

Address-in-Reply, Legislative Assembly, 9 August 1922

Mrs COWAN (West Perth) [5.14]: I desire first of all to congratulate the Premier on his success in obtaining money to help us in placing immigration in this State on a reasonable footing. I am not going to say that the arrangement he has made is entirely satisfactory, because that remains to be proved. There are various matters which I am sorry have not been alluded to in the Governor's Speech. One is the need for erecting some sort of a suitable home for the aged women at Fremantle. So far as I am aware, nothing has been done or suggested in that matter. The place known as the Old Women's Home is very far from satisfactory. Indeed, it is well known that the place is not what it should be. Unfortunately conditions have not been improved for the poor old souls there recently, owing to the fact that women are being sent there from the lunatic asylum in order that more room may be provided in that institution. I have no doubt that this course is absolutely necessary; but it seems to me a most pathetic thing that the nice old women who are not troubled mentally should be obliged to live alongside others who are insane, even if they are so only to a small degree.

Hon. T. Walker: The same thing is done at the Old Men's Home.

Mrs. COWAN: I understood it was not so there.

Hon. T. Walker: Yes, I have seen some there.

Mrs. COWAN: They should not be there in either case. Something should be done to prevent the existence of such a state of affairs, and I feel sure men and women will join together in seeking relief for those people from such conditions.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: A lunatic asylum is no place for them.

Mrs. COWAN: No, but there should be provided some building nearer to the asylum for their accommodation. We should not continue the present practice which disturbs the old age of these poor, worthy souls who have, perhaps, had a hard time during their life and are now, or should be, enjoying the few possible remaining restful years of their existence. Those last few years should not be made unhappy by coming into contact with the mentally deficient individuals who are taken there. It is bad enough to be old and it is, therefore, important that we should deal with this problem, realising that the finances of the State could be devoted in such a direction rather than in some avenues where expenditure is going on at present. I wish to pay a high tribute to the Colonial Secretary in connection with these matters. I am sorry that Mr Broun is not here and I regret to hear he is so ill. If we lose Mr Broun's services, we will be deprived of the offices of one who has been most sympathetic, kindly and helpful in these matters. Those of us who have had to deal with him realise that nothing was ever too much for him to do in securing kindly attention to these people and other privileges from time to time. Owing to financial difficulties, which, like the poor, appear to be always with us,

there is not the possibility there should be of getting many of these things attended to. A home, too, for mental deficient is required. Such an institution is badly needed for women, and I regret that no mention of anything to be done in that direction is made in the Governor's Speech. I still hope that we shall see some reference to this work when the Estimates are placed before us, more especially as there have been one or two additions to the population in this direction, as a result of immigration. It is a great pity that the system of elective Ministries is not in operation here. I think such a system would give most satisfactory results, and I hope it will be introduced as soon as possible. I know there is a great diversity of opinion on the question, but certainly, if the administration of the affairs of government is to be more satisfactorily carried out, we should have honorary Ministers. I do not agree that the salaries of honorary Ministers should come out of those drawn by portfolioed Ministers. Such a practice is quite unfair. We realise that our Ministers are worked hard enough and deserve all they get. Surely something can be done in this direction. Had I not been a new member, I would have spoken last session when the appointment of a Public Works Committee was suggested, and I pointed out that it was more economical to have additional honorary Ministers, rather than have a sub-committee advising without any responsibility whatever. Supposedly advisory, such a committee would practically have constituted a Cabinet within a Cabinet. I am glad to see no mention is made of such a proposal this session. As to cotton growing, speaking from the women's standpoint, I welcome the advent of such an industry, despite what the member for Pilbara (Mr Underwood) said last night regarding "those two and a half acres of cotton". I cannot help realising that even two and a half acres are better than none at all, if only as an illustration of what can be done. We all owe a debt of gratitude to the member for Roebourne (Mr Teesdale) for what he has done in connection with this question. It is peculiarly an industry in which women and girls can help, more so probably than in any other industry. Especially is this so, if we can grow cotton in the areas north of Perth towards Geraldton. In my opinion, there is no question but that we can do so. I am all the more of that opinion particularly since I have seen what has been produced in the Bayswater district. There is plenty of such land available and, after what has been done at Bayswater, one realises the opportunities available for the employment of a considerable number of our young people taking them away from those influences which unsteady them at the present time, owing to lack of occupation as much as anything else. I greatly sympathise with much of what the Leader of the Opposition said regarding the waste that goes on in Government departments, but I do not agree with what he and others said regarding the salaries paid to civil servants. It would be of advantage if we appointed as a commissioner a commercial man with banking experience, in whom we would have absolute confidence, who would go into the whole question of the civil service. Those of us who have had something to do with Government departments, either through relatives who have been employed as civil servants, or otherwise, realise that there is room for improvement in the direction indicated. In many instances, I think the civil servants themselves would more than welcome such an inquiry. I know that to be a fact. I always feel sorry when I hear the rather contemptuous references made to civil servants whenever they are mentioned in this Chamber. Such an attitude will not encourage them to do their best. It should be made clear that when we talk about this subject, we refer to the system rather than to the civil servants and the work they do.

