**Texts for February**

I have selected 3 texts all of which detail a mill strike and all of which include at least one woman who witnesses/becomes involved in the action. I have arranged the texts in date order, starting for 1849 with Bronte’s *Shirley*-a text which has been noted as the forerunner of Helen Burton’s novel-no-one mentions Gaskell. In 1854-5 we have *North and South* by Gaskell and this is followed in 1858 *Bertha Darley*.

My idea is to compare and contrast the presentation of the workers/rioters and the presentation of the leading female character in these extracts-we have Constance in *Bertha Darley* and Margaret in *N & S* and Shirley, Caroline in *Shirley*. There are also differences in style and content that affect the way we read and interpret the story.

This may also lead to a discussion of the political situation at the time and the influence of religion on each writer’s attitude to the situation.

When I read *Bertha Darley* for the first time, this particular scene really struck me.

I will send a list of Points to ponder nearer the time. These texts are for pre-reading.

***Shirley,* Charlotte Bronte- 1849**

"Halt!"

A halt followed. The march was arrested. Then came a low conference, of which no word was distinguishable from the dining-room.

"We *must* hear this," said Shirley.

She turned, took her pistols from the table, silently passed out through the middle window of the dining-room, which was, in fact, a glass door, stole down the walk to the garden wall, and stood listening under the lilacs.295 Caroline would not have quitted the house had she been alone, but where Shirley went she would go. She glanced at the weapon on the sideboard, but left it behind her, and presently stood at her friend's side. They dared not look over the wall, for fear of being seen; they were obliged to crouch behind it. They heard these words,—

"It looks a rambling old building. Who lives in it besides the damned parson?"

"Only three women—his niece and two servants."

"Do you know where they sleep?"

"The lasses behind; the niece in a front room."

"And Helstone?"

"Yonder is his chamber. He was burning a light, but I see none now."

"Where would you get in?"

"If I were ordered to do his job—and he desarves it—I'd try yond' long window; it opens to the dining-room. I could grope my way upstairs, and I know his chamber."

"How would you manage about the women folk?"

"Let 'em alone except they shrieked, and then I'd soon quieten 'em. I could wish to find the old chap asleep. If he waked, he'd be dangerous."

"Has he arms?"

"Firearms, allus—and allus loadened."

"Then you're a fool to stop us here. A shot would give the alarm. Moore would be on us before we could turn round. We should miss our main object."

"You might go on, I tell you. I'd engage Helstone alone."

A pause. One of the party dropped some weapon, which rang on the stone causeway. At this sound the rectory dog barked again furiously—fiercely.

"That spoils all!" said the voice. "He'll awake. A noise like that might rouse the dead. You did not say there was a dog. Damn you! Forward!"

Forward they went—tramp, tramp—with mustering, manifold, slow-filing tread. They were gone.

Shirley stood erect, looked over the wall, along the road.

"Not a soul remains," she said.

She stood and mused. "Thank God!" was the next observation.

Caroline repeated the ejaculation—not in so steady a tone. She was trembling much. Her heart was beating fast and thick; her face was cold, her forehead damp.

"Thank God for us!" she reiterated. "But what will happen elsewhere? They have passed us by that they may make sure of others."

"They have done well," returned Shirley, with composure. "The others will defend themselves. They can do it. They are prepared for them. With us it is otherwise. My finger was on the trigger of this pistol. I was quite ready to give that man, if he had entered, such a greeting as he little calculated on; but behind him followed three hundred. I had neither three hundred hands nor three hundred weapons. I could not have effectually protected either you, myself, or the two poor women asleep under that roof. Therefore I again earnestly thank God for insult and peril escaped."

After a second pause she continued: "What is it my duty and wisdom to do next? Not to stay here inactive, I am glad to say, but, of course, to walk over to the Hollow."

"To the Hollow, Shirley?"

"To the Hollow. Will you go with me?"

"Where those men are gone?"

"They have taken the highway; we should not encounter them. The road over the fields is as safe, silent, and solitary as a path through the air would be. Will you go?"

"Yes," was the answer, given mechanically, not because the speaker wished or was prepared to go, or, indeed, was otherwise than scared at the prospect of going, but because she felt she could not abandon Shirley.

"Then we must fasten up these windows, and leave all as secure as we can behind us. Do you know what we are going for, Cary?"

"Yes—no—because you wish it."

"Is that all? And are you so obedient to a mere caprice of mine? What a docile wife you would make to a stern husband! The moon's face is not whiter than yours at this moment, and the aspen at the gate does not tremble more than your busy fingers; and so, tractable and terror-struck, and dismayed and devoted, you would follow me into the thick of real danger! Cary, let me give your fidelity a motive. We are going for Moore's sake—to see if we can be of use to him, to make an effort to warn him of what is coming."

