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MR. ASQUITH'S VIEWS.

In view of the announcement that an election is to be held in Britain on the 6th of December, it may be timely to give extracts from a speech delivered a few weeks ago by Mr. Asquith, the recognised leader of the Orthodox British Liberals. Mr. Asquith's speeches are always readable:—

You may call a particular plant a rose, or, if you please and are anxious to avoid old associations, you may call it an odiferous vegetable. (Laughter.) It is a matter of taste. It is a matter of nomenclature. The thing will smell the same and will be the same, and therefore I do not think we need apologise in the least for discussing what used to be called the programme—except perhaps to those people who think that when the waters of the war subside all those old party distinctions which have been temporarily submerged will prove to have been permanently obliterated. Some of them even go so far as to discern in imagination a new earth with a new set of commandments and with new rules both of logic and of arithmetic. (Laughter and cheers.) Our experience, from the teaching of history, above all from those momentous controversies of which our own country, with its free public life, has been the secular arena—all those, according to some people, are to be reviewed and revised with the presumption, apparently, that the bulk of them have become outworn and out of date. (Laughter.) Some, at any rate, we know are to be regarded as tunes which have had their day, and which are now only fit to be played upon a hurdy-gurdy to some rustic crowd. (Laughter.) I do not hold these views. (Cheers.) I hope I am not blind to the lessons of the war, but I make no apology either for you as an organization of Liberals or for addressing you as an unrepentant fellow-Liberal and for congratulating you on the resolutions of your Conference, which seem to me in the instinct with the life and the undecayed spirit of Liberalism. (Cheers.) I cannot, of course, attempt in the time which is open to me to cover the whole ground, and if I leave, as I must leave, a number of topics untouched, it is not from indifference to their urgency or through any dissent, so far as I have been able to get possession of them, from your conclusions. So throughout what I am going to say let it be clearly understood that I am dealing with matters which will call for treatment when and not until the war comes to an end.

Back To Liberty.

The first result of peace to which we must look and for which we must work is the restoration of domestic liberty. (Cheers.) The people have submitted, and on the whole have submitted splendidly,

for the sake of the war to very many fetters on their habitual and traditional freedom. The ordinary rights of free expression have been gradually, and in some cases altogether, abrogated, and we have been taught what it is to live under the regime of a censored and controlled press. (Cheers.) This is a price, high as it is, which most of us think is worth paying, and which all of us at any rate have been willing to pay, to prosecute and win the war. But limitations such as these ought not to endure an hour longer than the necessity which led to their being imposed and endured. (Cheers.)

And this suggests to me some considerations of a general character which as Liberals we ought to keep in view in all the processes of after-war reconstruction. There are two principles for which Liberals have always fought, and which will be just as vital to the healthy development of the nation in the future as they have been in the past. The first is that liberty is a good thing in itself and for itself. (Cheers.) Without it you can never provide that equality of opportunity which is the foundation of social justice and the only means by which a nation can make the best use, in the interests of all of its human resources. (Cheers.) Without it you will never secure the free scope of personal initiative and self-development which we Liberals believe to be just as essential to the domestic sphere as in this war we have declared it to be in the international domain. The restoration of liberty, complete, unfettered, and at the earliest possible moment, is, in our view, the gate way of the future. (Cheers.) There is a second principle which runs through and connects a hundred Liberal causes, on which I have often insisted as your leader in days gone by—the subordination of special interests and the privilege of particular classes to the general good. (Cheers.) You will find that that, too, has practical applications in the work of reconstruction. Negatively, it rules out all attempts at setting up the ascendancy, even though draped under democratic disguises, of any new class with special rights and claims of its own. Positively, it indicates the expediency not indeed of anything in the nature of a centralised direction of industry—we have before our eyes beacons which ought to keep us off that track,—but of keeping under control in the common interest, to avoid the risks of monopoly, and to safeguard social exigencies, such enterprises—I give them only as examples—as those which deal with transit, the supply of light and power, and the production and consumption of intoxicating drink. The principle is plain, though there will always be room in a party of free thought like our own for divergence as to the limits at any given time of its application.

In this, and indeed in every chapter of reconstruction.

Continued on page 14.