Mr Teesdale: Do you think a lot of the strong young fellows there would be better employed at farming?

Mrs. COWAN: Yes, certainly I do. I will have something to say about young people presently. A Bill of importance from the point of view of everyone in the State, and more especially of the women and children, is to be introduced this session. I refer to the Hospitals Bill. I am glad we are to have such a measure, and I hope it will prove to be on satisfactory lines. To be such, it must provide that each one of us will share, on a graduated basis of taxation, the cost of these institutions. For my part, I would exempt no-one. No matter what an individual's wage or salary may be, each one should be prepared to pay his or her quota pro rata. I do not think we quite realise our responsibilities to each other in this respect. For that reason, I hope the Hospitals Bill will prove to be along the right lines. Allied to that question, is the necessity for providing further accommodation for women at the Perth Public Hospital. I know the Colonial Secretary is supporting us in our request in that direction. I am sorry the Premier is not present, but I would have liked to point out to him that the more immigrants he brings here, especially if the large bodies of women spoken of are to be brought out, the greater will be the necessity for additions to the hospital accommodation. There should be no suggestion of cutting any amount provided for this work off the Estimates this year. The amount sought is not a large one and this matter should receive the earnest consideration of members when it comes before them. Women especially realise that it is an urgent necessity. We cannot have a satisfactory race unless we pay proper attention to this matter and women should not be kept waiting for months, until they get in such a low condition that they require immediate treatment. They are often kept waiting for months before they can gain admission to our hospitals. Those already treated have to be placed on floors, or turned out of the hospital because there is not sufficient accommodation to meet the requirements of others in imperative need. Patients have had to be turned out too soon, frequently because of the necessity for taking in particularly bad cases, and patients have often to wait weeks or months before securing admittance. As to immigration, I note that there is nothing specified in connection with the Premier's scheme regarding the number contained in families who are to come out, nor is it indicated what is to be done with single men and single women. I was glad to hear the member for Toodyay (Mr Piesse) speak of the openings for poultry farmers. This is an important feature and I can believe that his statements are true, particularly in view of the price we are paying for eggs at present, and the prices we pay for many months in the year. On this basis, I can quite realise that poultry farming should be a lucrative means of earning livelihood. If we could induce women to go in for poultry farming, they should be able to make a good living. They would require to be looked after and educated in the industry, in order that they may be given some idea of how to get the best results. It would be a good thing if people already engaged in the industry would take some of these women and give them the necessary tuition and educate them in the responsibilities attached to poultry farming.

Hon. P. Collier: It is a more suitable occupation for women than for men.

Mrs. COWAN: I do not know that it is not, but I know that a good many men are doing well in this particular industry. For instance, it is rather hard work for a woman when she is asked to clean up and make over poultry yards, and do the digging that is involved. Apart from that aspect, it is a splendid occupation for them and I think women should do well at it.

Hon. P. Collier: Most of those who tried it did not do well.

