

A.D. 404

As the Romans grew prouder and more fond of pleasure, no one could hope to please them who did not give them sports and entertainments. When any person wished to be elected to any public office, it was a matter of course that he should compliment his fellow citizens by exhibitions of the kind they loved, and when the common people were discontented, their cry was that they wanted panem ac Circenses, 'bread and sports', the only things they cared for. In most places where there has been a large Roman colony, remains can be seen of the amphitheatres, where the citizens were wont to assemble for these diversions. Sometimes these are stages of circular galleries of seats hewn out of the hillside, where rows of spectators might sit one above the other, all looking down on a broad, flat space in the centre, under their feet, where the representations took place. Sometimes, when the country was flat, or it was easier to build than to excavate, the amphitheatre was raised above ground, rising up to a considerable height.

The grandest and most renowned of all these amphitheatres is the Coliseum at Rome. It was built by Vespasian and his son Titus, the conquerors of Jerusalem, in a valley in the midst of the seven hills of Rome. The captive Jews were forced to labour at it; and the materials, granite outside, and softer travertine stone within, are so solid and so admirably built, that still at the end of eighteen centuries it has scarcely even become a ruin, but remains one of the greatest wonders of Rome.

Five acres of ground were enclosed within the oval of its outer wall, which outside rises perpendicularly in tiers of arches one above the other. Within, the galleries of seats projected forwards, each tier coming out far beyond the one above it, so that between the lowest and the outer wall there was room for a great space of chambers, passages, and vaults around the central space, called the arena, from the arena, or sand, with which it was strewn.

When the Roman Emperors grew very vain and luxurious, they used to have this sand made ornamental with metallic filings, vermilion, and even powdered precious stones; but it was thought better taste to use the scrapings of a soft white stone, which, when thickly strewn, made the whole arena look as if covered with untrodden snow. Around the border of this space flowed a stream of fresh water. Then came a straight wall, rising to a considerable height, and surmounted by a broad platform, on which stood a throne for the Emperor, curule chairs of ivory and gold for the chief magistrates and senators, and seats for the vestal virgins. Next above were galleries for the equestrian order, the great mass of those who considered themselves as of gentle station, though not of the highest rank; farther up, and therefore farther back, were the galleries belonging to the freemen of Rome; and these were again surmounted by another plain wall with a platform on the top, where were places for the ladies, who were not (except the vestal virgins) allowed to look on nearer, because of the unclothed state of some of the performers in the arena. Between the ladies' boxes, benches were squeezed in where the lowest people could seat themselves; and some of these likewise found room in the two uppermost tiers of porticoes, where sailors, mechanics, and persons in the service of the Coliseum had their post. Altogether, when full, this huge building held no less than 87,000 spectators. It had no roof; but when there was rain, or if the sun was too hot, the sailors in the porticoes unfurled awnings that ran along upon ropes, and formed a covering of silk and gold tissue over the whole. Purple was the favorite color for this velamen, or veil; because, when the sun shone through it, it cast such beautiful rosy tints on the snowy arena and the white purple-edged togas of the Roman citizens.

Long days were spent from morning till evening upon those galleries. The multitude who poured in early would watch the great dignitaries arrive and take their seats, greeting them either with shouts of applause or hootings of dislike, according as they were favorites or otherwise; and when the Emperor came in to take his place under his canopy, there was

one loud acclamation, 'Joy to thee, master of all, first of all, happiest of all. Victory to thee for ever!'

When the Emperor had seated himself and given the signal, the sports began. Sometimes a rope-dancing elephant would begin the entertainment, by mounting even to the summit of the building and descending by a cord. Then a bear, dressed up as a Roman matron, would be carried along in a chair between porters, as ladies were wont to go abroad, and another bear, in a lawyer's robe, would stand on his hind legs and go through the motions of pleading a case. Or a lion came forth with a jeweled crown on his head, a diamond necklace round his neck, his mane plaited with gold, and his claws gilded, and played a hundred pretty gentle antics with a little hare that danced fearlessly within his grasp. Then in would come twelve elephants, six males in togas, six females with the veil and pallium; they took their places on couches around an ivory table, dined with great decorum, playfully sprinkled a little rosewater over the nearest spectators, and then received more guests of their unwieldy kind, who arrived in ball dresses, scattered flowers, and performed a dance.

Sometimes water was let into the arena, a ship sailed in, and falling to pieces in the midst, sent a crowd of strange animals swimming in all directions. Sometimes the ground opened, and trees came growing up through it, bearing golden fruit. Or the beautiful old tale of Orpheus was acted; these trees would follow the harp and song of the musician; but--to make the whole part complete--it was no mere play, but real earnest, that the Orpheus of the piece fell a prey to live bears.

For the Coliseum had not been built for such harmless spectacles as those first described. The fierce Romans wanted to be excited and feel themselves strongly stirred; and, presently, the doors of the pits and dens round the arena were thrown open, and absolutely savage beasts were let loose upon one another--rhinoceroses and tigers, bulls

and lions, leopards and wild boars--while the people watched with savage curiosity to see the various kinds of attack and defense; or, if the animals were cowed or sullen, their rage would be worked up--red would be shown to the bulls, white to boars, red-hot goads would be driven into some, whips would be lashed at others, till the work of slaughter was fairly commenced, and gazed on with greedy eyes and ears delighted, instead of horror-struck, by the roars and howls of the noble creatures whose courage was thus misused. Sometimes indeed, when some especially strong or ferocious animal had slain a whole heap of victims, the cries of the people would decree that it should be turned loose in its native forest, and, amid shouts of 'A triumph! a triumph!' the beast would prowl round the arena, upon the carcasses of the slain victims. Almost incredible numbers of animals were imported for these cruel sports, and the governors of distant provinces made it a duty to collect troops of lions, elephants, ostriches, leopards--the fiercer or the newer the creature the better--to be thus tortured to frenzy, to make sport in the amphitheatre. However, there was daintiness joined with cruelty: the Romans did not like the smell of blood, though they enjoyed the sight of it, and all the solid stonework was pierced with tubes, through which was conducted the stream of spices and saffron, boiled in wine, that the perfume might overpower the scent of slaughter below.

