

War & Remembrance

By: Keith Keyser

*“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—**of whom the world was not worthy**. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”* Hebrews 11:32-40 [Emphasis mine]

An elderly woman, who lived a solitary life in southeastern England died quietly in her home on September 2, 2010. Except for a few singular items that she left behind, her passing would have been utterly unremarkable to anyone not related to her or counted among her small circle of friends and neighbors. Among her meager possessions were high honors from the British & French governments. As one newspaper notes: “Indeed, after dying alone...89-year-old Eileen Nearne was to be laid to rest with few – if any – mourners expected at her funeral. Yet neighbours and council officials were stunned when they found out that Eileen Nearne had been a British spy who had plotted behind enemy lines during much of the Second World War.”ⁱ

Although she had been scheduled for the equivalent of a pauper’s burial, veterans associations intervened when the extent of her bravery and service during the Second World War were revealed to the astonished public. One obituary comments on the funeral thus: “Her coffin arrived draped in the British and French flags, as befits a hero who was awarded both the British MBE and the French Croix de Guerre. Buglers from Britain and France played the Last Post as the coffin left the church.”ⁱⁱ This heroine lived the bulk of her life unrecognized for patriotism, her devotion to victory, and willingness to suffer so that others might live in free societies. Likewise, many of God’s choice saints have labored, lived, and died in anonymity. The courageous exploits and faith of others are unknown or forgotten even among professional historians. Nevertheless, Hebrews 11 makes it clear that the Lord remembers each, and has reserved them for the better things that the saints collectively enjoy in Christ (Heb. 11:40.)

Behind Enemy Lines

Miss Nearne’s heroic mission began with her insertion into Nazi occupied France on March 2, 1944. She transmitted intelligence on German troop movements to British authorities until her arrest on July 21 of the same year. Despite repeated torture sessions and brutal incarceration in the notorious Ravensbrook concentration camp, Nearne stuck to her cover story as an ignorant French peasant. She was moved to different camps, and eventually escaped to join advancing American forces. As one newspaper recently recounted: “Didi Nearne was one of only a handful

of British agents to have survived Ravensbrück but her experiences marked her profoundly, and after the war she often had to live in the care of her sister. She painted violent pictures as a way of exorcising her time as a German prisoner. She trained as a nurse, and at one stage tried to find a job as a radio operator.”ⁱⁱⁱ Her ordeal left her with permanent psychological scars, and she initially was awarded a disability pension in light of her clandestine war service. This sum was later inexplicably reduced by the authorities; sadly, decades later she died virtually penniless.^{iv}

Many people lauded Nearne’s courage and endurance. *The New York Times* relates some of the posthumous praise that was lavished on her memory: “John Pentreath, county manager for the Royal British Legion veterans' charity, said...‘It's a staggering story for a young girl,’ he said. ‘We hold her in awe and huge respect. All Brits do. We are very disappointed we didn't know about her when she was alive; we would have dearly loved to have made contact with her.’”^v One of her neighbors added: “You would never have thought it, as she never spoke of it. I just want everyone to know what she had done in her past.”^{vi}

Unrequited Heroism

Miss Nearne’s unsung accomplishments are reminiscent of the Preacher’s lament in Ecclesiastes 9:15: “Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. **Yet no one remembered that same poor man**” [Emphasis mine.] Shakespeare expressed a similar sentiment in Marc Antony’s funeral oration from *Julius Caesar*: “The good is oft interred with their bones.”^{vii} So it often goes in this world, as the people’s short attention spans flit from event to event – never pondering the human cost of the few to procure present blessings that are enjoyed by the many.

Out of sight, out of mind

Of course, the most egregious example of human forgetfulness regarding courage certainly is the neglect of the Savior the Lord Jesus by the masses for which He died. A classic hymn eloquently expresses this disregard:

*Room for pleasure, room for business,
But for Christ the Crucified,
Not a place that He can enter,
In the heart for which He died?*^{viii}

Well-aware of this human tendency, the Lord instituted a memorial for His followers to commemorate His death and person on a weekly basis: it is known in Scripture as “the breaking of bread” or “the Lord’s Supper” (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 11:20.) On the night before His death on the cross, He commanded the disciples, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk. 22:19.) Accordingly, His church calls Him and His death to mind every time they celebrate the bread and cup, which are the symbols of His body and blood that were offered without spot to God.

Another beautiful hymn describes this blessed privilege:

*The depth of all Thy suffering
No heart could e'er conceive,
The cup of wrath o'erflowing
For us Thou didst receive;
And, oh, of God forsaken
On the accursed tree;
With grateful hearts, Lord Jesus,
We now remember Thee.*

*We think of all the darkness
Which round Thy spirit pressed,
Of all those waves and billows,
Which rolled across Thy breast.
Oh, there Thy grace unbounded
And perfect love we see;
With joy and sorrow mingling,
We would remember Thee.*

*We know Thee now as risen,
The Firstborn from the dead;
We see Thee now ascended,
The Church's glorious Head.
In Thee by grace accepted,
The heart and mind set free
To think of all Thy sorrow,
And thus remember Thee.^{ix}*

The Unlisted Legion

Similar to their Lord, the self-sacrificing deeds of Christians are often ignored or unknown in this world. As Hebrews 11 displays, the saints are frequently unappreciated by their fellow men. Stephen also noted this tendency, referring to Joseph, Moses, and other heroes of the faith who were largely misunderstood by their contemporaries (Acts 7.) Nevertheless, in a coming day the Lord will recognize every act done for His glory. As Christ said: “He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold *water* in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward” (Matt. 10:41-42.) He also predicted this future reward for those who are faithful to Him elsewhere:

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in

prison and you came to Me.’ “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me’ (Matt. 25:34-40.)