Mrs. COWAN: Regarding settlement in the South-West, I do not know whether the best policy is to settle the new arrivals only in that direction. The Premier however, should be a better judge of that questions than most of us. The idea seems to be to settle the immigrants in the South-West and to leave the wheat belt for our own people. It might be a good idea to encourage development also in the North-West and spend some of the money there. When I realise that nothing has yet been done regarding the report from the Surveyor-General, Mr King, which was before us last year, I confess that I do not know how long it will be before anything can be done for our own young men. If the Australian, and particularly the Western Australian young men are to have the benefit of settlement on the wheat lands, and the newcomers are not to have that benefit, surely something should be done in connection with Mr King's report. Mr King told us that there were millions of acres in those districts, that is to say, two and a half million acres within seven miles of the railways between York and Beverley to the westward, and towards Dowerin, Cunderdin and Quairading to the eastward. He pointed out that only one million acres had been developed in an agricultural sense. Would it not be better, in any Closer Settlement Bill to be brought before us, if the line suggested by the Lands department surveyor and by the Surveyor General also, were followed rather than the proposal set out in the Bill last session and which was thrown out by the Legislative Council? If that were done, we should probably have a better chance of getting the land developed and with greater benefit to the settlers themselves. He suggested that this land should be leased, that negotiations be opened with the owners and an arrangement made to acquire it on deferred terms of payment spread over 20 or 30 years. If the owner refused, the alternative should be heavy tax. That would be better than running the risk of introducing a Bill similar to that of last year. I did not quite agree with the member for Pilbara (Mr Underwood) yesterday when he said it was the fault of the women that the men came from the country to the town. The hon. member should have qualified that statement. What inducements are offered a woman to remain on the land until the man has made all his money? At Bunbury the other day I was invited to attend and speak at the settlers' conference then in session. The delegates seemed to have grasped all facts connected with the development of the soil, and to know everything there was to learn about farms and orchards. I could not help telling them it appeared to me that in their study of agricultural problems they had forgotten the human side, forgotten what was due to their uncomplaining women. For instance, one delegate admitted that when he had made a little money as the result of some outside work, he had put that money into super. He advised others to do the same. It seemed to me it would have been even better if he had spent at least half of it on his home. A woman who by a windlass is drawing household water from a well all day would greatly appreciate the provision of a pump and a few pipes leading to the kitchen and wash tubs. It would mean a tremendous muscular saving for her, and an appreciable

difference to the comfort of the home. Again, in back country districts so little is done in the way of providing even proper cooking utensils and washing apparatus. Is it to be wondered at that the wife is bad-tempered and fails to greet her husband with a sweet smile and warm slippers when he comes home for the evening? It must be remembered that the woman on the farm is far more lonely than is the man. She is not the first to be considered when a trip to town is mooted, nor does she have the healthy outdoor occupation of the men of her household. It is not for her to engage in boundary riding and keeping an eye on the stock. I know what I am talking about, for as a girl I often rode after stock, and invariably found it a most exhilarating exercise; whereas I have not always enjoyed the washing and cooking that falls to a woman's lot. Very much more consideration might reasonably be given to the lonely women in the country. Telephones ought to be provided as a means of breaking down their terrible isolation. Mr Poynton will see that they are provided at reasonable rates in the future—

Mr Davies: They will all have wireless in their homes presently.

Mrs. COWAN: I do not think you men quite realise the woman's standpoint, or appreciate her unselfishness, which alone enables her to remain on the land. At some of the group settlements I was told that, 18 months ago, women were brought out here from English factories, having no knowledge whatever of the work awaiting them in the Australian bush. They found plenty of food to cook, but no utensils with which to cook it. They knew nothing of the using up of kerosene tins as buckets and cooking pots, had no idea of how to shape a fruit tin into a milk jug. These expedients are all very enjoyable at a picnic and we Australians with our initiative think of them, but it is unreasonable to expect a knowledge of them in people from England whose baking has always been done at the bakehouse and who know nothing of the art of making bread.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Before the war everybody in England knew how to bake bread.

Mrs. COWAN: I am afraid the hon. member is somewhat inaccurate in making such a statement. I agree that there should be better examination of the immigrants coming out here. It is painful to see the condition of some of them. Even tubercular people and mental deficients have been sent out to us. Of these unfortunate classes we have quite enough here without adding to their numbers through our special scheme of immigration. I like the suggestion that we should have our own doctor in England, but in addition I want to see a woman doctor appointed for the women and children. She would get at the root of much which, probably a man doctor would not have the patience to arrive at. We all know that the work of Dr Roberta Jull in our schools was far more satisfactory than that which could be done by any man. Dr Jull is at present in England. Most of us hope she will return and continue her work in our schools; if she does not come back, her services might be availed of in England.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Dr D Montgomery did a great deal of good work in our schools before Dr Jull took over.