Wild beasts tearing each other to pieces might, one would think, satisfy any taste of horror; but the spectators needed even nobler game to be set before their favorite monsters--men were brought forward to confront them. Some of these were at first in full armor, and fought hard, generally with success; and there was a revolving machine, something like a squirrel's cage, in which the bear was always climbing after his enemy, and then rolling over by his own weight. Or hunters came, almost unarmed, and gaining the victory by swiftness and dexterity, throwing a piece of cloth over a lion's head, or disconcerting him by putting their fist down his throat. But it was not only skill, but death, that the Romans loved to see; and condemned criminals and deserters were reserved to feast the lions, and

to entertain the populace with their various kinds of death. Among these condemned was many a Christian martyr, who witnessed a good confession before the savage-eyed multitude around the arena, and 'met the lion's gory mane' with a calm resolution and hopeful joy that the lookers-on could not understand. To see a Christian die, with upward gaze and hymns of joy on his tongue, was the most strange unaccountable sight the Coliseum could offer, and it was therefore the choicest, and reserved for the last part of the spectacles in which the brute creation had a part.

The carcasses were dragged off with hooks, and bloodstained sand was covered with a fresh clean layer, the perfume wafted in stronger clouds, and a procession came forward--tall, well-made men, in the prime of their strength. Some carried a sword and a lasso, others a trident and a net; some were in light armor, others in the full heavy equipment of a soldier; some on horseback, some in chariots, some on foot. They marched in, and made their obeisance to the Emperor; and with one voice, their greeting sounded through the building, Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant! 'Hail, Caesar, those about to die salute thee!'

They were the gladiators--the swordsmen trained to fight to the death to amuse the populace. They were usually slaves placed in schools of arms under the care of a master; but sometimes persons would voluntarily hire themselves out to fight by way of a profession: and both these, and such slave gladiators as did not die in the arena, would sometimes retire, and spend an old age of quiet; but there was little hope of this, for the Romans were not apt to have mercy on the fallen.

Fights of all sorts took place--the light-armed soldier and the netsman --the lasso and the javelin--the two heavy-armed warriors--all combinations of single combat, and sometimes a general melee. When a gladiator wounded his adversary, he shouted to the spectators, Hoc habet! 'He has it!' and looked up to know whether he should kill or spare. If the people

held up their thumbs, the conquered was left to recover, if he could; if they turned them down, he was to die: and if he showed any reluctance to present his throat for the deathblow, there was a scornful shout, *Recipe ferrum!* 'Receive the steel!' Many of us must have seen casts of the most touching statue of the wounded man, that called forth the noble lines of indignant pity which, though so often repeated, cannot be passed over here:

'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 no--this eyes

Were with his heart, and that was far away.

He reck'd 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--he their sire,

Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday.

All this rush'd with his blood--Shall he expire,

And unavenged? Arise ye Goths and glut your ire.'

Sacred vestals, tender mothers, fat, good-humored senators, all thought it fair play, and were equally pitiless in the strange frenzy for exciting scenes to which they gave

themselves up, when they mounted the stone stairs of the Coliseum. Privileged persons would even descend into the arena, examine the death agonies, and taste the blood of some specially brave victim ere the corpse was drawn forth at the death gate, that the frightful game might continue undisturbed and unencumbered. Gladiator shows were the great passion of Rome, and popular favor could hardly be gained except by ministering to it. Even when the barbarians were beginning to close in on the Empire, hosts of brave men were still kept for this slavish mimic warfare--sport to the beholders, but sad earnest to the actors.

Christianity worked its way upwards, and at least was professed by the Emperor on his throne. Persecution came to an end, and no more martyrs fed the beasts in the Coliseum. The Christian emperors endeavored to prevent any more shows where cruelty and death formed the chief interest and no truly religious person could endure the spectacle; but custom and love of excitement prevailed even against the Emperor. Mere tricks of beasts, horse and chariot races, or bloodless contests, were tame and dull, according to the diseased taste of Rome; it was thought weak and sentimental to object to looking on at a death scene; the Emperors were generally absent at Constantinople, and no one could get elected to any office unless he treated the citizens to such a show as they best liked, with a little bloodshed and death to stir their feelings; and thus it went on for full a hundred years after Rome had, in name, become a Christian city, and the same custom prevailed wherever there was an amphitheatre and pleasure-loving people.