"To be sure! I am a blind, weak fool, and you are297 acute and sensible, Shirley. I will go with you; I will gladly go with you!"

"I do not doubt it. You would die blindly and meekly for me, but you would intelligently and gladly die for Moore. But, in truth, there is no question of death to-night; we run no risk at all."

Caroline rapidly closed shutter and lattice. "Do not fear that I shall not have breath to run as fast as you can possibly run, Shirley. Take my hand. Let us go straight across the fields."

"But you cannot climb walls?"

"To-night I can."

"You are afraid of hedges, and the beck which we shall be forced to cross?"

"I can cross it."

They started; they ran. Many a wall checked but did not baffle them. Shirley was surefooted and agile; she could spring like a deer when she chose. Caroline, more timid and less dexterous, fell once or twice, and bruised herself; but she rose again directly, saying she was not hurt. A quickset hedge bounded the last field; they lost time in seeking a gap in it. The aperture, when found, was narrow, but they worked their way through. The long hair, the tender skin, the silks and the muslins suffered; but what was chiefly regretted was the impediment this difficulty had caused to speed. On the other side they met the beck, flowing deep in a rough bed. At this point a narrow plank formed the only bridge across it. Shirley had trodden the plank successfully and fearlessly many a time before; Caroline had never yet dared to risk the transit.

"I will carry you across," said Miss Keeldar. "You are light, and I am not weak. Let me try."

"If I fall in, you may fish me out," was the answer, as a grateful squeeze compressed her hand. Caroline, without pausing, trod forward on the trembling plank as if it were a continuation of the firm turf. Shirley, who followed, did not cross it more resolutely or safely. In their present humour, on their present errand, a strong and foaming channel would have been a barrier to neither. At the moment they were above the control either of fire or water. All Stilbro' Moor, alight and aglow with bonfires, would not have stopped them, nor would Calder or Aire thundering in flood. Yet one sound made them pause. Scarce had298 they set foot on the solid opposite bank when a shot split the air from the north. One second elapsed. Further off burst a like note in the south. Within the space of three minutes similar signals boomed in the east and west.

"I thought we were dead at the first explosion," observed Shirley, drawing a long breath. "I felt myself hit in the temples, and I concluded your heart was pierced; but the reiterated voice was an explanation. Those are signals—it is their way—the attack must be near. We should have had wings. Our feet have not borne us swiftly enough."

A portion of the copse was now to clear. When they emerged from it the mill lay just below them. They could look down upon the buildings, the yard; they could see the road beyond. And the first glance in that direction told Shirley she was right in her conjecture. They were already too late to give warning. It had taken more time than they calculated on to overcome the various obstacles which embarrassed the short cut across the fields.

The road, which should have been white, was dark with a moving mass. The rioters were assembled in front of the closed yard gates, and a single figure stood within, apparently addressing them. The mill itself was perfectly black and still. There was neither life, light, nor motion around it.

"Surely he is prepared. Surely that is not Moore meeting them alone?" whispered Shirley.

"It is. We must go to him. I *will* go to him."

"*That* you will not."

"Why did I come, then? I came only for him. I shall join him."

"Fortunately it is out of your power. There is no entrance to the yard."

"There *is* a small entrance at the back, besides the gates in front. It opens by a secret method which I know. I will try it."

"Not with my leave."

Miss Keeldar clasped her round the waist with both arms and held her back. "Not one step shall you stir," she went on authoritatively. "At this moment Moore would be both shocked and embarrassed if he saw either you or me. Men never want women near them in time of real danger."

"I would not trouble—I would help him," was the reply.

299"How?—by inspiring him with heroism? Pooh! these are not the days of chivalry. It is not a tilt at a tournament we are going to behold, but a struggle about money, and food, and life."

"It is natural that I should be at his side."

"As queen of his heart? His mill is his lady-love, Cary! Backed by his factory and his frames, he has all the encouragement he wants or can know. It is not for love or beauty, but for ledger and broadcloth, he is going to break a spear. Don't be sentimental; Robert is not so."

"I *could* help him; I *will* seek him."

"Off then—I let you go—seek Moore. You'll not find him."

She loosened her hold. Caroline sped like levelled shaft from bent bow; after her rang a jesting, gibing laugh. "Look well there is no mistake!" was the warning given.

But there *was* a mistake. Miss Helstone paused, hesitated, gazed. The figure had suddenly retreated from the gate, and was running back hastily to the mill.

"Make haste, Lina!" cried Shirley; "meet him before he enters."

Caroline slowly returned. "It is not Robert," she said. "It has neither his height, form, nor bearing."