Mrs. COWAN: I do not dispute that. We should be extremely careful to see that no man who is imprisoned in this State and who, by his antecedents, is likely to be of

criminal instincts all his life, should be allowed to nominate his wife and children out to this State, when they can get a better living and be much happier among their friends in the Old Country. This sort of thing has actually occurred and we should see that it is not repeated. I am glad the Arbitration Act is to be amended. I trust the amendments will include a provision making continuity of work an obligation wherever there is continuity of employment. It would be welcomed by many in every walk of life and would do a great deal to allay industrial unrest. Unemployment has been greatly in evidence for some time past. It has proved extremely difficult to cope with, because it is of the kind against which doles can do very little good. Have we ever considered how the go-slow tendencies of so many are to be remedied wherever found, whether in the public service, in industrial circles, or in the commercial world? Until we consider that aspect of the question, I am afraid unemployment will continue to increase. Another evil we require to watch is seen in the effect of unduly high wages paid to boys and girls. I say "unduly high" because there is no corresponding obligation on those young people. I am speaking of all classes. The evil is not more evident in the industrial world than it is in the commercial or in the public service. So long as that condition continues, we shall not get continuity of employment, or induce investors to start industries which will help to employ our young people. No boy or girl should receive better pay than is awarded to many married men. The young people, many of them, do nothing towards the upkeep of the home, nor do they realise that they should be making provision for a home of their own. They are to be seen out enjoying themselves in all sorts of places without any attempt to realise the true responsibilities of life, which sooner or later must be borne in on them. We all realise much more than in the past the necessity for giving attention to these points. I do not wish to see wages lowered, but I do wish to see something done to prevent irresponsible young people from being better paid than are many married men and women. I have often wondered whether the age-wage system is a good one. The results are so unsatisfactory to parents and to the community generally. Why not grade the workers in all forms of service and grade the pay accordingly? Is it any wonder that in these circumstances there are unemployed and would not attention to these details help to remedy the evil?

Mr Willcock: They would all be on the one grade, just as they are now all on the one minimum wage.

Mrs Cowan: Not all are getting the minimum wage, but the people getting the bigger wage are being forced to maintain those who cannot equal them in any way and who are not allowed to work to the extent of their capacity.

Hon. M F Troy: How do you know that?

Mr Richardson: If a loophole be left, somebody is bound to take advantage of it.

Mrs Cowan: Then again I always understood that the best thing for a community was an eight hours day—eight hours for work, eight hours for recreation and rest, and if you wished it, the development of the mind, and eight hours for sleep. The whole of that idea, however, appears to have broken down, and it seems to be now that it does not matter in the least how much time one devotes to hard and toilsome work beyond the

eight hours, provided that double pay is given for it. I cannot see how such a thing can be beneficial to the community, either to the young or to the old. I have watched it for some time and it does not appear to have given satisfactory results, but I am willing, if it is possible, to have it demonstrated that it is not a wise course to work the first eight hours for ordinary pay and a subsequent eight hours for double pay. There are more important things than double pay to be considered, and it would have the effect of reducing unemployment greatly if no one was allowed to work overtime in any avocation, except perhaps in a few necessary cases. At present overtime is worked in almost every form of employment, professional or otherwise. I hope too that something will be done—I do not know whether it can be dealt with under the Arbitration Act or whether unions can adopt it—in the direction of seeing that mothers are given a voice in deciding whether or not there shall be a strike. As a mother I have always held that view and dozens of other mothers have expressed a similar opinion to me. If we were to take a referendum on the question tomorrow it would be carried without any difficulty. Therefore I trust that something will be done to bring this about. Another matter on which I wish to speak, and which undoubtedly leads to unemployment is gambling. It also leads to going slowly and to a distaste for wholesome work. It cannot be denied that wholesome work is good for us all. This Parliament should discourage carnivals and lotteries by making it illegal for those under 21 years of age to take any part in them. This would be the means of inducing our young people to become steady workers and to give a better return to their employers, as well as to make them happier than they are, and a more thrifty and saving element in our community. In this regard I would like to quote what Ruskin says on the subject -

But there is one way of wasting time, of all the vilest, because it wastes, not time only, but the interest and energy of your minds. Of all the ungentlemanly habits into which you can fall—

and I am willing to add to this “unladylike” as women are indulging in gambling almost as much as men.

