

**SKETCHES FROM LIFE IN  
TOWN AND COUNTRY,  
AND SOME VERSES**

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Sketches from life in town and country, and some verses by Edward Carpenter

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**EDWARD CARPENTER**

**SKETCHES FROM LIFE IN  
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SKETCHES FROM LIFE

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\* Reprinted from *Narcissus and other Poems*.

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## SKETCHES FROM LIFE IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

MARTIN TURNER

TOWNSFOLK get their facial muscles pretty well exercised; they have to twitch some sort of greeting to their fellow-cits a hundred times a day. In country people the muscles of expression, from disuse, cease to act, or never get developed at all. Their faces acquire a stolid impervious look, and the town-dweller gets downright mad when, after letting off his best jokes and saying the most surprising things he can think of, the country-man still regards him with unchanged impassive eye, as though he were a cow or a tree. He goes off, spluttering contempt on the rustic's head.

But Hodge is not always such a fool as he looks. I have often been amused by the remarks passed when the man of words was gone.

"He seems in a mighty hurry, he do."

"Well, dun you see, he's got such a lot to say, he's bound to let it out somehow."

## SKETCHES FROM LIFE

"He war dauncin' about all the time, joost as if he war set on wires."

"Oh, he's a clever man, very clever. Now I lay he could thack you a stack in five minutes, or pleach that there hedge as soon as look at it."

"O ay, O ay! of course he could. What'd be the good of his eddication and sich, if he couldn't do that?"

And so on. Perhaps the Derbyshire farm people are especially notable for their stolid imperviosity of manner. There is a distich in the country-side:

"Derbyshire born, Derbyshire bred,  
Strong in the arm and weak in the head,"

which is certainly not very complimentary; but I must say I have not unfrequently found under this mask of denseness a shrewd and active mind, and even lambent wit. Martin Turner was "Derbyshire born, Derbyshire bred." When I first knew him he was a young farmer, about thirty years of age, living on his own farm, into possession of which he had lately come by the death of his father. He was of sturdy medium stature, solid, tough as oak, with florid smooth face, high cheek-bones, and grey eyes. He wore, or very commonly wore, an ancestral green coat with brass buttons, which suited him well, and when he looked at you it was with that rustic no-how sort of look, of which I have spoken. Yet behind the impenetrable face, and hidden by those almost simpleton manners, lay an acute

## MARTIN TURNER

philosophic mind and a keen sense of humour. You would talk to him for some time, and his features would be like stone—you would not feel *quite* sure whether he was following; then you would begin to notice a little twitching in the ends of the mouth, the look would become quite intense and pointed; till suddenly, with a kind of guffaw and a quick gesture, he would turn out some absurdly witty or really telling remark, which he would repeat several times over, with emphasis, after which he would relapse again into the utter rustic.

Martin was young when his mother died. The father, a quiet undemonstrative old boy (who wore the green coat then), carried on the farm, and after the mother's death a niece of his, Elizabeth, came to keep house for the three; for there was also an elder brother, David, but he was decidedly "weak in the head" and incompetent. Martin developed an extraordinary taste for reading, especially, oddly enough, mathematics. He read algebra, trigonometry, and all sorts of outrageous things, conning them out by himself, and later getting a little help from the schoolmaster. The father thought him a fool for his pains, but didn't mind as long as he milked the cows regular, and kept quiet (which of course he did) during his father's after-dinner nap.

There was one thing, however, that interfered with the nap, and irritated the old man excessively, and that was a *cricket*. It used to come out in a crack in the stone floor, just under