Meantime the enemies of Rome were coming nearer and nearer, and Alaric, the great chief of the Goths, led his forces into Italy, and threatened the city itself. Honorius, the Emperor, was a cowardly, almost idiotical, boy; but his brave general, Stilicho, assembled his forces, met the Goths at Pollentia (about twenty-five miles from where Turin now stands), and gave them a complete defeat on the Easter Day of the year 403. He pursued them into the mountains, and for that time saved Rome. In the joy of the victory the Roman senate

invited the conqueror and his ward Honorius to enter the city in triumph, at the opening of the new year, with the white steeds, purple robes, and vermilion cheeks with which, of old, victorious generals were welcomed at Rome. The churches were visited instead of the Temple of Jupiter, and there was no murder of the captives; but Roman bloodthirstiness was not yet allayed, and, after all the procession had been completed, the Coliseum shows commenced, innocently at first, with races on foot, on horseback, and in chariots; then followed a grand hunting of beasts turned loose in the arena; and next a sword dance. But after the sword dance came the arraying of swordsmen, with no blunted weapons, but with sharp spears and swords--a gladiator combat in full earnest. The people, enchanted, applauded with shouts of ecstasy this gratification of their savage tastes. Suddenly, however, there was an interruption. A rude, roughly robed man, bareheaded and barefooted, had sprung into the arena, and, signing back the gladiators, began to call aloud upon the people to cease from the shedding of innocent blood, and not to requite God's mercy in turning away the sword of the enemy by encouraging murder. Shouts, howls, cries, broke in upon his words; this was no place for preachings--the old customs of Rome should be observed 'Back, old man!' 'On, gladiators!' The gladiators thrust aside the meddler, and rushed to the attack. He still stood between, holding them apart, striving in vain to be heard. 'Sedition! Sedition!' 'Down with him!' was the cry; and the man in authority, Alypius, the prefect, himself added his voice. The gladiators, enraged at interference with their vocation, cut him down. Stones, or whatever came to hand, rained down upon him from the furious people, and he perished in the midst of the arena! He lay dead, and then came the feeling of what had been done.

His dress showed that he was one of the hermits who vowed themselves to a holy life of prayer and self-denial, and who were greatly revered, even by the most thoughtless. The few who had previously seen him, told that he had come from the wilds of Asia on pilgrimage, to visit the shrines and keep his Christmas at Rome--they knew he was a holy

man--no more, and it is not even certain whether his name was Aymachus or Telemachus. His spirit had been stirred by the sight of thousands flocking to see men slaughter one another, and in his simple-hearted zeal he had resolved to stop the cruelty or die. He had died, but not in vain. His work was done. The shock of such a death before their eyes turned the hearts of the people; they saw the wickedness and cruelty to which they had blindly surrendered themselves; and from the day when the hermit died in the Coliseum there was never another fight of the Gladiators. Not merely at Rome, but in every province of the Empire, the custom was utterly abolished; and one habitual crime at least was wiped from the earth by the self-devotion of one humble, obscure, almost nameless man.

La última pelea en el Coliseo de Charlotte M. Yonge

Los Romanos se hicieron más orgullosos y más aficionados con el placer, nadie que no les diera deportes o entretenimiento los podía satisfacer. Cuando alguien quería ser elegido para un cargo público, era, por supuesto, un hecho del candidato proveer exhibiciones del tipo que los otros ciudadanos amaban, y cuando el público estaba satisfecho, protestaban que querían panem ac Circenses, 'pan y circo,' lo único que les importaba. En muchos lugares donde había grandes colonias Romanas, quedan los restos de anfiteatros, en donde los ciudadanos se reunían para ver estos espectáculos. Estos eran escenarios circulares con asientos tallados en la ladera, en donde filas de espectadores se sentaban uno arriba del otro, todos viendo hacia abajo a un espacio plano y amplio en el centro, abajo de ellos, en donde el entretenimiento tomaba lugar. De vez en cuando el territorio era plano, el anfiteatro se construiría sobre la tierra, llegando a grandes alturas.

El anfiteatro más grandioso y reverencial era el Coliseo en Roma. Fue construido por Vespiano y su hijo Tito, los conquistadores de Jerusalén, en un valle entre los siete cerros de Roma. Los Judíos capturados fueron forzados a trabajar en él; y los materiales, granito en el exterior, y travertino más suave en el interior, son tan sólidos y tan bien apilados, que al fin de dieciocho siglos a penas y está en ruinas, siendo una de las grandes maravillas de Roma.

Cinco acres de tierra fueron encapsulados por el óvalo de la pared exterior, que se eleva perpendicularmente en capas de arcos uno sobre el otro. Dentro, las filas de asientos salen hacia el frente, cada nivel saliendo un poco más que el anterior, para que entre el nivel más bajo y la pared del exterior haya suficiente espacio para cámaras, pasajes y bóvedas alrededor del espacio central, llamado arena, por la arena, o gravilla, que está espolvoreada.

En cuanto los Emperadores Romanos se hicieron más vanidosos y lujosos, hicieron que la arena se hiciera más ornamental con limaduras metálicas, bermellón, y los polvos de piedras preciosas; pero se pensaba que era más elegante usar las talladuras de piedras suaves y blancas, que cuando estaban espolvoreadas en capas gruesas hacían la arena verse como si estaba cubierta por una capa de nieve sin pisar. Alrededor de la orilla de este espacio corría un riachuelo de agua fresca. Luego, salía una pared, que llegaba a alturas impresionantes, y soportaba a una plataforma espaciosa, en la cual estaba el trono del Emperador, sillas curul de marfil y oro para los Jefes de magistrados y senadores, y los asientos para las vírgenes vestales. Un nivel más hacia arriba estaban las gradas para la orden ecuestre, las grandes masas de los que se consideraban estar en posiciones nobles, aunque no estaban en los rangos más altos; más arriba, y por lo tanto más atrás, estaban las gradas para los hombres libres de Roma; y estos otra vez estaba superada por una pared y una plataforma sobre ella, en donde se podían reunir las mujeres, que (en excepción a las vírgenes vestales) no se podían acercar más para ver, por el estado de desnudez de alguno de los participantes en la arena. Entre las secciones para las mujeres, se ponían bancas para que las personas de nivel social más bajo se pudieran sentar; y varios de este grupo también encontraban espacio en los dos niveles más altos de los pórticos, en donde los marineros, mecánicos y las personas de servicio del Coliseo estaban. En total, cuando este gran edificio estaba lleno, podía tener 87,000 espectadores. No tenía techo; pero cuando llovía o si estaba muy soleado, los marineros en los pórticos desenrollaban toldos que colgaban de cuerdas, y formaba una

cubierta de seda y tejido oro que tapaba todo. Murado era el color favorito para este velo; porque cuando los rayos de sol pasaban por él, creaba preciosos tonos de rosa en la arena nevada y las togas blancas, con bordes morados, de los ciudadanos romanos.