—the vilest is betting or interesting yourselves in the issues of betting. It unites nearly every condition of folly and vice; you concentrate upon a matter of chance, instead of upon the subject of true knowledge, and you back opinions which you have no grounds for forming merely because they are your own. All the insolence of egoism is in this; and so far the love of excitement is complicated with the hope of winning money, you turn yourselves into the basest sort of tradesmen—those who live by speculation. Were there no other ground for industry, this would be a sufficient one, that it protected you from the temptation to so scandalous a vice. Work faithfully, and you will put yourselves in possession of a glorious and enlarging happiness, not such as can be won by the speed of a horse, or marred by the obliquity of a ball.

That puts it very well. There are many in this House who feel as I do on this question, but they are so afraid of being called wowsers that they will not come out into the open and let us know how they view the matter. With regard to picture shows, these too often

degenerate into a pernicious force, which makes for disintegration of high character in the young.

Mr Munsie: They are not too bad; I go very often.

Mrs Cowan: I, too, go sometimes and I find that occasionally the pictures are very good. But there are some that are distinctly objectionable, and we all know that that is so. The women of this State have for a long time past asked for the appointment of a censorship board. That is one of the things we would gladly see the Government give attention to. If the power to create such a body does not exist the matter could be attended to by an amendment of existing legislation.

Hon. W. C. Angwin: Every picture is already censored by the Federal authorities.

Mrs COWAN: What we want is a censorship such as exists in Tasmania, where the preventive effect arising from that censorship has been most marked. For that reason alone it would be wise to establish such a board here, and its mere existence I think would bring about the desired result. I wish to say a few words in connection with the Como trams. I feel that no member of Cabinet can afford to let people think that his standard of honour is lower than that of the common gambler, whose word has to be his bond, unless he accepts the alternative of being booted and hooted out from the fraternity to which he belongs. It is not the construction of the Como tramway to which I take exception, it is the breaking of a promise made in this House. Examples of this kind must be detrimental in their effect on the national character. I feel strongly about this matter. An Englishman's pride is that his word is his bond, and any repudiation shocks the community badly and it can only be viewed with disapprobation by all right thinking people. I accept the assurance of the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture that they were not consulted. Surely if it be necessary to get the sanction of Parliament to appoint a nurse at a North West town—Derby, I think—is not as important to keep a pledge given to this House before spending even a so-called “paltry” £41,000 on a losing proposition such as we are told the Como tramway is likely to be. Some members think that this tramway may, like other “babies,” grow into a fine child, but “babes” of unhealthy parentage, like this one, are apt to wither and become sickly and a costly liability instead. On all these questions of honour and moral dealing we may well recall to our minds the belief held by that great statesman, John Bright, which was—

That the national morality of the nation will in the course of history affect it in the same way that the private standards of an individual affect those with whom he comes in contact.

Bright sums it up in the following pithy words—

If nations—

or, as in this case, “Governments” — reject or deride the moral law, there is a penalty which will inevitably follow.

To hon. members and the members of the Government I would quote these words—

Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;

Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.

This will sooner or later happen to us as a people and as a Parliament unless we can do something to prevent unconstitutional acts being done in the future. There is one other matter to which I wish to refer. In a recent issue of the *Sunday Times* I read a paragraph in which it was stated that the allowance to State children had been reduced by 50 per cent. I do not think that is true; in fact, I am sure it is not. I would however, like the Government to give the public an assurance that it is not so because the subject has been referred to by many people, and if it really were carried into effect, a great hardship would be created. I have no intention tonight of dealing with the subject of licensing and other matters, because we shall have another opportunity to do so. The suggestion which has been made in regard to the holding of a conference of representatives of the State Parliaments on the question of Federation is a wide one and I hope it will take place, and if not, that this Parliament will voice its opinion on the Federal position in no uncertain way and forwards its views to the Prime Minister so that the injustices which we have suffered for so long may be remedied. I spoke against federation in the days of long ago because I thought it was 30 years before its time, and the words of those who spoke against it then have proved to be absolutely true. Now, however, we are told by way of reply, "We are very sorry. You had all the sense and we had all the sentiment." It is time that some of us with the sense got together and remedied the condition of affairs now existing, because the deficit cannot be satisfactorily coped with until we receive more revenue from taxation now taken unfairly by the Federal Government.