

from Remarks at the 1855 National Women's Rights Convention



ABOUT THE READING This speech was given by Lucy Stone, a college-educated abolitionist and women's rights advocate who defied convention by becoming a public speaker.



As you read pay attention to the arguments and devices Stone uses to persuade her listeners.

The question of Woman's Rights is a practical one. The notion has prevailed that it was only an **ephemeral** idea; that it was but women claiming the right to smoke cigars in the streets, and to frequent bar-rooms. Others have supposed it a question of relative intellect; others still, of **sphere**. Too much has already been said and written about woman's sphere. Trace all the doctrines to their source and they will be found to have no basis except the **usages** and prejudices of the age. . . Wendell Phillips says, "The best and greatest thing one is capable of doing, that is his sphere." I have confidence in the Father to believe that when He gives us the capacity to do anything He does not make a blunder. Leave women, then, to find their sphere. And do not tell us before we are born even, that our province is to cook dinners, darn stockings, and sew on buttons. We are told woman has all the rights she wants; and even women, I am ashamed to say, tell us so. They mistake the politeness of men for rights—seats while men stand in this hall tonight, and their

VOCABULARY

ephemeral short-lived or without substance

sphere position in society; station in life

usages customs

adulations praises

hew cut

caste social status

Stone answers people who think that the issue of women's rights is just a passing fancy.

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adulations; but these are mere courtesies. We want rights. The flour-merchant, the house-builder, and the postman charge us no less on account of our sex; but when we endeavor to earn money to pay all these, then, indeed, we find the difference. Man, if he have energy, may **hew** out for himself a path where no mortal has ever trod, held back by nothing but what is in himself; the world is all before him, where to choose; and we are glad for you, brothers, men, that it is so. But the same society that drives forth the young man, keeps woman at home—a dependent—working little cats on worsted, and little dogs on punctured paper; but if she goes heartily and bravely to give herself to some worthy purpose, she is out of her sphere and she loses **caste**.

Stone claims that women have the right to do whatever work they are suited for.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What is Stone asking for from the society in which she lives?

2. Based on Stone's speech, what did society expect of women at the time?
