

remember his Juvenal—'et verso pollice vulgi Quemlibet occidunt populariter.' " Nor is this the only instance of the kind that has come to my notice.

In one of Mr. Richard Dowling's novels the author turned down the thumb as the sign of death; and *The Athenæum* (1861) reproved him for his mistake. Whereupon, Mr. Edmund Yates in *The World* of January 25th, 1882, came to the rescue of Mr. Dowling, and expressed a fear from this reproof that his own long and early faith in the meaning of "pollice verso" was tottering.

The view we are discussing is expressed twice by the author of *The Gladiators*. "Occasionally," writes Mr. Whyte-Melville, "some vanquished champion of more than common beauty, or who had displayed more than ordinary address and courage, so wins the favour of the spectators that they sign for his life to be spared. Hands are turned outwards with the thumb pointing to the earth, and the victor sheathes his sword, and retires with his wounded antagonist from the contest; but more generally the fallen man's signal for mercy is neglected. Ere the shout of 'A Hit' has died upon his ears, his despairing eye marks the thumbs of his judges pointing upwards, and he disposes himself to 'welcome the steel' with a calm courage worthy of a better cause."¹

The second reference is equally pointed: "Then, with a numerous party of friends and clients, Licinius made a strong demonstration of mercy; the speed of foot, too, displayed by the vanquished, and the obvious cause of his discomforture, acted favourably on the majority of spectators. Such an array of hands turned outwards, and pointing to the earth, met the eye of Placidus, the Tribune, that he could not but forsake his cruel purpose. So he gave his weapon to one of the attendants who had now entered the arena, took his cloak from the hands of another, and, with a graceful bow to the spectators, turned scornfully from his fallen foe."²

In all probability, the differences of opinion arise from the use of the verb "vertere" by so many ancient writers in connection with the movement of the thumb: Thus, from Juvenal (Sat. III, v. 36), "Minera nunc edunt, et verso pollice vulgi, Quemlibet occidunt populariter," "And to win popularity, they slay whomsoever the people, by turning (up) the thumb, order." For giving to the word "verso" the "up", turning of the thumb, Facciolati and Forcellini may be cited.³ Then

¹ *The Gladiators, a Tale of Rome and Judea*, by G. J. Whyte-Melville, p. 139, chapter 19, "The Arena."

² *Ibid.*, p. 117, chapter 15.

³ "Totius Latinitatis Lexicon, consilio et cura Jacobi Facciolati, opera et studio Ogilii Forcellini."