

(vertebant, convertabant) their thumbs towards their breasts as a signal to his opponent to stab him. Those who wished him to be spared, turned their thumbs downwards (premebant) as a signal for dropping the sword." In Ruperti's edition of Juvenal there is a suggestion supporting Professor Mayor's opinion, namely, that the thumb was pointed upwards and inwards to the heart as a sign that the fallen man was to be run through there, and in accordance with this suggestion, the Rev. A. J. Macleane, one of the editors of the *Bibliotheca Classica*, holds to the opinion that the people expressed their approbation by turning their thumbs down, and the reverse by uplifting them.

Before concluding this portion of my article with a few comments on the turning of the thumb towards the breast to signify that the conquered gladiator was to be killed, an appropriate quotation from a little volume entitled *Society in Rome under the Caesars* may be given.<sup>1</sup> According to the author: "The general practice was for the spectators to express their wishes as to the fate of the prostrate combatant by a motion of the thumb, which was turned to the breast to indicate the death thrust, or moved downwards to signify the dropping of the weapon." And he adds, on the authority of Tacitus, that these mute gestures were often accompanied by loud shouts, "dissono clamore."

The act itself of turning the thumb towards the breast is suggestive. It made self-evident what was meant, if it could be seen; and we can take it for granted, if the signal was to be promptly obeyed, that it was one which had to be easily seen and readily understood. The great height from the arena to the podium would possibly render such a signal indistinct. It certainly would be indistinct if, at the moment of defeat, the successful gladiator happened to be across the arena or at one end of it, to the right or left of the podium, in a colosseum large enough to hold, perhaps, eighty or a hundred thousand human beings. Nor was it safe, when in doubt about the sign, to rely upon the cry of the spectators. Indeed, on such occasions, the eye was a safer guide than the ear, for the savage shouts<sup>2</sup> of the assembled thousands were meant not alone for the combatants, but by way of censure of some hated minister, or even of the not less hated sovereign. Here alone, by the license of the circus, the populace could freely express themselves, and in this way, and by this means, it is said,<sup>3</sup> they compelled Tiberius to restore a statue which he had taken to his own palace from the Baths of Agrippa. This

<sup>1</sup> *Society in Rome under the Caesars*, by William Ralph Inge, M.A., Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Assistant Master at Eton (p. 57).

<sup>2</sup> *Habet! Accipe ferrum! Occide, ure, verbera! Quare tam timide incurrit in ferrum? Quare parum libenter moritur?* Sen. Ep. 7. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Plin. II. N. 34. 62.