Jemima Bamford

From Samuel Bamford, *Passages in the Life of a Radical* (1839-42), vol. I, ch. 39.

I was determined to go to the meeting, and should have followed, even if my husband had refused his consent to my going with the procession. From what I, in common with others, had heard the week previous, “that if the country people went with their caps of liberty, and their banners, and music, the soldiers would be brought to them," I was uneasy, and felt persuaded, in my own mind, that something would be the matter, and I had best go with my husband, and be near him; and if I only saw him I should be more content than in staying at home. I accordingly, he having consented after much persuasion, gave my little girl something to please her, and promising more on my return, I left her with a careful neighbour woman, and joined some other married females at the head of the procession.

Every time I went aside to look at my husband, and that was often, an ominous impression smote my heart. He looked very serious, I thought, and I felt a foreboding of something evil to befal us that day.

I was dressed plainly as a countrywoman, in my second best attire. My companions were also neatly dressed as the wives of working men; I had seen Mr. Hunt before that time; they had not, and some of them were quite eager to obtain good places, that they might see and hear one of whom so much had been reported.

In going down Mosley-street, I lost sight of my husband. Mrs. Yates, who had hold of my arm, would keep hurrying forward to get a good place, and when the crowd opened for the Middlteton procession, Mrs. Yates and myself and some others of the women, went close to the hustings, quite glad that we had obtained such a situation for seeing and hearing all. My husband got on the stage, but when afterwards I saw him leap down, and lost sight of him, I began to be unhappy.

The crowd seemed to have increased very much, for we became insufferably pressed. We were surrounded by men who were strangers; we were almost suffocated, and to me the heat was quite sickening; but Mrs. Yates, being taller than myself supported it better.

I felt I could not bear this long, and I became alarmed. I reflected that if there was any more pressure I must faint, and then what would become of me? and I begged of the men to open a way and let me go out, but they would not move. Every moment I became worse, and I told some other men then, who stood in a row, that I was sick, and begged they would let me pass them, and they immediately made a way, and I went down a long passage betwixt two ranks of these men, many of them saying, “make way, she's sick, she's sick, let her go out," and I passed quite out of the crowd, and turning to my right, I got on some high ground, on which stood a row of houses – This was Windmill-street.

I thought if I could get to stand at the door of one of those houses, I should have a good view of the meeting, and should perhaps see my husband again; and I kept going further down the row, until I saw a door open, and I stepped within it, the people of the house making no objections.

By this time Mr. Hunt was on the hustings, addressing the people. In a minute or two some soldiers came riding up. The good folks of the house, and some who seemed to be visitors, said, “the soldiers were only come to keep order; they would not meddle with the people;” but I was alarmed. The people shouted, and then the soldiers shouted, waving their swords. Then they rode amongst the people, and there was a great outcry, and a moment alter, a man passed without hat, and wiping the blood off his head with his hand, and it ran down his arm in a great stream.

The meeting was all in a tumult; there were dreadfull cries; the soldiers kept riding amongst the people, and striking with their swords. I became faint, and turning from the door, I went unobserved down steps into a cellared passage; and hoping to escape from the horrid noise, and to be concealed, I crept into a vault, and sat down, faint and terrified, on some fire-wood.

The cries of the multitude outside, still continued, and the people of the house, up stairs, kept bewailing most pitifully. They could see all the dreadful work through the window, and their exclamations were so distressing, that I put my fingers in my ears to prevent my hearing more; and on removing them, I understood that a young man had just been brought past, wounded. The front door of the passage before mentioned, soon after opened, and a number of men entered, carrying the body of a decent, middle-aged woman, who had been killed. I thought they were going to put her beside me, and was about to scream, but they took her forward, and deposited her in some premises at the back of the house.

I had sat in my hiding place some time, and the tumult seemed abated, when a young girl, one of the family, came into the vault, and suddenly crouching, she bumped against my knee, and starting up, and seeing another dead woman, as she probably thought, she ran up stairs quite terrified, and told her mother. The good woman, Mrs. Jones, came down with the girl and several others and having ascertained that I was living, but sadly distressed, she spoke very kindly, and assisted me to a chair in her front room. She offered me refreshment, and would have made tea, but I declined it. I was too unhappy to take anything except a little water. I could not restrain my feelings, but kept moaning and exclaiming, “My lad;” – “My poor lad!” They asked if I was married? and I said I was, and had lost my husband in the crowd, and was afraid he was killed. Those good people did all they could to comfort me. They asked where I came from, and my husband's name? and I told them I came from Middleton, but evaded mentioning his name, lest, on account of his being a leader, I should be put in prison; for though they had behaved most kindly, I doubted whether they would continue to do so, if they knew whose wife I was.

I now became wishful to go, and Mrs. Jones called a special constable, and requested he would see me into Market-street, from whence I could find my way. The man very civilly took my arm, and led me over the now almost deserted field. I durst not look aside, lest I should encounter some frightful object, and particularly that which I most dreaded to see, the corpse of my husband, being almost assured he was dead or wounded. I only looked up once, and then saw a great number of horses at rest, and their riders dismounted. I durst scarcely open my eyes; and hurrying with the constable over that dreaded place, we were soon in Market-street, where thanking my conductor for his civility, he returned, and I hastened towards Shudehill, where I met one our people, who had heard that my husband was killed. Afterwards I was informed that he was in the Infirmary: another said he was in prison; and then I heard that he was gone home; and soon after I had the pleasure of again rejoining him at Harperhey, for which mercy, I sincerely returned thanks to God.