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Marianne Farningham

A Plain Woman Worker

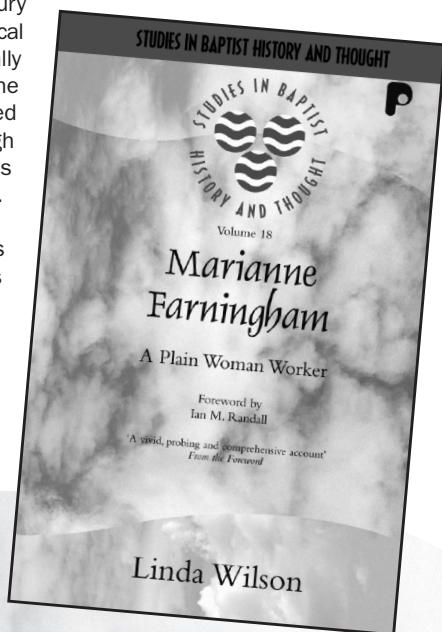
Linda Wilson

Marianne Farningham has been called one of the most influential female members of the nineteenth-century Baptist community, yet her name, a familiar one in evangelical households during the later nineteenth century, is virtually unknown to us today. Marianne, who wrote for the Christian press over a period of fifty years, both reflected and shaped aspects of popular Nonconformity, through her poetry, prose and biographies. She covered topics as varied as the theology of hell and votes for women.

This investigation explores major aspects of Marianne's many-faceted life and thought, and discusses her views of women's roles, her educational work, her public life, for example as a popular lecturer, and her spirituality. Informed by Marianne's life and writings, it challenges a number of stereotypes of Victorian evangelicalism, including assumptions about evangelical women and the relationship between evangelicalism and feminism. It is a significant contribution to the history of Victorian Nonconformity.

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'Secular scholars often complain that, traditionally, historians have ignored the lives of women. Nevertheless, when these scholars have gone to rediscover past women, they have often been bewildered by their strong commitment to the Christian faith and their scholarship has suffered from an inability to understand theology and spirituality. Linda Wilson is the perfect historian to retrieve for us the life of a Victorian woman. Wilson is a careful researcher and a clear, engaging writer. She brings both a deep understanding of Christianity and a probing, analytical mind. Moreover, Marianne Farningham is exactly the kind of person we need to rediscover. Although a remarkable and fascinating woman in many ways, Farningham did not live an extreme life - she was not a genius, an aristocrat, or a heroic missionary-martyr. Calling herself "a plain woman worker", Farningham's life can inform the on-going struggle of many women (and men) today to live out their faith, make a living, seek to fulfil their potential even in the face of prejudice, and value their home lives and relationships.'

Timothy Larsen, McManis Professor of Christian Thought, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, USA

'This stimulating study of an unjustly neglected figure not only brings her life and work vividly before the reader, but also illuminates her time and context in ways that will provoke further study.'

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'Farningham deserves the admirable quality of treatment found in this volume. She had a significant personal influence and is also someone whose life illuminates nineteenth-century Baptist and wider evangelical Nonconformist culture and the role of women within that culture.'

Ian M. Randall, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, Czech Republic and Spurgeon's College, London, UK



Linda Wilson tutors distance learning courses with London School of Theology and the University of Gloucestershire. She is also part of the leadership team of a 'new church', Bristol Christian Fellowship. Linda has previously published *Constrained by Zeal*, a study of nineteenth-century female spirituality.

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