"I saw it was not Robert when I let you go. How could you imagine it? It is a shabby little figure of a private soldier; they had posted him as sentinel. He is safe in the mill now. I saw the door open and admit him. My mind grows easier. Robert is prepared. Our warning would have been superfluous; and now I am thankful we came too late to give it. It has saved us the trouble of a scene. How fine to have entered the counting-house *toute éperdue*, and to have found oneself in presence of Messrs. Armitage and Ramsden smoking, Malone swaggering, your uncle sneering, Mr. Sykes sipping a cordial, and Moore himself in his cold man-of-business vein! I am glad we missed it all."

"I wonder if there are many in the mill, Shirley!"

"Plenty to defend it. The soldiers we have twice seen to-day were going there, no doubt, and the group we noticed surrounding your cousin in the fields will be with him."

"What are they doing now, Shirley? What is that noise?"

"Hatchets and crowbars against the yard gates. They are forcing them. Are you afraid?"

300"No; but my heart throbs fast. I have a difficulty in standing. I will sit down. Do you feel unmoved?"

"Hardly that; but I am glad I came. We shall see what transpires with our own eyes. We are here on the spot, and none know it. Instead of amazing the curate, the clothier, and the corn-dealer with a romantic rush on the stage, we stand alone with the friendly night, its mute stars, and these whispering trees, whose report our friends will not come to gather."

"Shirley, Shirley, the gates are down! That crash was like the felling of great trees. Now they are pouring through. They will break down the mill doors as they have broken the gate. What can Robert do against so many? Would to God I were a little nearer him—could hear him speak—could speak to him! With my will—my longing to serve him—I could not be a useless burden in his way; I could be turned to some account."

"They come on!" cried Shirley. "How steadily they march in! There is discipline in their ranks. I will not say there is courage—hundreds against tens are no proof of that quality—but" (she dropped her voice) "there is suffering and desperation enough amongst them. These goads will urge them forwards."

"Forwards against Robert; and they hate him. Shirley, is there much danger they will win the day?"

"We shall see. Moore and Helstone are of 'earth's first blood'—no bunglers—no cravens——"

A crash—smash—shiver—stopped their whispers. A simultaneously hurled volley of stones had saluted the broad front of the mill, with all its windows; and now every pane of every lattice lay in shattered and pounded fragments. A yell followed this demonstration—a rioters' yell—a north-of-England, a Yorkshire, a West-Riding, a West-Riding-clothing-district-of-Yorkshire rioters' yell.

You never heard that sound, perhaps, reader? So much the better for your ears—perhaps for your heart, since, if it rends the air in hate to yourself, or to the men or principles you approve, the interests to which you wish well, wrath wakens to the cry of hate; the lion shakes his mane, and rises to the howl of the hyena; caste stands up, ireful against caste; and the indignant, wronged spirit of the middle rank bears down in zeal and scorn on the famished and furious mass of the operative class. It is difficult to be tolerant, difficult to be just, in such moments.

301Caroline rose; Shirley put her arm round her: they stood together as still as the straight stems of two trees. That yell was a long one, and when it ceased the night was yet full of the swaying and murmuring of a crowd.

"What next?" was the question of the listeners. Nothing came yet. The mill remained mute as a mausoleum.

"He *cannot* be alone!" whispered Caroline.

"I would stake all I have that he is as little alone as he is alarmed," responded Shirley.

Shots were discharged by the rioters. Had the defenders waited for this signal? It seemed so. The hitherto inert and passive mill woke; fire flashed from its empty window-frames; a volley of musketry pealed sharp through the Hollow.

"Moore speaks at last!" said Shirley, "and he seems to have the gift of tongues. That was not a single voice."

"He has been forbearing. No one can accuse him of rashness," alleged Caroline. "Their discharge preceded his. They broke his gates and his windows. They fired at his garrison before he repelled them."

What was going on now? It seemed difficult, in the darkness, to distinguish; but something terrible, a still-renewing tumult, was obvious—fierce attacks, desperate repulses. The mill-yard, the mill itself, was full of battle movement. There was scarcely any cessation now of the discharge of firearms; and there was struggling, rushing, trampling, and shouting between. The aim of the assailants seemed to be to enter the mill, that of the defenders to beat them off. They heard the rebel leader cry, "To the back, lads!" They heard a voice retort, "Come round; we will meet you."

"To the counting-house!" was the order again.

"Welcome! we shall have you there!" was the response. And accordingly the fiercest blaze that had yet glowed, the loudest rattle that had yet been heard, burst from the counting-house front when the mass of rioters rushed up to it.

The voice that had spoken was Moore's own voice. They could tell by its tones that his soul was now warm with the conflict; they could guess that the fighting animal was roused in every one of those men there struggling together, and was for the time quite paramount above the rational human being.

