



A Woman to Deliver Her People: Joanna Southcott and English Millenarianism in an Era of Revolution (The Dan Danciger Publication Series)

James K. Hopkins

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The Second Coming of Christ has been prophesied many times through the centuries but seldom by a figure so fascinating as Joanna Southcott (1750–1814), the domestic servant who at the age of forty-two declared that God had chosen her to announce His return. *A Woman to Deliver Her People* is the most comprehensive study of this remarkable woman and her movement yet written.

Dramatic social and political changes of the late eighteenth century—among them the revolutions in America and France—had a profound effect on the attitudes of English men and women at all levels of society. With events so far outside the range of ordinary experience, both the educated and the uneducated turned to the prophetic books of the Bible, seeking solace and explanation. A number of prophets and prophetesses appeared, claiming to have a special understanding of the biblical texts and offering startling new revelations which had been disclosed to them by God. The greatest and most influential of these was Joanna Southcott, who attracted tens of thousands of followers from the West Country, London, the Midlands, and the industrial North. Her "spiritual communications" filled some sixty-five books and pamphlets from 1801 until her death.

Most contemporary observers dismissed Southcott as a fanatic, and she was frequently the subject of caricature and ridicule. James Hopkins attempts to remedy this distortion by examining Southcott's life and the millenarian movement she led within the context of the social, political, and economic crises of the period. By tracing the psychological and popular roots of Southcott's piety, and casting her appeal against the backdrop of a revolutionary age, Hopkins not only vividly portrays the life of this fascinating woman but also offers a new perspective on the mentality of ordinary English men and women during the years of their transformation into a working class.

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