

The rabbi's atheist daughter: Ernestine Rose, international feminist pioneer

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Abstrak

Famous in the 1850s, Ernestine Rose has been undeservedly forgotten. An outstanding orator and activist for womens rights, free thought, anti-slavery, and pacifism, Rose became admired despite being the only foreigner and atheist in all these US movements. This biography restores her amazing life to history. Born the only child of a Polish rabbi in 1810, she rejected both Judaism and her fathers choice of a fiance for her, successfully sued in court for control of her inheritance, and left Poland forever at seventeen. After living in Berlin and Paris, she moved to London, where she became a follower of the industrialist-turned-socialist Robert Owen and met her husband, William Rose. They emigrated to New York in 1836. From then until 1869, Rose fought for freedom from religion, for abolitionism, and for feminism. Among the most radical reformers of her day, she believed all people, black and white, male and female, deserved equal rights. As an atheist, she was stigmatized as an infidel but believed that religion handicapped all believers, especially women. The rise of religion and antisemitism during the Civil War, coupled with splits in the womens movement, led the Roses to return to England in 1869. There she continued to be an advocate for feminism, free thought, and pacifism until her death in 1892. Restoring recognition of her unique life and career returns an important and vital figure to our heritage.