

# The Watertord Chronicle

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## TITHES—DEVONSHIRE COUNTY MEETING.

(ABRIDGED FROM THE WESTERN TIMES.)

EXETER, JAN. 19.—The interest excited by this meeting has not been surpassed by any county meeting which has taken place for a long time. Nothing since the great agitation which finally shook the Tories from their long abiding place at the head of the county can be compared with its interest and excitement. Many of the yeomen, notwithstanding the ungenial state of the weather, arrived in the city on Thursday afternoon, determined to take a part in the momentous proceedings. The South Hams, ever on the alert, led the van, and, as we were informed by several gentlemen of that district, the excitement that prevailed there appeared as if the Tories had suddenly and unexpectedly risen and come to life again, and the South Hams had, as we are told, called upon some more to speak than on the head. The Northern districts, though less animated to excitement, felt the importance of the meeting; not the less, if we may judge by the appearance of the gallant fellows from the distant hills. The far-west, too, had acknowledged the tallmanhood of tithes, and the moorland, from the wilds of Dartmoor, and the yeoman from its neighbourly valleys, joined the sturdy assemblage to do battle in the good cause.

If the South Hams were peculiarly excited it was not without peculiar cause, for the landowners of that district had felt it to be their duty to take a very prominent part in promoting the meeting. Foremost among these was H. Steady, Esq., of Watton-court. This gentleman, whose patriotism is so prominent, caused an excellent address to be circulated through his own neighbourhood. He attended the meetings and assemblies of the farmers, heard and read, and has seized every opportunity of mingling with them; wherever two or three were gathered together there was he in the midst, pointing out the grievances and oppressions of the yeoman, its anti-Christian tendency, and the necessity of combating it as once manfully and vigorously. The attendance of South Hams showed that the labour was not in vain.

Shortly before twelve the yeomen began to assemble in the yard, and by the time the meeting commenced, we should estimate the numbers present at upwards of three thousand, and which at one time increased to about four thousand, though the heavy showers that fell dispersed a portion, and left little behind, but the all-weather opponents of the system, who stood their ground like men throughout, numbering amongst their body 3,000 as staunchly determined yeomen as ever assembled within the castle walls. When the High Sheriff made his appearance, we observed on the hustings Lord Eborac, the Hon. Newton Fellows, Mr. J. C. Bullock, M.P., Mr. Parrott, M.P., Colonel Seale, M.P., Sir H. P. Davis, Bart., C. P. Hamlyn, Esq., Captain Buller, Rev. Jonas Dennis, Arthur Gilestrick, Esq., George Carey, Esq., H. Steady, Esq., Edward Divett, Esq., M.P., &c. The High Sheriff having taken his station, proceeded to open the meeting, which he did by reading the requisition, and stating his compliance with it. The requisition was signed by 2,160.

The Sheriff then stated that he had received a letter from one of the county members, stating his inability to attend the meeting. The hon. gentleman then read the letter, which was from Lord John Russell. It was dated Watton Abbey, Jan. 5, 1834. It stated that the noble writer, having been informed by Mr. Hamlyn of the requisition to the sheriff, and the answer of the latter thereto, fixing the meeting for this day, wished the sheriff to make known his reasons for not attending the meeting. He begged to assure them that it did not arise from any want of respect to the numerous body of his constituents who had signed the requisition, nor any indifference to the great objects they had in view—but as he must be engaged in the cabinet, in the discussion of measures of the greatest importance, and as he could not address the meeting without involving his colleagues in the opinions he might express, he deemed it his duty to abstain from attending, &c. As soon as the letter had been read,