Both the girls felt their faces glow and their pulses throb;302 both knew they would do no good by rushing down into the *mêlée*. They desired neither to deal nor to receive blows; but they could not have run away—Caroline no more than Shirley; they could not have fainted; they could not have taken their eyes from the dim, terrible scene—from the mass of cloud, of smoke, the musket-lightning—for the world.

"How and when would it end?" was the demand throbbing in their throbbing pulses. "Would a juncture arise in which they could be useful?" was what they waited to see; for though Shirley put off their too-late arrival with a jest, and was ever ready to satirize her own or any other person's enthusiasm, she would have given a farm of her best land for a chance of rendering good service.

The chance was not vouchsafed her; the looked-for juncture never came. It was not likely. Moore had expected this attack for days, perhaps weeks; he was prepared for it at every point. He had fortified and garrisoned his mill, which in itself was a strong building. He was a cool, brave man; he stood to the defence with unflinching firmness. Those who were with him caught his spirit, and copied his demeanour. The rioters had never been so met before. At other mills they had attacked they had found no resistance; an organized, resolute defence was what they never dreamed of encountering. When their leaders saw the steady fire kept up from the mill, witnessed the composure and determination of its owner, heard themselves coolly defied and invited on to death, and beheld their men falling wounded round them, they felt that nothing was to be done here. In haste they mustered their forces, drew them away from the building. A roll was called over, in which the men answered to figures instead of names. They dispersed wide over the fields, leaving silence and ruin behind them. The attack, from its commencement to its termination, had not occupied an hour.

Day was by this time approaching; the west was dim, the east beginning to gleam. It would have seemed that the girls who had watched this conflict would now wish to hasten to the victors, on whose side all their interest had been enlisted; but they only very cautiously approached the now battered mill, and when suddenly a number of soldiers and gentlemen appeared at the great door opening303 into the yard, they quickly stepped aside into a shed, the deposit of old iron and timber, whence they could see without being seen.

It was no cheering spectacle. These premises were now a mere blot of desolation on the fresh front of the summer dawn. All the copse up the Hollow was shady and dewy, the hill at its head was green; but just here, in the centre of the sweet glen, Discord, broken loose in the night from control, had beaten the ground with his stamping hoofs, and left it waste and pulverized. The mill yawned all ruinous with unglazed frames; the yard was thickly bestrewn with stones and brickbats; and close under the mill, with the glittering fragments of the shattered windows, muskets and other weapons lay here and there. More than one deep crimson stain was visible on the gravel, a human body lay quiet on its face near the gates, and five or six wounded men writhed and moaned in the bloody dust.

Miss Keeldar's countenance changed at this view. It was the after-taste of the battle, death and pain replacing excitement and exertion. It was the blackness the bright fire leaves when its blaze is sunk, its warmth failed, and its glow faded.

"This is what I wished to prevent," she said, in a voice whose cadence betrayed the altered impulse of her heart.

"But you could not prevent it; you did your best—it was in vain," said Caroline comfortingly. "Don't grieve, Shirley."

"I am sorry for those poor fellows," was the answer, while the spark in her glance dissolved to dew. "Are any within the mill hurt, I wonder? Is that your uncle?"

"It is, and there is Mr. Malone; and, O Shirley, there is Robert!"

"Well" (resuming her former tone), "don't squeeze your fingers quite into my hand. I see. There is nothing wonderful in that. We knew he, at least, was here, whoever might be absent."

"He is coming here towards us, Shirley!"

"Towards the pump, that is to say, for the purpose of washing his hands and his forehead, which has got a scratch, I perceive."

"He bleeds, Shirley. Don't hold me. I must go."

"Not a step."

"He is hurt, Shirley!"

"Fiddlestick!"

304"But I *must* go to him. I wish to go so much. I cannot bear to be restrained."

"What for?"

"To speak to him, to ask how he is, and what I can do for him."

"To tease and annoy him; to make a spectacle of yourself and him before those soldiers, Mr. Malone, your uncle, et cetera. Would he like it, think you? Would you like to remember it a week hence?"

"Am I always to be curbed and kept down?" demanded Caroline, a little passionately.

"For his sake, yes; and still more for your own. I tell you, if you showed yourself now you would repent it an hour hence, and so would Robert."

"You think he would not like it, Shirley?"

"Far less than he would like our stopping him to say good-night, which you were so sore about."

"But that was all play; there was no danger."

"And this is serious work; he must be unmolested."

"I only wish to go to him because he is my cousin—you understand?"

"I quite understand. But now, watch him. He has bathed his forehead, and the blood has ceased trickling. His hurt is really a mere graze; I can see it from hence. He is going to look after the wounded men."

