

fought in a complete suit of armour. They were as completely encased as crabs in their shells, but as they could see each other through the bars of their visors, they were able skilfully to direct their weapons at the joints of their antagonist's armour. Soon the arena was red with blood, and more than one victim lay dead and trampled on the sands.

"Good! this is something like the thing," cried Budo. "But these fellows are so cased in their shells it is hard to get at them. Let us have the *Retiarii*."

"Yes, the *Retiarii* and *Mirmillones*," shouted the mob; and they soon marched upon the scene.

This conflict promised abundance of excitement. The *Retiarii* wore no armour, and their only weapons were a net (*rete*, hence their name) and a trident or three-pronged spear. The *Retiarius* endeavoured to throw the net over his antagonist, and then to despatch him with the spear. If he missed his aim in throwing his net, he betook himself to flight, and endeavoured to prepare his net for a second cast, while his adversary followed him round the arena in order to kill him before he could make a second attempt. It was a cruel sport, and kindled to fury the fierce passions of the eager spectators.

Then came a conflict between skilled gladiators—the most accomplished swordsmen of the gladiatorial schools. The vast multitude watched with fevered interest the wary fencing, the skilful guard and rapid thrust and stroke of those trained butchers of their fellow-men. When a swordsman was wounded, the spectators rent the air with cries of "*Habet! Habet!*" and the one who was vanquished lowered his arms in token of submission. His fate, however, depended upon the will of the people, who sometimes, when a vanquished swordsman had exhibited especial dexterity and skill, gave the signal to spare him by stretching out their hands with the thumbs turned down. But if, as was more frequently the case, their bloodthirsty passions were roused to insatiable fury, they demanded his death by turning their thumbs upwards, and shouting, "*Recipe ferrum!*" Without a tremor the victim then bared his breast to the sword, and the victor thrust it home to the hilt, while the cruel mob shouted their huzzas over the bloody tragedy.

Such is the scene brought vividly before our minds by the matchless antique statue of the Dying Gladiator, found in the Gardens of Sallust, now in the museum of the Capitol. As one gazes with a strange fascination on that wondrous marble, instinct, it seems, with mortal agony, callous must be the heart that is unmoved by its touching pathos. The exquisite lines of Byron nobly express the emotions which it awakens in every breast:—

I see before me the Gladiator lie;  
He leans upon his hand—his manly brow  
Consents to death, but conquers agony,  
And his drooped head sinks gradually low—  
And through his side the last drops ebbing slow  
From the red gash fall heavy, one by one,  
Like the first of a thunder shower; and now  
The arena swarms around him—he is gone,  
Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hailed  
The wretch who won.

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes  
Were with his heart, and that was far away.  
He recked not of the life he lost nor prize,  
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,  
There were his young barbarians all at play,  
There was their Dacian mother—her, their sire,  
Butchered to make a Roman holiday.

An unwonted interest was given to this cruel scene in the Roman amphitheatre, by a novel and unheard-of incident which occurred. A brilliant young Roman officer, Ligurius Rufus, was announced to take part in these games. It was no uncommon thing for military sops, eager to win the applause of the multitude, or to goad their jaded weariness of life into a momentary excitement by a spice of real danger, to enter the lists of the arena; and Ligurius was at once the most brilliant swordsman in the Twelfth Legion, and the most *ennuyés* and world-weary man in Rome.

He was pitted against a brawny Hercules, the strongest and hugest of the whole school of gladiators—a British prisoner of war, who had been long the pride and boast of the arena. As they stood face to face, the young officer in burnished armour, inlaid with silver and gold, and the mighty thow of his opponent encased in leather and bronze, the betting was heavy in favour of the British giant. Each felt that he had a foeman worthy of his steel. They walked wearily around each other, each watching with eager eye every movement of his antagonist. Every thrust on either side was skilfully parried, and advantage of strength on the part of the British warrior being matched by the superior nimbleness of the Roman officer. At last a rapid thrust by Ligurius severed a tendon in the sword-arm of his foe, and it fell nerveless by his side. With a giant effort the disabled warrior sprang upon the Roman as if to crush him by sheer weight; but Ligurius nimbly sprang aside, and his antagonist, slipping in the gory sand, fell headlong to the ground. In an instant the Roman's foot was on his neck and his sword at his breast. With a courteous gesture, Ligurius raised his sword and waved it towards the Emperors' tribune and to the crowded seats of the *podium*, as if asking the signal to spare the vanquished gladiator, while the despairing look of the latter seemed with mute eloquence to ask for life. "*Habet! Habet!*" rang round the Colosseum, but not a single sign of mercy was made, not a thumb was reversed. "*Recipe ferrum!*" roared the mob at the prostrate giant; and then shouted to Ligurius, "*Occide! Occide!—Kill! Kill!*"

The gallant Roman heeded them as he would heed the howl of wolves. "I am not a butcher," he said, with a defiant sneer, and he sheathed his sword and, much to the surprise of his discomfited foe, lent his hand to raise him from the ground.

"You are a brave man," he said; "I want you as a standard-bearer of the Twelfth Legion. That is better than making worm's meat of you. Rome may need such soldiers as you before long."

The Emperors were not unwilling to grant this novel request of a favourite officer, and the grateful creature, in token of his fidelity, humbly kissed the hand of Ligurius, and followed him from the arena. The cruel mob, however, angered at being deprived of their anticipated spectacle of blood, howled with rage, and demanded the crowning scene of the day's sports—the conflict between the wild beasts and the Christian martyrs.

