

APPENDIX A

The Milton Sonnet

Andpice

Here is no ancient pile all stained and scarred
By centuries of rain and blasting storm,
Yet in the few short years since thou was born,
No backward look thy spreading fame has marred.
Forth went thy sons when jealous races warred,
Died at Latema, and 'mid Flanders corn,
While Achi Baba grim and battle worn
O'er Milton graves eternally keeps guard.
Proud were the man whose noble name you bear
Could he behold the inmates of your walls.
O'er half a continent thy summons calls
Fathers to place their sons in Milton's care;
Throughout this land thy cry rings loud and long,
"Oh quit yourselves like men. Be strong, be strong!"
N.H.D. Spicer.

THE Milton Sonnet first appeared in the Miltonian of November 1922 and has been reprinted in every issue since 1924. The author was never mentioned and it was only in the Golden Jubilee booklet of 1960 that it was given an attribution; subsequently it has again retreated into anonymity.

It was in fact written by Newton Henry Dampier Spicer who was born in Buenos Aires in 1889. He was educated in Britain and came to Southern Rhodesia in 1907 where he joined the Native Affairs Department serving in both Mashonaland and Matabeleland. He served as Secretary to the Prime Minister (Howard Moffat) in 1930 and retired from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1947; he died in Salisbury on 7 April 1952.

In his spare time Spicer was a poet and five volumes of his work were published between 1930 and 1947. He also wrote the words for several Rhodesian school songs — and Milton's sonnet; this was not included in any of Spicer's own volumes but it did appear in an anthology called 'Rhodesian Verse 1888–1938', published in England in 1938.

Spicer's son, John, attended Milton in the early twenties when his father was Native Commissioner in Bulawayo. Spicer coached the school swimming and water polo teams and, according to his son, had numerous friends on the staff. It does not seem to be known whether the sonnet was a spontaneous tribute to the school or a commissioned work although the fact that it was printed without either attribution or explanation on its first appearance suggests that the former is more likely.

Some of its references are now somewhat arcane, perhaps always were: Latema refers to the Battle of Latema Hill, fought on 11–12 March 1916 during the Kilimanjaro campaign — the hill is now situated on the border between Kenya and Tanzania and was the scene of a very fierce engagement in which British casualties numbered some 270 killed and wounded on the first day of the battle. Of the three battalions involved, one was the 2nd Rhodesia Regiment which suffered 16 killed and 45 wounded; among the dead were two Old Miltonians, Privates Thomas Ely and Reginald Johnston. (Under General Smuts, the attack on the hill and its neighbour was resumed on the following day and the Germans finally compelled to abandon their positions.) 'Flanders corn' is self explanatory and at least seven OMs died on the Western Front. Achi Baba was a hill around which raged one of the more ferocious parts of the Gallipoli campaign in April–May 1915; only one Rhodesian is known to have died there, Lieutenant L. Webber, and he was not an Old Miltonian. In the last line Spicer couples Milton's motto with the further injunction from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians — 'Quit you like men, be strong' (Ch.16, v.13).

Writing in 1973 of Milton's continued use of the sonnet, the then Deputy Headmaster, Alec Dry, remarked:

"The language and style of the poem are stilted and unmodern, but the spirit and truth it contains can never fade and for that reason I am glad that it is printed year after year. It was written for Milton and it belongs to us for ever. The men who fought in the Great War were ordinary men, but doubtless they gained strength and courage from their attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to

live up to the old and undying virtues — implied in our motto — of selfless manliness.”