Accordingly Mr. Moore and Mr. Helstone went round the yard, examining each prostrate form. They then gave directions to have the wounded taken up and carried into the mill. This duty being performed, Joe Scott was ordered to saddle his master's horse and Mr. Helstone's pony, and the two gentlemen rode away full gallop, to seek surgical aid in different directions.

*North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell 1854

Riot at the Mill.

“I’m sorry, Miss Hale, you have visited us at this unfortunate moment, when, I fear, you may be involved in whatever risk we have to bear. Mother! hadn’t you better go into the back rooms? I’m not sure whether they may not have made their way from Pinner’s Lane into the stable-yard; but if not, you will be safer there than here. Go, Jane!” continued he, addressing the upper-servant. And she went, followed by the others.

“I stop here!” said his mother. “Where you are, there I stay.” And indeed, retreat into the back rooms was of no avail; the crowd had surrounded the outbuildings at the rear, and were sending forth{138} their awful threatening roar behind. The servants retreated into the garrets, with many a cry and shriek. Mr. Thornton smiled scornfully as he heard them. He glanced at Margaret, standing all by herself at the window nearest the factory. Her eyes glittered, her colour was deepened on cheek and lip. As if she felt his look, she turned to him and asked a question that had been for some time in her mind:

“Where are the poor imported workpeople? In the factory there?”

“Yes! I left them cowed up in a small room, at the head of a back flight of stairs; bidding them run all risks, and escape down there, if they heard any attack made on the mill doors. But it is not them—it is me they want.”

“When can the soldiers be here?” asked his mother, in a low but not unsteady voice.

He took out his watch with the same steady composure with which he did everything. He made some little calculation:—

“Supposing Williams got straight off when I told him, and hadn’t to dodge about amongst them—it must be twenty minutes yet.”

“Twenty minutes!” said his mother, for the first time showing her terror in the tones of her voice.

“Shut down the windows instantly, mother,” exclaimed he: “the gates won’t bear such another shock. Shut down that window, Miss Hale.”

Margaret shut down her window, and then went to assist Mrs. Thornton’s trembling fingers.

From some cause or other, there was a pause of several minutes in the unseen street. Mrs. Thornton looked with wild anxiety at her son’s countenance, as if to gain the interpretation of the sudden stillness from him. His face was set into rigid lines of contemptuous defiance; neither hope nor fear could be read there.

Fanny raised herself up:

“Are they gone?” asked she, in a whisper.

“Gone!” replied he. “Listen!”

She did listen; they all could hear the one great straining breath; the creak of wood slowly yielding; the wrench of iron; the mighty fall of the ponderous gates. Fanny stood up tottering—made a step or two towards her mother, and fell forwards into her arms in a fainting fit. Mrs. Thornton lifted her up with a strength that was as much that of the will as of the body, and carried her away.

“Thank God!” said Mr. Thornton, as he watched her out. “Had you not better go upstairs, Miss Hale?”

Margaret’s lips formed a “No!”—but he could not hear her speak, for the tramp of innumerable steps right under the very wall of the house, and the fierce growl of low deep angry voices that had a ferocious murmur of satisfaction in them, more dreadful than their baffled cries not many minutes before.

“Never mind!” said he, thinking to encourage her. “I am very sorry that you should have been entrapped into all this alarm; but{139} it cannot last long now; a few minutes more, and the soldiers will be here.”

“Oh, God!” cried Margaret, suddenly; “there is Boucher. I know his face, though he is livid with rage,—he is fighting to get to the front—look! look!”

“Who is Boucher?” asked Mr. Thornton coolly, and coming close to the window to discover the man in whom Margaret took such an interest. As soon as they saw Mr. Thornton, they set up a yell, to call it not human is nothing,—it was as the demoniac desire of some terrible wild beast for the food that is withheld from his ravening. Even he drew back for a moment, dismayed at the intensity of hatred he had provoked.

“Let them yell!” said he. “In five minutes more—. I only hope my poor Irishmen are not terrified out of their wits by such a fiendlike noise. Keep up your courage for five minutes, Miss Hale.”

“Don’t be afraid for me,” she said hastily. “But what in five minutes? Can you do nothing to soothe these poor creatures? It is awful to see them.”

“The soldiers will be here directly, and that will bring them to reason.”

“To reason!” said Margaret, quickly. “What kind of reason?”

“The only reason that does with men that make themselves into wild beasts. By heaven! they’ve turned to the mill-door!”

“Mr. Thornton,” said Margaret, shaking all over with her passion, “go down this instant, if you are not a coward. Go down and face them like a man. Save these poor strangers, whom you have decoyed here. Speak to your workmen as if they were human beings. Speak to them kindly. Don’t let the soldiers come in and cut down poor creatures who are driven mad. I see one there who is. If you have any courage or noble quality in you, go out and speak to them, man to man!”

