

We Rest On Thee, Our Shield and Our Defender

One of the favourite hymns of our fellowship sung in our Sunday meetings is this wonderful hymn:

We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender;
We go not forth alone against the foe;
Strong in Thy strength, safe in Thy keeping tender.
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.

Yea, in Thy Name, O Captain of salvation!
In Thy dear Name, all other names above;
Jesus our Righteousness, our sure Foundation,
Our Prince of glory and our King of love.

We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,
And needing more each day Thy grace to know:
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing;
We rest on Thee, and in Thy Name we go.

We rest on Thee, our Shield and our Defender:
Thine is the battle, Thine shall be the praise
When passing through the gates of pearly splendour;
Victors, we rest with Thee, through endless days.

Edith Gilling Cherry (1872-1897)

Like many hymns, this hymn has a story – in fact, it has two stories...

It was written out of the adversity of its young author, Edith Gilling Cherry, who was born in Plymouth in 1872. She contracted polio as a child “*which winged the bright little bird of the home*” and remained unable to walk without crutches. Soon afterward her younger sister died, then at age 12 she herself suffered a stroke. Tragically, when just 25 she endured a second stroke from which she didn’t recover.

During her brief life Edith wrote *We Rest On Thee* as well as many other beautiful poems all praising the everlasting care and faithfulness of her Saviour. Just before she died, she said to her mother, “*It all looks so small, all I have tried to do - so small to Him.*”

Edith believed she had done so little for her Lord, but for us who now sing these precious words she penned, her own selfless sacrifice of praise in the midst of the suffering of her too-short life is no small thing. Her hymn has since blessed and strengthened so many Christians facing illness, griefs, trials, temptations, discouragements, battles, and uncertainty - and this is the hymn’s second story...

We all know of Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint, and Roger Youderian, who took the gospel to the Quichua, Jivaro, and Auca Indians in Ecuador in the 1950s - I remember doing a project in Sunday School about their work amongst these tribes when I was about 10 or 11.

The missionaries were murdered by the Aucas to whom they sought to bring God’s love and life. Five days before their deaths they had sung this hymn as they prepared to fly to the Curaray river in Auca territory. “*At the close of prayers the five men sang one of their favourite hymns, ‘We Rest On Thee’ ... On the last verse their voices rang out with deep conviction*”:

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Their widows continued to live amongst the Ecuadorian Indians where, by God’s grace, they and subsequent missionaries brought Christ’s salvation to the Aucas who had killed their husbands. Elisabeth Elliot wrote their story in her book, *Through Gates of Splendour* – I’m sure you know it.

If you are interested in reading Elisabeth Elliot’s book and/or Edith Cherry’s poetry book, *The Master’s Touch and Other Poems*, you should be able to order second hand copies of each through usedbooksearch.co.uk.

*May God bless you.
Elizabeth McDonald
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(A slightly different version of this item first appeared in the March 2019 edition of the Frindsbury Baptist Church Newsletter)