

BUYING A HORSE

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Buying a Horse by William Dean Howells

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WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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BY
WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS



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IF one has money enough, there seems no reason why one should not go and buy such a horse as he wants. This is the commonly accepted theory, on which the whole commerce in horses is founded, and on which my friend proceeded.

He was about removing from Charles-bridge, where he had lived many happy years without a horse, farther into the country, where there were charming drives and inconvenient distances, and where a horse would be very desirable, if not quite necessary. But as a horse seemed at first an extravagant if not sinful desire, he be-

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gan by talking vaguely round, and rather hinting than declaring that he thought somewhat of buying. The professor to whom he first intimated his purpose flung himself from his horse's back to the grassy border of the sidewalk where my friend stood, and said he would give him a few points. "In the first place don't buy a horse that shows much daylight under him, unless you buy a horse-doctor *with* him; get a short-legged horse; and he ought to be short and thick in the barrel," — or words to that effect. "Don't get a horse with a narrow forehead: there are horse-fools as well as the other kind, and you want a horse with room for brains. And look out that he's *all right forward*."

"What's that?" asked my friend, hearing this phrase for the first time.

"That he is n't tender in his fore-feet, — that the hoof is n't contracted," said the professor, pointing out the well-planted foot of his own animal.

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"What ought I to pay for a horse?" pursued my friend, struggling to fix the points given by the professor in a mind hitherto unused to points of the kind.

"Well, horses are cheap, now; and you ought to get a fair family horse — You want a family horse?"

"Yes."

"Something you can ride and drive both? Something your children can drive?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, you ought to get such a horse as that for a hundred and twenty-five dollars."

This was the figure my friend had thought of; he drew a breath of relief. "Where did you buy your horse?"

"Oh, I always get my horses" — the plural abashed my friend — "at the Chevaliers'. If you throw yourself on their mercy, they'll treat you well. I'll send you a note to them."