These hateful scenes had become the impassioned delight of all classes, from the Emperors to the "vile plebs" of

Rome. Even woman's pitiful nature forgot its tenderness, and maids and matrons gloated on the cruel spectacle, and the honour was reserved for the Vestal Virgin to give the signal for the mortal stroke. Such scenes created a ferocious thirst for blood throughout society. They overthrew the altar of pity, and impelled to every excess and refinement of barbarity. Even children imitated the cruel sport in their games, schools of gladiators were trained for the work of slaughter, women fought in the arena or lay dead and trampled in the sand.

It is to the eternal praise of Christianity that it suppressed these odious contests, and forever averted the sword of the gladiator from the throat of his victim. The Christian city of Constantinople was never polluted by the atrocious exhibition. A Christian poet eloquently denounced the bloody spectacle. A Christian monk, roused to indignation by the hateful scene, leaped over the barrier to separate the gladiators in the very frenzy of the conflict. The maddened mob, enraged at this interruption of their sport, stoned him to death. But his heroic martyrdom produced a moral revolution against the practice, and the laws of Honorius, to use the language of Gibbon, "abolished forever the human sacrifices of the amphitheatre."

It remains to notice the last scene in the stern drama of this "Roman holiday."

THE MARTYRS CROWNED.

At a flourish of trumpets the iron-studded doors of the cells in which the Christians were confined were thrown open, and the destined martyrs walked forth on the arena in the sight of assembled thousands. It was a spectacle to arrest the attention of even the most thoughtless, and to move the sympathy of even the most austere. At the head of the little company walked the good presbyter, Demetrius, his silvery hair and beard and benignant expression of countenance giving him a strikingly venerable aspect. Leaning heavily on his arm, evidently faint in frame but strong in spirit, was his daughter Callirhoe. Robed in white, she looked the embodiment of saintly purity, and in her eyes there beamed a heroic courage which inspired a wonder that so brave a soul should be shrouded in so frail a body. Adauctus, Aurelius, and other Christian confessors condemned to death, made up the little contingent of the noble army of martyrs.

The prefect Naso, from his place in the tribune, near the Emperors, read the sentence of the court, that the accused having been proven by ample testimony to be the enemies of the Cæsars and of the gods, had been condemned to death by exposure to wild beasts.

"Nay, not the enemies of the Cæsars," exclaimed the aged Demetrius. "We are the friends of all, the enemies of none.\* We pray for the Cæsars at all our assemblies."

"Will you do homage to the gods?" demanded Diocletian. "Will you burn incense to Neptune? Here is his altar and here are his priests."

"We worship the true God who made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that in them is," replied the venerable man, with uplifted and reverent countenance, "and Him only

will we serve. They be no gods which are made by man's device, and 'tis idolatry to serve them."

"Away with the Atheists," cried the priests of Neptune; "they blaspheme the holy gods."

"The Christians to the lions!" roared the mob, and at the signal from the Emperor to the master of the games, the dens of the wild beasts were thrown open, and the savage brutes, starved into madness, bounded into the arena. The defenceless martyrs fell upon their knees in prayer, and seemed conscious only of the presence of Him who stood with the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, so rapt was the expression of faith and courage on their upturned faces.

The fierce Numidian lions, and tigers from the Libyan desert, instead of bounding upon their prey, began to circle slowly around them, lashing their tawny flanks meanwhile, glaring at their victims from bloodshot fiery eyes, and uttering horrid growls.

At this moment a loud shout was heard, and a soldier, clad in burnished mail, and with his drawn sword in his hand, one of the body guards of the Emperors, leaped from the tribune and bounded with clashing armour into the arena. Striding across the sand, he hurled aside his iron helmet and his sword, and flung himself at the feet of the aged priest, with the words:—

"Father, your blessing; Callirhoe, your parting kiss. I, too, am a Christian. Long time have I sought you, alas! only to find you thus. But gladly will I die with you, and, separated in life, we are united in death and forever."

"*Nunc dimittis, Domine!*" exclaimed the old man, raising his eyes to heaven. "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace." And he laid his hands in blessing on the head of his long-lost son.

"Ezra, my brother!" exclaimed Callirhoe, folding him in her arms. "To think we were so near, yet knew not of each other. Thank God, we go to heaven together; and, long divided on earth, we shall soon, with our beloved mother, be a united family forever in the skies. And God shall wipe away all the tears from our eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

"Amen! even so, come, Lord Jesus!" spake the young soldier, as he enfolded, as if in a sheltering embrace, the gray-haired sire and the fair-faced girl.

The utmost consternation was exhibited on the countenance of the old Emperor Diocletian. "What! have we Christians and traitors even in our body guard? Our very life is at the mercy of those wretches!"

"I would feel safer with them," said the more stoical or more courageous Galerius, "than with the *delatores* and informers who betray them," and he glanced with mingled contempt and aversion at Naso, the prefect, and Furca, the priest. "When a Christian gives his word, 'tis sacred as all the oaths of Hecate. I want no better soldiers than those of the Thundering Legion.\*"

Meanwhile the wild beasts, startled

\*The *Legio Tonans*, tradition affirms, was a legion composed wholly of Christians, whose prayers in a time of drought brought on a violent thunderstorm, which confounded the enemy and saved the army.

This famous phrase dates from the time of Tertullian, in the 3rd century, and is also recorded in the *Catechisms*.