He turned and looked at her while she spoke. A dark cloud came over his face while he listened. He set his teeth as he heard her words.

“I will go. Perhaps I may ask you to accompany me downstairs, and bar the door behind me; my mother and sister will need that protection.”

“Oh! Mr. Thornton! I do not know—I may be wrong—only—”

But he was gone; he was downstairs in the hall; he had unbarred the front door; all she could do, was to follow him quickly, and fasten it behind him, and clamber up the stairs again with a sick heart and a dizzy head. Again she took her place by the farthest window. He was on the steps below; she saw that by the direction of a thousand angry eyes; but she could neither see nor hear anything save the savage satisfaction of the rolling angry murmur. See threw the window wide open. Many in the crowd were mere boys; cruel and thoughtless,—cruel because they were thoughtless; some were men, gaunt as wolves, and mad for prey. She knew how it was;{140} they were like Boucher,—with starving children at home—relying on ultimate success in their efforts to get higher wages, and enraged beyond measure at discovering that Irishmen were to be brought in to rob their little ones of bread. Margaret knew it all; she read it in Boucher’s face, forlornly desperate and livid with rage. If Mr. Thornton would but say something to them—let them hear his voice only—it seemed as if it would be better than this wild beating and raging against the stony silence that vouchsafed them no word, even of anger or reproach. But perhaps he was speaking now; there was a momentary hush of their noise, inarticulate as that of a troop of animals. She tore her bonnet off, and bent forward to hear. She could only see; for if Mr. Thornton had indeed made the attempt to speak, the momentary instinct to listen to him was past and gone, and the people were raging worse than ever. He stood with his arms folded; still as a statue; his face pale with repressed excitement. They were trying to intimidate him—to make him flinch; each was urging the other on to some immediate act of personal violence. Margaret felt intuitively, that in an instant all would be uproar; the first touch would cause an explosion, in which, among such hundreds of infuriated men and reckless boys, even Mr. Thornton’s life would be unsafe,—that in another instant the stormy passions would have passed their bounds, and swept away all barriers of reason, or apprehension of consequence. Even while she looked, she saw lads in the background stooping to take off their heavy wooden clogs—the readiest missile they could find; she saw it was the spark to the gunpowder, and, with a cry, which no one heard, she rushed out of the room, down stairs,—she had lifted the great iron bar of the door with an imperious force—had thrown the door open wide—and was there, in face of that angry sea of men, her eyes smiting them with flaming arrows of reproach. The clogs were arrested in the hands that held them—the countenances, so fell not a moment before, now looked irresolute, and as if asking what this meant. For she stood between them and their enemy. She could not speak, but held out her arms towards them till she could recover breath.

“Oh, do not use violence! He is one man, and you are many;” but her words died away, for there was no tone in her voice; it was but a hoarse whisper. Mr. Thornton stood a little on one side; he had moved away from behind her, as if jealous of anything that should come between him and danger.

“Go!” said she, once more (and now her voice was like a cry). “The soldiers are sent for—are coming. Go peaceably. Go away. You shall have relief from your complaints, whatever they are.”

“Shall them Irish blackguards be packed back again?” asked one from out the crowd, with fierce threatening in his voice.

“Never, for your bidding!” exclaimed Mr. Thornton. And instantly the storm broke. The hootings rose and filled the air,—but Margaret did not hear them. Her eye was on the group of lads who had armed themselves with their clogs some time before. She saw their gesture—she knew its meaning—she read their aim. Another moment, and Mr. Thornton might be smitten down,—he whom she{141} had urged and goaded to come to this perilous place. She only thought how she could save him. She threw her arms around him; she made her body into a shield from the fierce people beyond. Still, with his arms folded, he shook her off.

“Go away,” said he, in his deep voice. “This is no place for you.”

“It is,” said she. “You did not see what I saw.” If she thought her sex would be a protection,—if, with shrinking eyes she had turned away from the terrible anger of these men, in any hope that ere she looked again they would have paused and reflected, and slunk away, and vanished,—she was wrong. Their reckless passion had carried them too far to stop—at least had carried some of them too far; for it is always the savage lads, with their love of cruel excitement, who head the riot—reckless to what bloodshed it may lead. A clog whizzed through the air. Margaret’s fascinated eyes watched its progress; it missed its aim, and she turned sick with affright, but changed not her position, only hid her face on Mr. Thornton’s arm. Then she turned and spoke again:

“For God’s sake! do not damage your cause by this violence. You do not know what you are doing.” She strove to make her words distinct.