As He is so are we in this world

The Holy Spirit registers His verdict on these ignored and despised disciples: “...of whom the world was not worthy...” (Heb. 11:38.) Their bravery and fortitude may be unrecognized in this age, but in the age to come they will be glorified with the formerly rejected Christ, Who will be hailed by the entire universe (Phil. 2:5-11.) Like the courageous Miss Nearne, their works will be lauded posthumously, but to a far greater degree. No national honors or media coverage will be necessary. They will share in greater honors with the glorified King of kings and Lord of lords (2 Tim. 2:11-13.)

*We're pilgrims in the wilderness;
Our dwelling is a camp;
Created things though pleasant,
Now bear to us death's stamp.
But onward we are speeding,
Though often let and tried;
The Holy Ghost is leading
Home to the Lamb, His bride.*

*With fellow pilgrims meeting,
As through the waste we roam,
'Tis sweet to sing together,
We are not far from home!
And when we've learned our lesson,
Our work, in suffering, done,
Our ever-loving Father
Will welcome every one.*

*We look to meet our brethren
From every distant shore;
Not one will seem a stranger,
Though never seen before:
With angel hosts attending,
In myriads, through the sky;
Yet 'midst them all Thou only,
O Lord, wilt fix the eye!*

*Lord, since we sing as pilgrims,
O give us pilgrim's ways!*

*Low thoughts of self, befitting
Proclaimers of Thy praise;
O make us each more holy,
In spirit, pure and meek:
More like to heavenly citizens,
As more of heaven we speak.^x*

ⁱ Kunal Dutta, "Eileen Nearne: Lonely Death of a spy who evaded Gestapo," *The Independent*, published 14 Sept. 2010, electronic edition: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/eileen-nearne-lonely-death-of-a-spy-who-evaded-gestapo-2078548.html> Accessed on 9/24/10.

ⁱⁱ Steven Morris, "Spy Eileen Nearne given heroine's burial in Torquay," *The Guardian*, published 21 Sept. 2010, electronic edition: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/21/spy-eileen-nearne-heroine-burial> Accessed on 9/24/10.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Eileen Nearne," *The Daily Telegraph*, Publ. 17 Sept. 2010 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/military-obituaries/special-forces-obituaries/8009812/Eileen-Nearne.html> Accessed on 9/24/10.

^{iv} *The Daily Mail* reports the following: "The torture left her with a variety of medical problems and in 1946 she was declared 100 per cent disabled as a result of 'exhaustion neurosis' by a secret pensions tribunal. She was granted the maximum allowable pension of £175-a-year - equivalent to £4,500 today - but twelve months later this was cut to £140 without explanation. By 1948 Miss Nearne was receiving just £87 and 10 shillings and in 1950 this was cut off entirely when she went to stay in France for a long term visit. The same year a psychiatric report found she was suffering headaches, depression, sleeplessness, palpitations and a sense of unreality. The psychiatrist also said that she showed some 'uncharacteristically schizoid representations' brought about by her traumatic experiences during the war. On her return to the UK in 1954 she contacted the Government giving the name of her doctor and asked for the payments to resume - but the request was refused."

The Daily Mail, "Forgotten WWII spy tortured by the Nazis died penniless after her British pension was halted without explanation," published 21 Sept. 2010; electronic edition: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1313618/WWII-spy-Eileen-Nearne-died-penniless-British-pension-halted.html#ixzz10U1jKm4n> Accessed on 9/24/10.

^v John F. Burns, "Eileen Nearne, Wartime Spy, Dies At 89," *The New York Times*, published Sept. 21, 2010; electronic edition: http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/22/world/europe/22nearne.html?_r=1&partner=rss&emc=rss Accessed on 9/24/10.

^{vi} Kunal Dutta, "Eileen Nearne: Lonely Death of a spy who evaded Gestapo," *The Independent*, published 14 Sept. 2010, electronic edition: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/eileen-nearne-lonely-death-of-a-spy-who-evaded-gestapo-2078548.html> Accessed on 9/24/10.

^{vii} William Shakespeare, "Julius Caesar," Act 3, Scene 2, Line 79; *The Riverside Literature Series*, ed. Richard Grant White. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1894, p. 65; electronic ed.:

<http://books.google.com/books?id=Ap4ZAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=julius+caesar+shakespeare&hl=en&ei=erafTNalM4G78gb7->

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^{viii} Anonymous, adapted by D.W. Whittle, "Have you any room for Jesus?"

<http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/h/y/hyouanyr.htm> Accessed on Sept. 28.

^{ix} George W. Fraser, "We would remember thee," <http://www.hymnal.net/hymn.php/h/213> Accessed on Sept. 28.

^x Mary Bowley Peters, "We're pilgrims in the wilderness." *Hymns For The Little Flock*, #231.

http://www.stempublishing.com/hymns/data/Dv1881_5.htm#231