Largos días se pasaban en estas gradas. Las multitudes que llegaban temprano para ver a la realeza llegar y tomar sus lugares, dándoles la bienvenida con gritos de aplausos o abucheos con desapruebo, dependiendo de quiénes eran sus favoritos o no y cuando el Emperador llegaba a tomar su lugar debajo de su sombrilla, siempre había un gran alabanza, 'Alegría a usted, maestro de todos, en primer lugar, más feliz de todos. ¡Victoria a usted para siempre! Ya que el Emperador se había sentado y había dado la señal, los deportes podían continuar. A veces, un elefante que danzaba en una cuerda comenzaba el entretenimiento, subía hasta la parte más alta de la estructura y bajaba en una cuerda. Luego cargaban a un oso, vestido como una matrona Romana, en una silla entre porteros, como era la costumbre de las damas ir al extranjero, y otro oso en la túnica de un abogado, se paraba en sus patas traseras y hacía las mociones de discutir un caso. O un león salía con una corona llena de piedras en su cabeza, un collar de diamantes al rededor de su cuello, su melena trenzada con oro, y sus garras doradas, y jugaba delicadamente unas cien veces con una liebre que bailaba sin miedo cerca de su agarre. Luego llegaban doce elefantes, seis machos en togas, seis hembras en velo y capa; tomaban sus lugares en sillones alrededor de una mesa de marfil y comían con decoro, juguetonamente rociaban agua de rosa a los espectadores más cercanos, y luego recibían más invitados de su mismo tipo rebelde, quienes llegaban en vestidos formales, soltaban flores y hacían un baile.

De vez en cuando se llenaba la arena de agua, llegaba un barco, y despedazándose, soltaba una multitud de animales nadando en todas direcciones. A veces, se abría la tierra y crecían árboles que daban fruta dorada. O se actuaba el hermoso cuento de Orfeo; estos árboles seguían el arpa y la canción del músico; pero, para hacer esta escena completa, no solo era un acto, pero en serio, que el Orfeo de esta obra cayera preso a osos salvajes.

El Coliseo no se había construido para actos tan inocentes como los primeros narrados. Los feroces Romanos querían emocionarse y sentirse agitados; y, actualmente, las puertas de los pozos y de las guaridas alrededor de la arena fueron abiertas, y soltaron bestias absolutamente salvajes contra una y otra-- rinocerontes y tigres, toros y leones, leopardos y jabalíes-- mientras las personas los observaban con curiosidad macabra para ver los varios ataques y defensas; o, si los animales se intimidaban o se asustaban, se les hacía enojar; se les mostraba rojo a los toros, blanco a los jabalíes, agujones al rojo vivo se clavaban en algunos, latigazos se les daban a otros, hasta que la matanza tomara vuelo, y miradas con ojos codiciosos y oídos encantados, en lugar de horrorizados, por los rugidos y aullidos de las nobles criaturas cuyo coraje había sido tan mal utilizado. De hecho, si un animal especialmente fuerte y feroz derrotaba suficientes víctimas, los aullidos de las personas declaraban que se debería liberar en su hábitat natural, y entre gritos de "¡un triunfo! ¡Un triunfo!" la bestia caminaba entre los cadáveres de sus víctimas en la arena. Un número casi increíble de animales eran importados para esta crueldad que le hacían decir deporte, y los gobernadores de provincias lejanas hicieron juntar armadas de leones, elefantes, avestruces, leopardos una tarea-- entre más feroces y más novedosos mejor-- para torturarlos hasta locura para el deporte en el anfiteatro.

Sin embargo, había delicadeza en esta crueldad: a los Romanos no les gustaba el olor de la sangre, aunque les gustaba verla derramar, y en la piedra maciza habían labrado canales, que llevaban una mezcla de especias y azafrán, hervidas en vino, para que el aroma perfuma el aire y cubriera la peste de la matanza que ocurría abajo.

Las bestias salvajes destrozándose una a otra, uno pensaría, que satisfacería cualquier apetito por el horror; pero los espectadores necesitaban cazas más noble para enfrentar a sus monstruos favoritos-- se presentaban hombres para confrontarlos. Al principio, muchos traían armadura y peleaban con mucho esfuerzo, victoriosamente en lo general; y había una maquinaria giratoria, casi como una rueda de ratón, en la cual el oso corría tras su presa, y luego se tropezaba por su propio peso. O cuando los cazadores llegaban, casi desarmados, y salían victoriosos por puro talento y destrezas, tirando un pañuelo sobre la cabeza de un león, o desorientados al poner sus puños en sus gargantas. No solo era el talento, sino la muerte, lo que amaban los Romanos; y se condenaban a criminales y desertores a ser la cena de los leones y el entretenimiento de la población con sus diversos modos de morir. Dentro de estos condenados, había muchos mártires Cristianos, quienes profesaban su fe ante los ojos salvajes de las multitudes alrededor de la arena, y se encontraron con la melena de oro del león con resolución tranquila y alegría esperanzada que los espectadores no podrían entender. Ver a un Cristiano morir con su vista en los cielos y cantos de alabanza en su aliento, era el espectáculo más extraño que se ofrecía en el Coliseo, y por tanto era el más selecto y reservado para la última parte de los espectáculos en los que la creación bruta tenía parte.