A sharp pebble flew by her, grazing forehead and cheek, and drawing a blinding sheet of light before her eyes. She lay like one dead on Mr. Thornton’s shoulder. Then he unfolded his arms, and held her encircled in one for an instant:

“You do well!” said he. “You come to oust the innocent stranger. You fall—you hundreds—on one man; and when a woman comes before you, to ask you for your own sakes to be reasonable creatures, your cowardly wrath falls upon her! You do well!” They were silent while he spoke. They were watching, open-eyed and open-mouthed, the thread of dark-red blood which wakened them up from their trance of passion. Those nearest the gate stole out ashamed; there was a movement through all the crowd—a retreating movement. Only one voice called out:

“Th’ stone was meant for thee; but thou wert sheltered behind a woman!”

Mr. Thornton quivered with rage. The blood-flowing had made Margaret conscious—dimly, vaguely conscious. He placed her gently on the door-step, her head leaning against the frame.

“Can you rest there?” he asked. But without waiting for her answer, he went slowly down the steps right into the middle of the crowd. “Now kill me, if it is your brutal will. There is no woman to shield me here. You may beat me to death—you will never move me from what I have determined upon—not you!” He stood amongst them with his arms folded, in precisely the same attitude as he had been in on the steps.

But the retrograde movement towards the gate had begun—as unreasoningly, perhaps as blindly, as the simultaneous anger. Or, perhaps, the idea of the approach of the soldiers, and the sight of that pale, upturned face, with closed eyes, still and sad as marble,{142} though the tears welled out of the long entanglement of eyelashes, and dropped down; and, heavier, slower plash than even tears, came the drip of blood from her wound. Even the most desperate—Boucher himself—drew back, faltered away, scowled, and finally went off, muttering curses on the master, who stood in his unchanging attitude, looking after their retreat with defiant eyes. The moment that retreat had changed into a flight (as it was sure from its very character to do), he darted up the steps to Margaret.

***Bertha Darley* 1858**

The extract below describes such a riot.

CONSTANCE and I gazed upon the motley crowd, with hand clasped in hand , blanched cheeks, and compressed lips ; not a word passed between us , and breath itself seemed almost suspended . On, on , they come — now with impatient tramp and burning lust of devastation . No longer can their leaders impose silence or order upon thein ; amid yells and savage execrations , the dreadful tide of human beings sweep forward ; in vain their leaders , among whom is John Ellis , laboured to still the savage passions they themselves had fomented ; with pitchforks , pikes , and sticks they come - a mouldy loaf carried high before them . Bursting through the low paling which divided the meadow from the lawn , and tearing up shrubs , plants , and trees , they reach within a few yards of the house. Quick as thought Constance dashed through the open window on to the stone portico , clasping a pistol in each hand . and Englishmen ! ” she exclaimed in a firm voice , loud and clear , “ stop your onward course if it be one of vengeance and destruction ; but if it be bread or money you ask to meet the pressing wants of your families , we will give you what we have in the house . ” Here a confused murmur arose ; the crowd , startled at first by Constance's sudden appearance upon the portico , had waited to listen , but now swayed impatiently to and fro . “

“ Oh , you fools and blockheads ! ” called out a fiendish - looking woman , carrying a miserable infant in her arms, whom I recognized as Catty Speight ; “ would yer be stopt by the likes of ' er , who's an aristocrat, and hates t ' poor ? Heed her not , lads , but down wi ' every thing while t’ould rascal's away, Why do you let her stop you , when we be shivering with empty bellies? Are you cowards, and will you see your bairns at home starve , whilst the likes on that wench fatten on us ļ ”

After this harangue , in vain Constance essayed to speak — her voice was drowned in uproar.

“ Down wi ' her - down wi ' her , and the aristocrats ! It's such as you as robs the poor . We'll none of yer palaver . Our bellies are empty , and we want bread , and bread we'll have , whilst you rot and starve like we've done . The Charter ! The Charter ! that's what we'll have ; and nothing but the Charter .

” Hurrah , for the Charter ! Three cheers for the Charter ! as will do all for us ! No , Aristocrats ! No more Tories , no Bishops , no grinding Drummonds ! Groans for Drummond ! Tyrant , tyrant , he'll be brought to his crusts yet ! Hypocrite ! hard - hearted wretch he'd rather see folk starve than live ! Who sent my lad , Willie , to prison for taking a bit of bread when his belly was empty ? Down with such tyrants down with them, and three cheers for the Charter hip - hip - hurrah !

Quick lads , quick ! Now's the time - come on ! "

“ Advance a foot , and the first man who attempts the door I will shoot , ” said Constance , in clear ringing tones , pointing her pistols , whilst I , seized with an impulse I could not control, rushed to her side and pointed another .

“Ah - ah - ha ! ” they laughed in mockery .

“ Heed ' em not ! down wi ' house and everything ! Poor wenches , ah - ah - ha !

” Here a rush was made to the side of the house , the heaving mob tearing down all that came in their way . They seized pigs , hens , and geese , throwing them over their shoulders as trophies , whilst their frightened squeals and cackles added to the dreadful din .

