

or the limbs of the wretched slave quivered in the jaws of the lion. These were the excitements which made his pulses bound with pleasure and led him to scorn all milder joys. The appetite for blood grew by what it fed on; gladiatorial shows multiplied, especially in the declining days of the Empire, and at length became a necessary part of all public entertainments. The numbers who fought in the arena for the amusement of the Romans seem to us almost incredible. Historians relate that in celebrating his victory over the Dacians, the Emperor Trojan feasted the eyes of the populace with the combats of ten thousand gladiators in the Coliseum at Rome. The contests of hired combatants at length palled upon the appetite of the degraded populace, and the nobles, in order to purchase popularity, went down into the arena and fought for the public amusement. There was even a lower depth to be reached—"Rome's proud dames whose garments swept the ground," forgetting their rank and sex, descended into the blood-stained lists and murdered one another with sword and spear, and the loveliest and noblest daughters of the city lay dead on the trampled sand. What a scene must one of these amphitheatres have been—the slope of the vast concave filled with tiers on tiers of marble seats, rising upwards from the arena! Lord Lytton's "*Last days of Pompeii*" and Melville's fine tale of "*The Gladiators*" help us to form some idea of these huge structures; and we can faintly imagine the scene, when the roar of one hundred thousand spectators, in the Coliseum, rent the air, and their eyes eagerly watched the thrusts and parries of the combatants, and their signals sealed the doom of the disabled victim. Byron's noble lines have well depicted the scene:

"I see before me the Gladiator lie,—  
 He leans upon his hand—his manly brow  
 Consents to death, but conquers agony,  
 And his droop'd 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 swims around him—he is gone,  
 Ere ceased the inhuman shout which hailed the wretch who won.

"He heard it, but he heeded it 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,