

INTRODUCTION

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which the writer of the *Iliad* appeals and the imaginative belief appealed to by *Captain Singleton* is, indeed, one of kind and not degree. As to the *Odyssey*, it is true that the vis matrix of the story is very largely man's shifts and devices in his struggle with the forces of nature, and that in *Robinson Crusoe* this is entirely so. But while in the one case nature is conquered by the special endowments and characteristics of a vividly painted individual, in the other she is conquered by the instinctive and inevitable ingenuities of universal man. And herein lies the difference between the born dramatist and the born story-teller. It might almost be said that in Homer's case it was only from artistic environment—it was only because in Homer's time there was no stage—that so pure a dramatist as he worked in any other than purely dramatic forms. Wonderful it is no doubt that ages before Phrynichus, ages before an acted drama was dreamed of, a dramatic poet of the first order should arise, who, though he was obliged to express his splendid dramatic imagination through epic forms, expressed it almost as fully as if he had inherited the method and the stage of Sophocles; but so it was.

II

THE PROPER STYLE FOR PROSE FICTION

And what shall be said about Defoe's narrative style? Its influence upon that of George Borrow, is beyond all gauging, although, of course, the sentimental attitude of Sterne also influenced the author of *Lavengro*.

Often and often has he said to me that Defoe was the only 'professional' author who could 'tell a plain story on paper,' and that was at a time before what a great living poet called the 'word-torturing' style of our many contemporary novelists had ever been dreamed of. 'It is,' writes Borrow in a well-known passage, 'no easy thing to tell a story plainly and distinctly by mouth; but to tell one on paper is difficult indeed, so many snares lie in the way. People are afraid to put down what is