

OBITUARIES

Patience Strong

PATIENCE STRONG, the popular versifier, who has died aged 83, administered a rhyming counsel of strength and patience to readers of such publications as *Woman's Own* and the *Daily Mirror* for nearly four decades.

She created a unique relationship with her readers, treating every aspect of the human condition in simple, homely words that touched their hearts and encouraged them to believe that they knew the author personally. Her daily poem in the *Daily Mirror* was read by thousands, and the verses cut out and cherished.

There were poems for all eventualities, offering help through times of hardship, sorrow and woe, and conveying gratitude for life's more accessible joys. Nature and Christian faith were persistent themes in her work:

*Look at roses when oppressed
by weariness or grief.*

*Look at roses and restore
spent hope and lost belief-
of this life*

In the morn'g, heaven above.

*Look at roses if you ever
doubt that God is Love.*

During the Second World War Patience Strong worked tirelessly from her small study at her cottage in Kent - which virtually became an adjunct to the Post Office - writing to the service personnel and their families who turned to her for spiritual succour. Many a British serviceman perished with a cutting of a Patience Strong poem in the pocket of his battledress.

Miss Strong admitted that there might not be a great deal of literary merit in her verses. "I just naturally think in rhymes," she said. "I do it without thinking. Now and



again perhaps I do write a pot-boiler if I'm rushing to catch the 5:30 pm post."

The secret of her success, she believed, was sincerity. Her favourite aphorism was, "Nothing's true unless you've lived it."

She was born Winifred Emma Cushing in London on June 4 1907 and started writing poetry at the age of four, when her verses, based on photographs which her uncles sent back to her from Egypt during the First World War, were invariably called Dawn on the Desert:

It was not until she was in her mid-twenties that Miss Cushing sent some of her verses to the *Daily Mirror*. "Everybody told me that I was trying to get into the Rolls-Royce class," she recalled, "trying to follow Wilhelmina Stitch, the most famous verse writer of her time. But the *Mirror* editor said, could I do another 18 by the next day, and he'd give them a trial. They ran ever afterwards."

The editor also asked her to choose a suitable name for herself, and that same evening a friend happened to bring her a book - a chronicle of New England life by Mrs A D T Whitney. "The minute I saw the title," she said, "I knew that was it. It was called Patience Strong."

Patience Strong's poems were first published in the *Daily Mirror* in August 1935 under the heading *The Quiet Corner*, and subsequently in its sister paper, the *Sunday Pictorial* (later to become the *Sunday Mirror*). They also appeared weekly for more than 35 years in *Woman's Own*, and continue to be published in the quarterly journal *This England*.

In the course of her long career, Patience Strong published scores of books of her poems and religious thought, as well as an autobiography, *With, A Poem In My Pocket*. She also made several recordings of her poems, and blossomed briefly as a lyricist. Her best-known songs included the tango *Jealousy* and *The Dream of Olwen*.

In spite of the sentimental and sometimes bland content of her verses, Miss Strong was a lady of pronounced views, and occasionally asked her editors if she might extend her repertoire to write poems about her pet hates.

The request was always rejected - though she was proud to have managed, in the early 1960s, to slip in "a little something about the Channel Tunnel". "I'm against that," she said: "it would fill Kent full of foreigners on motor-cycles."

She was widowed twice and died childless.