

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.*"

Here, in a widely circulated Cyclopædia, was a formal contradiction of what I had stated, and for the moment I felt annoyed. My friend, of course, smiled. On returning home, as I had not at hand Dr. Smith's *Dictionary of Antiquities*, I consulted the note on *Gladiators*, written (as Byron tell us), by Sir John Cam Hobhouse, to illustrate Canto IV. of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Again, to my astonishment, I read as follows: "When one gladiator wounded another he shouted, *Hoc habet*, or *Habet*, 'He has it.' The wounded combatant dropped his weapon, and advancing to the edge of the arena, supplicated the spectators. If he had fought well, the people saved him; if otherwise, or as they happened to be inclined, *they turned down their thumbs, and he was slain.*"

Baffled a second time, I referred to the well-known *Manual of Roman Antiquities*, by William Ramsay, M.A., Trinity College, Cambridge, Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow, and was for the third time astonished to read as follows, at page 179: "As soon as a gladiator inflicted a decided wound on his adversary he exclaimed, *Hoc habet*. If the injury disabled his opponent the editor replied, *Habet*. The wounded man now held up his finger in token of submission. The President, as a matter of courtesy, referred to the audience, and if the man was a favourite and had fought well, the crowd testified their approbation, and he was allowed to retire; *but if not, they depressed their thumbs in silence, and the conqueror, in obedience to a look from the editor, plunged his weapon into the body of the unresisting victim.*"

Vexed at the discouraging results of my researches, I took up, at a fourth venture, the latest *Manual of Roman Antiquities*, written by A. S. Wilkins, M.A., of Owens College, Manchester, and once more, to my astonishment, read as follows, at p 105: "When a gladiator was disarmed or wounded, his fate was in the hands of the spectators. If he had fought well and bravely, they signified by applause, and by waving of handkerchiefs, their wish that he should be spared; *but, if they were in a cruel mood, or if he had failed to please them, they pointed downwards with their thumbs in silence, and he received the finishing blow.*"

Most people would imagine that by this time I ought to have been convinced of my error. Far, however, from this being the case, I was merely—very much surprised. How could these four writers, apparently unconnected, viz., the author of the Cyclopædia's Article, Sir John Cam Hobhouse, Professor Ramsay, and Professor Wilkins (in addition to Gérôme, the French painter), have all gone astray? From what common source could they have derived their erroneous information? This is an enigma that I have not yet solved; but for a solution of which I shall be obliged to any polite correspondent.

Remembering a *locus classicus* in Pliny (Book 28, chap 5), which seemed to me to settle the question (*Pollices, cum faveamus, premere etiam proverbio jubemur*), I referred for "more light" to *The Natural History of Pliny*; translated by John Bostock, M.D., and H. T. Riley (Bohn's Edition), and at p. 284 of Vol. V. in a note on the passage above quoted I was, for the fifth time, astonished to read as follows: "*The thumb was turned upwards as a mark of favour, downwards as a mark of disfavour.*"

I began to think that I was bewitched, and that all writers on Roman Antiquities had mysteriously conspired