Se quitaban los cadáveres con ganchos y la arena manchada de sangre era cubierta por una capa de arena nueva, el perfume flotaba en nubes más densas, y la procesión salía-- todos hombres altos de buena figura, en la flor de sus fuerzas. Algunos tenían espadas y lazos, otros un tridente y una red; unos traían un poco de armadura, otros estaban en armadura de cuerpo completo; unos a caballo, unos en carruajes, otros a pie. Entraban marchando y daban sus reverencias al Emperador; y con sus voces en armonía sus saludos rugían por la gran estructura, "Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant", "¡Salve, César, los que estamos a punto de morir te saludamos!"

Estos eran los gladiadores-- los soldados entrenados para pelear hasta la muerte para la diversión del público. Usualmente eran esclavos entrenados para pelear bajo el cuidado de un dueño; pero de vez en cuando personas se voluntariaban para pelear como profesión: ellos, junto con los gladiadores esclavizados, que no morían en la arena, a veces se jubilaban, y pasaban sus años mayores en paz; pero, había muy poca esperanza para esto, ya que los Romanos tenían muy poca piedad a los que caían.

Peleas de cualquier tipo ocurrían-- el soldado con poca armadura contra el que tenía redes-- el lazo contra el jabalín-- dos peleadores cubiertos con armaduras-- todo tipo de combinaciones de combates singulares, a veces de peleas confusas. Cuando un gladiador hería a su competidor, gritaba a los espectadores, "Hoc habet", "¡Toma eso!" y veía a la audiencia para saber si lo dejaba ir o si lo mataba. Si las personas le daban la señal de aprobación con sus pulgares en el aire, dejaba que el conquistado se recuperara, si podía; si los ponían hacia

abajo, lo mataría; y si demostraba algún temor para recibir el último espadazo a la garganta, había un grito despreciativo, "Recipe ferrum", "¡Acepta el acero!" Muchos de nosotros debemos haber visto moldes de la estatua más conmovedora del hombre herido, que provocó las nobles líneas de piedad indignada que, aunque tan a menudo repetidas, no pueden pasarse por alto aquí:

"Veo ante mí a un Gladiador caer;

Se recarga en su brazo-- su mirada masculina

Consiente a la muerte, pero derrota la agonía.

Y su cabeza inclinada se hunde poco a poco,

Y por su costado las últimas gotas, derraman lentamente

Desde el tajo rojo, caen pesadas una por una,

Como el primero de una lluvia de truenos; y ahora

La arena nada a su alrededor, se ha ido

Y luego cesó el grito inhumano que aclamó al desgraciado que ganó.

'Lo escuchó, pero no hizo caso, estos ojos

Estaban con su corazón, y eso estaba muy lejos.

No pensó en la vida que perdió, ni en el premio,

Pero donde estaba su tosca choza junto al Danubio,

Allí estaban todos sus jóvenes bárbaros en juego,

Allí estaba su madre dacia, él su padre,

Masacrado para hacer una fiesta romana.

Todo esto corrió con su sangre, ¿caerá definitivamente?

¿Y sin venganza? Levantaos, godos, y saciad vuestra ira.

Sagradas vestales, madres cariñosas, gordos senadores de buen humor, todos pensaban que era juego limpio, y se mostraban igualmente despiadados en el extraño frenesí por las escenas emocionantes a las que se entregaban, cuando subían las escaleras de piedra del Coliseo. Personas privilegiadas incluso descenderían a la arena, examinarían las agonías de la muerte y saborearían la sangre de alguna víctima especialmente valiente antes de que el cadáver fuera sacado por la puerta de la muerte, para que el espantoso juego continuara sin interrupciones y sin trabas. Los espectáculos de gladiadores eran la gran pasión de Roma, y difícilmente se podía ganar el favor popular a menos que se les hiciera ministra. Incluso cuando los bárbaros comenzaban a acercarse al Imperio, todavía se mantenían huestes de hombres valientes para esta guerra de imitación servil: diversión para los espectadores, pero triste seriedad para los actores.

El cristianismo siguió infiltrándose hacia arriba, y al menos fue profesado por el Emperador en su trono. La persecución llegó a su fin y no más mártires alimentaron a las bestias en el Coliseo. Los emperadores cristianos se esforzaron por evitar más espectáculos en los que la crueldad y la muerte constituían el interés principal y ninguna persona verdaderamente religiosa podía soportar el espectáculo; pero la costumbre y el amor a la emoción prevalecieron incluso contra el Emperador. Los simples trucos de las bestias, las carreras de caballos y carros, o los concursos sin sangre, eran mansos y aburridos, según el gusto enfermizo de Roma; se pensaba que era débil y sentimental oponerse a contemplar la escena de una muerte; los emperadores estaban generalmente ausentes en Constantinopla, y nadie podía ser elegido para ningún cargo a menos que ofreciera a los ciudadanos el espectáculo que más les gustaba, con un poco de derrame de sangre y muerte para despertar sus emociones; y así continuó por completo cien años después de que Roma, de nombre, se hubiera convertido en una ciudad cristiana, y la misma costumbre prevaleció dondequiera que hubiera un anfiteatro y gente amante del placer.

