

In *The Canadian Spectator* of February 19th, 1881, "Laclede" in his "Ephemerides," while paying a high but just compliment to Mr. George Murray's scholarship, combats his views on this vexed question. He says: "With all possible deference, I venture to enquire where there is a single classical passage showing that "vertere" is used to indicate an upward direction. The verses of Juvenal and Prudentius cannot be cited, as they are precisely the ones that we wish to elucidate. Is there not reason to say that the two signals given by the Vestal Virgins in the Amphitheatre were, first, "premere pollicem," doubling the fingers round the thumb to signify grace; second, "vertere pollicem," turning down the thumb of the right hand to signify death?"

It would be difficult indeed to find such a passage, and it is this that occasions the great confusion of opinion. But taking "vertere" as found in Juvenal (III. v. 36), and "premere" as found in Pliny (I. 28, c. 2), can there be much doubt that, as "premere" indicates to press down, so "vertere" indicates to turn up? But the answer to "Laclede" had better come from the Rev. Joseph C. Carrier, C.S.C., Librarian and Curator of the Museum, College of St. Laurent, near Montreal—an authority on the subject. In a letter dated May 12th, 1888, addressed to *The Montreal Star*, approving of Mr. George Murray's views upon the subject, he writes as follows:—"It is quite true as I contend that "vertere" means to turn up or down, as the case may be, whether in English, French, or Italian. But "vertere" taken in connection with "premere" can mean only to turn up, as "premere" signifies press down or upon, to depress. Now, it is well known that the ancient Romans who frequented the amphitheatres had a way of showing their favour or their disfavour towards the gladiators by a peculiar motion of their right hand thumb, *i.e.* pollice verso or pollice presso, as, *e.g.*, we read in Pliny. They expressed their favour towards the defeated combatant by pressing the thumb on the index (premere pollicem), and their disfavour, by lifting up the same thumb towards their own breast (vertere pollicem); and when the sword of the victor had executed the mimicry of the upturned thumbs, the blood-thirsty multitude expressed their satisfaction by shouting "huc habet," which may be translated by the single interjection "there!" In French, "il en tient," "he's got it."

*Chambers' Encyclopædia* holds with "Laclede." In the article on gladiators we find the following: "When one of the combatants was disarmed or on the ground, the victor looked to the Emperor, if present, or to the people for the signal of death. If they raised their thumbs, his life was spared; if they turned them down, he executed the fatal mandate."