

license was the opportunity of the Roman people. Their outcries led more than once to the fall of powerful leaders, for in proportion as freedom of speech was denied at all other times, so was it the more effective when pronounced on these occasions of political liberty. Rival leaders organized beforehand rival bands; and rival shouts, each trying to drown the other, produced on these occasions a veritable pandemonium. Hence it would be dangerous, indeed, for the gladiator to depend for any indication of the sign upon the opposing cries of the intensely excited spectators. Yet, there are many who hold to the view that the signal to kill was the turning of the thumb inwards towards the breast. Mr. Edward Strachan, author of *The Art Gallery of the Centennial Exhibition*, tells us that most people believe that the gesture of condemnation in the circus was made by turning in the thumb towards the breast. But, however inaccurate Gérôme may be in his illustration, no demonstration however clear would have induced him to admit in his painting the accuracy of this sign of condemnation. Such would have deprived the picture of all artistic effect, had he adopted it. Looking at the picture then, all one could see would be the outer part of the clinched hand. The thumb itself would be completely hidden from view, no matter what might be the real sign to kill in the time of Nero. For the artist to turn the thumb towards the heart in the picture would have hidden the thumb and made the picture meaningless.

On the other hand, the list of writers asserting that death was signified by turning the thumb down and not up, is a formidable one, including, as it does, novelists, poets, and scholars of high standing. The quotations I have selected from their works are just as pointed as those that precede, while, at the same time, their varied character may of itself prove interesting to the general reader. Naturally the work of fiction that occurs first of all to the mind of novel readers is *Quo Vadis? A Narrative of the Time of Nero*, in which the customs of the arena are referred to several times. The three quotations given illustrate the author's view. We find at page 62, chapter 7, that Vestinius says: "Thou art mistaken! I hold with Caesar." "Very well," answered Petronius, "I have just maintained that thou hast a glimmering of understanding, but Caesar insists that thou art an ass without mixture." "Habet," said Caesar, laughing and turning down the thumb as was done in the Circus, in sign that the gladiator had received a blow and was to be finished."

The second quotation brings before us a divided circus (p. 128, chapter 45): "The whole circus was trembling from plaudits and the roar of the people. For those who had bet on Calendio, he was at that moment greater than Caesar; but for this very reason all animosity