Mientras tanto, los enemigos de Roma se acercaban cada vez más, y Alarico, el gran jefe de los godos, condujo sus fuerzas a Italia y amenazó a la ciudad misma. Honorio, el emperador, era un muchacho cobarde, casi idiota; pero su valiente general, Estilicón, reunió sus fuerzas, se encontró con los godos en Pollentia (a unas veinticinco millas de donde está ahora Turín), y les dio una completa derrota en el día de Pascua del año 403. Los persiguió hasta las montañas, y por ese tiempo salvó a Roma. En la alegría de la victoria, el Senado romano invitó al conquistador y a su pupilo Honorio a entrar triunfalmente en la ciudad, en la apertura del nuevo año, con los corceles blancos, túnicas moradas y cachetes bermellón con que, de los viejos y victoriosos generales fueron recibidos en Roma. Se visitaron las iglesias en lugar del Templo de Júpiter, y no hubo asesinato de los cautivos; pero la sed de sangre romana aún no se había disipado y, una vez completada toda la procesión, comenzaron los espectáculos del Coliseo, inocentemente al principio, con carreras a pie, a caballo y en carros; luego siguió una gran caza de bestias sueltas en la arena; y luego un baile de espadas. Pero después de la danza de la espada vino la formación de espadachines, sin armas desafiladas, pero con lanzas y espadas afiladas, un combate de gladiadores en toda su seriedad. La gente, encantada, aplaudía con gritos de éxtasis esta gratificación de sus gustos salvajes. De repente, sin embargo, hubo una interrupción. Un hombre rudo, toscamente vestido, con la cabeza descubierta y los pies

descalzos, había saltado a la arena y, haciendo retroceder a los gladiadores, comenzó a llamar en voz alta a la gente para que cesara el derramamiento de sangre inocente y no correspondiera a la misericordia de Dios al rechazar espada del enemigo alentando el asesinato de los gladiadores. Gritos, aullidos, llantos, interrumpieron sus palabras; este no era un lugar para predicaciones; debían observarse las viejas costumbres de Roma "¡Retroceda, anciano!" ¡Adelante, gladiadores! Los gladiadores apartaron al entrometido y se lanzaron al ataque. Él todavía estaba en medio, manteniéndolos separados, esforzándose en vano por ser escuchado. '¡Sedición! ¡Sedición!' ¡Derrotenlo!, fue el grito; y el hombre en autoridad, Alipio, el prefecto, él mismo añadió su voz. Los gladiadores, enfurecidos por interferir con su vocación, lo mataron. ¡Piedras, o lo que estaba a sus alcances, llovieron sobre él de parte de la gente furiosa, y murió en medio de la arena! Cayó muerto, y luego vino la sensación de lo que se había hecho.

Su vestimenta mostraba que era uno de los ermitaños que se comprometieron a una vida santa de oración y abnegación, y que eran muy reverenciados, incluso por los más irreflexivos. Los pocos que lo habían visto anteriormente, decían que había venido de las selvas de Asia en peregrinación, para visitar los santuarios y celebrar su Navidad en Roma - sabían que era un hombre santo - nada más, y ni siquiera sabían con certeza si su nombre era Alímaco o Telémaco. Su espíritu se había conmovido al ver a miles que acudían en multitudes para ver a hombres matarse unos a otros, y en su celo sencillo, había decidido detener la crueldad o morir. Había muerto, pero no en vano. Su trabajo estaba hecho. La conmoción de tal muerte ante sus ojos transformó los corazones de la gente; vieron la maldad y la crueldad a las que se habían rendido ciegamente; y desde el día en que murió el ermitaño en el Coliseo nunca hubo otra pelea de Gladiadores. No solo en Roma, sino en todas las provincias del Imperio, la costumbre fue completamente abolida; y un crimen habitual al menos fue borrado de la tierra por la devoción propia de un hombre humilde, oscuro y casi sin nombre.

##Original##

The Last Fight at the Coliseum by Charlotte M. Yonge

As the Romans grew prouder and more fond of pleasure, no one could hope to please them who did not give them sports and entertainments. When any person wished to be elected to any public office, it was a matter of course that he should compliment his fellow citizens by exhibitions of the kind they loved, and when the common people were discontented, their cry was that they wanted panem ac Circenses, 'bread and sports', the only things they cared for. In most places where there has been a large Roman colony, remains can be seen of the amphitheatres, where the citizens were wont to assemble for

these diversions. Sometimes these are stages of circular galleries of seats hewn out of the hillside, where rows of spectators might sit one above the other, all looking down on a broad, flat space in the centre, under their feet, where the representations took place. Sometimes, when the country was flat, or it was easier to build than to excavate, the amphitheatre was raised above ground, rising up to a considerable height.

The grandest and most renowned of all these amphitheatres is the Coliseum at Rome. It was built by Vespasian and his son Titus, the conquerors of Jerusalem, in a valley in the midst of the seven hills of Rome. The captive Jews were forced to labour at it; and the materials, granite outside, and softer travertine stone within, are so solid and so admirably built, that still at the end of eighteen centuries it has scarcely even become a ruin, but remains one of the greatest wonders of Rome.

Five acres of ground were enclosed within the oval of its outer wall, which outside rises perpendicularly in tiers of arches one above the other. Within, the galleries of seats projected forwards, each tier coming out far beyond the one above it, so that between the lowest and the outer wall there was room for a great space of chambers, passages, and vaults around the central space, called the arena, from the arena, or sand, with which it was strewn.