C. P. Hamlyn, Esq., stood forward, and was greeted with three loud and long continued cheers, which were called for by Mr. Watson, of Dorset. Four years have now elapsed since I last had the honour of addressing you on this question, which we are now met to discuss; there is one point on which I congratulate you; I congratulate you on the change which has taken place—(cheers)—we may now ask for a commutation, without being told it is impracticable. (Hear, hear.) We are not now to be told that it is impracticable or unjust; we have it from the highest authority—from the bishop themselves—that a change in the tithes law is absolutely necessary—(cheers)—that is one point gained. Gentlemen, we have heard in different quarters that this is the fact. It is not my intention to take up your time by going into the origin of the tithes law; we have been told that all those who contend that there was an equal division of tithes, have been ignorant men, or men who wish to deceive. Now as I do not think such men as Blackstone and many others of that description are entitled to this epithet, I will continue to think that the tithes was so divided, and what is more, that at one time the people had a right to pay this tithes to whatever clergyman they thought proper. (A voice—"where is that?") One thing is very clear that tithes is a very great grievance in its present shape; it is inimical to the best interests of the country. We have been told so by the best authorities in the land, perhaps. (Cheers.) Gentlemen, I will not enter into the question, to take up too much of your time, but tithes, from the change of circumstance, have completely changed, and they have now risen to a point that never could have been contemplated—for how could it be contemplated to take the tithes of things that were not known to be in existence. (Hear, hear.) Every tax laid on tells in favour of the tithes owner; for the greater the expense of the production, the greater is his profit—(hear)—it is equally against the consumer and the cultivator; but I will not enter into the subject; I know that it is so bad, that you have all come here to petition against the injustice—we have come here to petition against the injustice—we

ask here to propose a fair commutation, to get rid of that injustice and that oppression; that tithes are unjust in their operation, there can be no doubt—to take a tenth of the capital, to take a tenth of the labour, to take a tenth of everything, is in itself most unjust; and let me ask any honourable man, how it can be reconciled to common justice, that when a crop has failed, and the farmer is out of pocket, that the tithes-holder, and takes a tithes of his losses when the ship is wrecked in steps, the tithes holder takes a tenth of the little that is saved—"Down with the system!" Gentlemen, the tithes are designated by all authors, as a tenth of the increase upon land or capital. Now, in the name of common sense, in the name of common honesty, I will ask how it can possibly be just, that a tenth should be taken in seasons and upon occasions when there is no increase; and when the farmer has lost half his crop, and lost the larger portion of his capital, still the tithes owner goes in and takes his portion—"It is too true!" They are described as the produce of the land; now let us see the justice of that. It was but the other day I was looking into the report of the Commissioners of the Poor Laws, and saw that £2,000 a year was laid out in one parish to raise turnips in certain parishes. Were the turnips the produce of the soil? They were the produce of the bone ash; and would any man say it is justice that the parish should take the tithes of the produce of this capital? (Cheers.) But what does one of our greatest men say (Locke)? He tells us that the land can only be considered the most worthless part of the material—it is the skill, and capital, and labor that come to it, that make everything; but I need not explain this to you; every man who is here feels the pressure of it. I need not explain to you why it is that we stand here; I make no apology for the manner in which I express myself; I declare solemnly, in the face of heaven, that my only wish is to get rid of a vexatious imposition, and substitute a fair payment in place of it. (Bravo.) I have no feeling against any set of men; I regard—though God knows that some may think differently from me at this moment—the clergy as a body; I tell them on my conscience and soul I am one of their best friends—(a laugh)—though they do not think so, perhaps. Do you not know that the best friend of a child, sometimes, is the one that gives it physic—"Physic them well." I believe that if these impositions were removed, the clergy would be relieved; they would be in reality what I believe they ought to be, the best friends and associates of those among whom they live; but while continual disputes are arising, and must arise, by taking on one hand what is considered unjust, and on the opposite party never thinking that they can have enough, no good understanding can exist—(Cheers.) I may be told that the object I have in a selfish one; but I tell you that I am neither a tithes owner nor a tithes payer; there is not one of my tenants who has any dispute about tithes; the estate I farm myself is tithes free. Some will say you do it to get money in your own pocket; I am ready to meet that charge, or any other that may be brought against me—(Cheers.) The hon. gentleman concluded by moving the adoption of a petition to the House of Commons, complaining that the demand of one-tenth part of the gross produce of the land, by those who contribute nothing towards its production, is in variance with the dictates of reason, and the principles of justice, and most oppressively grievous in cases that frequently occur, when the value of the whole crop will not cover the expense of raising it, and praying that the subject of tithes may be taken into serious consideration, and that tithes may be permanently commuted, on the basis of supposing the tithes owner the tenth part proprietor of the soil. But anxiously as the petitioners desire a change in the existing tithes law, oppressive and unjust as they consider them, they would nevertheless prefer their continuance, to the enactment of any other measure that would have the effect of exempting the holders of the property from bearing their just portion of all parochial and other assessments, thereby severing their interests from those of the rest of the community.