“ It is useless ! ” said Constance as she turned into the little room , white with suppressed emotion . we are at the mercy of a mob ; we can do nothing more . How foolish of me to imagine I could reason with a mob, or have any chance of being listened to ! "

“ Let us go to Mrs. Drummond's room , Bertie ; we are helpless , and in their power until Janet sends assistance .

" Oh , Father in Heaven protect us! ” said I, sinking down upon my knees in an agony of fear by Constance's side. “Hear them! How enraged they are! There there! They are in the house’.

“Let us go , dear Bertha , ” said Constance calmly , as she raised me tenderly from my knees . “ Let us go to Lilybelle , and seek strength and support from One who has promised to be a Father to the fatherless , and who has assured us that not a sparrow falls to the ground unheeded by Him . Fear not, therefore ; we are of more value than many sparrows .

' As we entered Mrs. Drummond's room we heard the mob dealing fearful blows at the doors and windows , which were protected by strong , inside shutters .

A wild shriek of delight , and a fierce cheer , as shutters , bolts , and locks at length succumbed , and the mob whelmed into the house , like pent - up waters bursting through their barriers .

The demon of destruction was upon them ! They were the very scum of the Chartists , at whose mercy we were ; for the better class , yielding to the persuasions of their leaders , had consented to attack the mill only , and were at that moment fiercely occupied in its demolition ; whilst the scum , the very out scouring of their class -men of evil deeds , who had joined their ranks in order to plunder the rich , under the convenient shelter of a popular movement , and in whose mouths the watch - words " liberty , fraternity and equality , " embodied the very essence of anarchy , confusion , and robbery , seized the opportunity to in vade the house .

In the hall, dining and drawing rooms, the work of demolition and plunder commenced. Furniture, glass, and pictures were hurled through the windows with reckless fury. The larder and wine cellar were sought, and their contents greedily devoured by famished women and besotted men. Then the house became a pandemonium, and we, trembling women, locked in each other’s arms expected every moment to fall victims to their wild and drunken hatred. But no! Their object was not to murder women, but to destroy, and possess themselves of all they could carry away. Uttering fearful imprecations, yells, and screams they staggered up the staircase, trampling the weaker under foot in their haste to reach the scene of further plunder. Some brandished bottles of wine , others crammed food into their mouths, and women, mad with excitement and brandy, ran into the bedrooms, burst open the wardrobes, and scrambled for their contents amid fierce altercations, screams and laughter.

It was an awful sight and sound, to see and hear those wretched women, brutalized and desperate, dancing frantically through the house with their spoil-bonnets, dresses, jewellery, and trampling upon everything that came in their way.

No hint however, of personal violence reached us . They jeered at us, and taunted us with Constance’s prowess, laughing at it in mockery. Once only were we molested. A huge ruffian staggered and hiccoughed forward, seizing Constance by the arm, expressing, in disjointed sentences and fearful oaths, his hatred for aristocrats and parsons, and his love for a pretty wench like herself ; and proposed , with a leer, that they should pledge their mutual healths in the tankard of wine he offered to her, polluted by his bloated lips.

Suddenly screams and laughter and rioting cease. The cry of ‘the military’ and’ Drummond’ resounds through the house. Panic seizes the rioters! The miserable wretches, gorged with excess, and overpowered with fear, trample and scramble over each other in their hurry to reach those doors and windows which permitted a chance of egress. What a change! And how quickly wrought! There was something awful in the sudden calm which reigned within the house, so lately filled with a rampant, reckless multitude.

After the danger had passed:

‘Oh! I dare not look’, said Lillybelle, hiding her face on my shoulder. And no wonder, for the rioting still is dreadful at the factory. What fearful confusion! It is impossible to depict the scene presented to our gaze. A lawn strewn with broken furniture, glass , pictures, books , and china-trees uprooted-stacks of hay on fire, and the factory standing grim and square, with every pane of glass broken, surrounded by police and special constables. A mob flying helter -skelter over the meadows before the glittering lances of a small body of cavalry-men and women turning to look at their pursuers, falling to the ground from fear, and trampled underfoot. To the left, up the straight long lane, came a gentleman on horseback ; and preceding them rode another detachment of military, with Mr Drummond riding in advance. One glance at the scene of destruction, as he came in sight of the house and factory, stamped his face with hatred and revenge- grinding his teeth, and clenching his hand at the flying multitude, he spurred his horse until blood trickled down its foaming sides. In a moment he disappeared from our sight, concealed from our view by a wall and the thick foliage of some trees-the next, we saw a flash of firearms, followed by a loud report, and Carlos galloping riderless, scared and terrified, tail erect, over the adjoining fields.