When the Roman Emperors grew very vain and luxurious, they used to have this sand made ornamental with metallic filings, vermilion, and even powdered precious stones; but it was thought better taste to use the scrapings of a soft white stone, which, when thickly strewn, made the whole arena look as if covered with untrodden snow. Around the border of this space flowed a stream of fresh water. Then came a straight wall, rising to a considerable height, and surmounted by a broad platform, on which stood a throne for the Emperor, curule chairs of ivory and gold for the chief magistrates and senators, and seats for the vestal virgins. Next above were galleries for the equestrian order, the great mass of

those who considered themselves as of gentle station, though not of the highest rank; farther up, and therefore farther back, were the galleries belonging to the freemen of Rome; and these were again surmounted by another plain wall with a platform on the top, where were places for the ladies, who were not (except the vestal virgins) allowed to look on nearer, because of the unclothed state of some of the performers in the arena. Between the ladies' boxes, benches were squeezed in where the lowest people could seat themselves; and some of these likewise found room in the two uppermost tiers of porticoes, where sailors, mechanics, and persons in the service of the Coliseum had their post. Altogether, when full, this huge building held no less than 87,000 spectators. It had no roof; but when there was rain, or if the sun was too hot, the sailors in the porticoes unfurled awnings that ran along upon ropes, and formed a covering of silk and gold tissue over the whole. Purple was the favorite color for this velamen, or veil; because, when the sun shone through it, it cast such beautiful rosy tints on the snowy arena and the white purple-edged togas of the Roman citizens.

Long days were spent from morning till evening upon those galleries. The multitude who poured in early would watch the great dignitaries arrive and take their seats, greeting them either with shouts of applause or hootings of dislike, according as they were favorites or otherwise; and when the Emperor came in to take his place under his canopy, there was one loud acclamation, 'Joy to thee, master of all, first of all, happiest of all. Victory to thee for ever!'

When the Emperor had seated himself and given the signal, the sports began. Sometimes a rope-dancing elephant would begin the entertainment, by mounting even to the summit of the building and descending by a cord. Then a bear, dressed up as a Roman matron, would be carried along in a chair between porters, as ladies were wont to go abroad, and another bear, in a lawyer's robe, would stand on his hind legs and go through the motions of pleading a case. Or a lion came forth with a jeweled crown on his head, a diamond

necklace round his neck, his mane plaited with gold, and his claws gilded, and played a hundred pretty gentle antics with a little hare that danced fearlessly within his grasp. Then in would come twelve elephants, six males in togas, six females with the veil and pallium; they took their places on couches around an ivory table, dined with great decorum, playfully sprinkled a little rosewater over the nearest spectators, and then received more guests of their unwieldy kind, who arrived in ball dresses, scattered flowers, and performed a dance.

Sometimes water was let into the arena, a ship sailed in, and falling to pieces in the midst, sent a crowd of strange animals swimming in all directions. Sometimes the ground opened, and trees came growing up through it, bearing golden fruit. Or the beautiful old tale of Orpheus was acted; these trees would follow the harp and song of the musician; but--to make the whole part complete--it was no mere play, but real earnest, that the Orpheus of the piece fell a prey to live bears.

For the Coliseum had not been built for such harmless spectacles as those first described. The fierce Romans wanted to be excited and feel themselves strongly stirred; and, presently, the doors of the pits and dens round the arena were thrown open, and absolutely savage beasts were let loose upon one another--rhinoceroses and tigers, bulls and lions, leopards and wild boars--while the people watched with savage curiosity to see the various kinds of attack and defense; or, if the animals were cowed or sullen, their rage would be worked up--red would be shown to the bulls, white to boars, red-hot goads would be driven into some, whips would be lashed at others, till the work of slaughter was fairly commenced, and gazed on with greedy eyes and ears delighted, instead of horror-struck, by the roars and howls of the noble creatures whose courage was thus misused. Sometimes indeed, when some especially strong or ferocious animal had slain a whole heap of victims, the cries of the people would decree that it should be turned loose in its native forest, and, amid shouts of 'A triumph! a triumph!' the beast would prowl round

the arena, upon the carcasses of the slain victims. Almost incredible numbers of animals were imported for these cruel sports, and the governors of distant provinces made it a duty to collect troops of lions, elephants, ostriches, leopards--the fiercer or the newer the creature the better--to be thus tortured to frenzy, to make sport in the amphitheatre. However, there was daintiness joined with cruelty: the Romans did not like the smell of blood, though they enjoyed the sight of it, and all the solid stonework was pierced with tubes, through which was conducted the stream of spices and saffron, boiled in wine, that the perfume might overpower the scent of slaughter below.

Wild beasts tearing each other to pieces might, one would think, satisfy any taste of horror; but the spectators needed even nobler game to be set before their favorite monsters--men were brought forward to confront them. Some of these were at first in full armor, and fought hard, generally with success; and there was a revolving machine, something like a squirrel's cage, in which the bear was always climbing after his enemy, and then rolling over by his own weight. Or hunters came, almost unarmed, and gaining the victory by swiftness and dexterity, throwing a piece of cloth over a lion's head, or disconcerting him by putting their fist down his throat. But it was not only skill, but death, that the Romans loved to see; and condemned criminals and deserters were reserved to feast the lions, and to entertain the populace with their various kinds of death. Among these condemned was many a Christian martyr, who witnessed a good confession before the savage-eyed multitude around the arena, and 'met the lion's gory mane' with a calm resolution and hopeful joy that the lookers-on could not understand. To see a Christian die, with upward gaze and hymns of joy on his tongue, was the most strange unaccountable sight the Coliseum could offer, and it was therefore the choicest, and reserved for the last part of the spectacles in which the brute creation had a part.

The carcasses were dragged off with hooks, and bloodstained sand was covered with a fresh clean layer, the perfume wafted in stronger clouds, and a procession came

forward--tall, well-made men, in the prime of their strength. Some carried a sword and a lasso, others a trident and a net; some were in light armor, others in the full heavy equipment of a soldier; some on horseback, some in chariots, some on foot. They marched in, and made their obeisance to the Emperor; and with one voice, their greeting sounded through the building, Ave, Caesar, morituri te salutant! 'Hail, Caesar, those about to die salute thee!'

