through the wave,  
Has been caught up by new "aëronauts"  
Who've made sky-paths across the seven seas  
And now attempt the vast, last continent  
Where but "The Spirit of the Lord" hath flown.