They were the gladiators--the swordsmen trained to fight to the death to amuse the populace. They were usually slaves placed in schools of arms under the care of a master; but sometimes persons would voluntarily hire themselves out to fight by way of a profession: and both these, and such slave gladiators as did not die in the arena, would sometimes retire, and spend an old age of quiet; but there was little hope of this, for the Romans were not apt to have mercy on the fallen.

Fights of all sorts took place--the light-armed soldier and the netsman --the lasso and the javelin--the two heavy-armed warriors--all combinations of single combat, and sometimes a general melee. When a gladiator wounded his adversary, he shouted to the spectators, Hoc habet! 'He has it!' and looked up to know whether he should kill or spare. If the people held up their thumbs, the conquered was left to recover, if he could; if they turned them down, he was to die: and if he showed any reluctance to present his throat for the deathblow, there was a scornful shout, Recipe ferrum! 'Receive the steel!' Many of us must have seen casts of the most touching statue of the wounded man, that called forth the noble lines of indignant pity which, though so often repeated, cannot be passed over here:

'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 no--this eyes

Were with his heart, and that was far away.

He reck'd 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--he their sire,

Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday.

All this rush'd with his blood--Shall he expire,

And unavenged? Arise ye Goths and glut your ire.'

Sacred vestals, tender mothers, fat, good-humored senators, all thought it fair play, and were equally pitiless in the strange frenzy for exciting scenes to which they gave themselves up, when they mounted the stone stairs of the Coliseum. Privileged persons would even descend into the arena, examine the death agonies, and taste the blood of some specially brave victim ere the corpse was drawn forth at the death gate, that the frightful game might continue undisturbed and unencumbered. Gladiator shows were the great passion of Rome, and popular favor could hardly be gained except by ministering to it. Even when the barbarians were beginning to close in on the Empire, hosts of brave men were still kept for this slavish mimic warfare--sport to the beholders, but sad earnest to the actors.

Christianity worked its way upwards, and at least was professed by the Emperor on his throne. Persecution came to an end, and no more martyrs fed the beasts in the Coliseum. The Christian emperors endeavored to prevent any more shows where cruelty and death formed the chief interest and no truly religious person could endure the spectacle; but custom and love of excitement prevailed even against the Emperor. Mere tricks of beasts, horse and chariot races, or bloodless contests, were tame and dull, according to the diseased taste of Rome; it was thought weak and sentimental to object to looking on at a death scene; the Emperors were generally absent at Constantinople, and no one could get elected to any office unless he treated the citizens to such a show as they best liked, with a little bloodshed and death to stir their feelings; and thus it went on for full a hundred years after Rome had, in name, become a Christian city, and the same custom prevailed wherever there was an amphitheatre and pleasure-loving people.

Meantime the enemies of Rome were coming nearer and nearer, and Alaric, the great chief of the Goths, led his forces into Italy, and threatened the city itself. Honorius, the Emperor, was a cowardly, almost idiotical, boy; but his brave general, Stilicho, assembled his forces, met the Goths at Pollentia (about twenty-five miles from where Turin now stands), and gave them a complete defeat on the Easter Day of the year 403. He pursued them into the mountains, and for that time saved Rome. In the joy of the victory the Roman senate invited the conqueror and his ward Honorius to enter the city in triumph, at the opening of the new year, with the white steeds, purple robes, and vermilion cheeks with which, of old, victorious generals were welcomed at Rome. The churches were visited instead of the Temple of Jupiter, and there was no murder of the captives; but Roman bloodthirstiness was not yet allayed, and, after all the procession had been completed, the Coliseum shows commenced, innocently at first, with races on foot, on horseback, and in chariots; then followed a grand hunting of beasts turned loose in the arena; and next a sword dance. But after the sword dance came the arraying of swordsmen, with no blunted weapons, but with

sharp spears and swords--a gladiator combat in full earnest. The people, enchanted, applauded with shouts of ecstasy this gratification of their savage tastes. Suddenly, however, there was an interruption. A rude, roughly robed man, bareheaded and barefooted, had sprung into the arena, and, signing back the gladiators, began to call aloud upon the people to cease from the shedding of innocent blood, and not to requite God's mercy in turning away the sword of the enemy by encouraging murder. Shouts, howls, cries, broke in upon his words; this was no place for preachings--the old customs of Rome should be observed 'Back, old man!' 'On, gladiators!' The gladiators thrust aside the meddler, and rushed to the attack. He still stood between, holding them apart, striving in vain to be heard. 'Sedition! Sedition!' 'Down with him!' was the cry; and the man in authority, Alypius, the prefect, himself added his voice. The gladiators, enraged at interference with their vocation, cut him down. Stones, or whatever came to hand, rained down upon him from the furious people, and he perished in the midst of the arena! He lay dead, and then came the feeling of what had been done.

His dress showed that he was one of the hermits who vowed themselves to a holy life of prayer and self-denial, and who were greatly revered, even by the most thoughtless. The few who had previously seen him, told that he had come from the wilds of Asia on pilgrimage, to visit the shrines and keep his Christmas at Rome--they knew he was a holy man--no more, and it is not even certain whether his name was Alymachus or Telemachus. His spirit had been stirred by the sight of thousands flocking to see men slaughter one another, and in his simple-hearted zeal he had resolved to stop the cruelty or die. He had died, but not in vain. His work was done. The shock of such a death before their eyes turned the hearts of the people; they saw the wickedness and cruelty to which they had blindly surrendered themselves; and from the day when the hermit died in the Coliseum there was never another fight of the Gladiators. Not merely at Rome, but in every province

of the Empire, the custom was utterly abolished; and one habitual crime at least was wiped from the earth by the self-devotion of one humble, obscure, almost nameless man.