Sir Humphrey Davis, Bart., seconded the petition, and was greeted with the most enthusiastic cheering. He contended with great warmth that a change was absolutely necessary, for that the grievance had arrived at such a pitch that it was no longer tolerable, and that it would be impossible much longer to collect the tithes. He then adverted to the bill which had been brought in last session. There was a commutation, he said, proposed there, but it was found, in the common saying, "that there was a screw loose;" the commutation had been proposed in the wrong quarter, and was accompanied by the wrong measures, the people had determined to take the subject up for themselves, and to propose such a commutation as would be fair and equitable to all parties. Such, he believed, the proposition of the petition to be two shillings in the pound, he repeated, was a just equivalent for all that the clergy were entitled to. On the High Sheriff putting the petition, H. Steady, Esq., stood forward, and was received with the warmest acclamations; he said, having been long a practical agriculturalist, I appear here to-day for the purpose of supporting the petition—"Put on your hat"—in order that I may do my part in getting rid of that tyrannical practice which has hitherto been exercised over us—in the spoliation of our property, by taking away a tenth of our capital and of our industry. It has been held out to you, that if the landlords succeed in this commutation, the whole of the difference will go into their pockets; that I deny—(hear, hear)—most positively deny. (Cheers.) I have been a practical agriculturalist for thirty years, for a purpose of improving my land, and I have experienced the robbery and spoliation of the system, in the taking away of the tenth of the crops which have been produced by the care and industry of myself and tenants. That never was the intention of the tithes law, be they established 800 years ago, or when they might; their object was to maintain the clergy, and also the fabric of the Church, and also the poor. (Hear.) The poor have been thrown upon the land—the Church has been supported by a separate tax—and the clergy have appropriated the whole tithes; these were the abuses that had crept in; money payments were

now made for that which was originally established before money was known. (Hear.) I trust the abuse will not last much longer. (Hear.) Every country in the civilized world had got rid of it, but England submit to it still; I hope, however, that we shall not any longer submit to this system. It has been the case elsewhere, but I hope it never will be the case here, that whenever a commutation has taken place, the tithes have been the first property to go. (Hear, hear.) I was brought up by an early part of my life in revolution. I spent three years in the American war, and have seen many persons who supported this doctrine of tithes falling before public opinion, and coming to retire to England and live as pensioners in the British nation. Mr. Steady then went into a picture of his own situation as a tithes payer. This was in the parish of Stoke Gabriel, a peculiar parish, for they had lost their vicarage house; and though they paid four or five hundred a year for the parson, all the benefit they had from him was, when he came over once a week to preach to them; but one of the greatest grievances was this, that the man who took the tithes was a middleman—a class that had proved the greatest curse of Ireland—living in Exeter, who had the lease of the great tithes, whilst the vicar, who had the small tithes, was compelled to make the most of it, and they were groined in every way. The hon. gentleman was understood to say that he had taken every pains to come to a just composition, but could not succeed, and because he would not give way, he had now to pay everything in kind, and even the tenth egg was taken away from him. (Hear, hear.) He condemned the bill of the last session, because it was not final, for under that, at the end of twenty-one years, the payer would be liable to a new valuation, which would then be a direct tax upon the cultivation and improvement. He repeated that he came there with an honest spirit, willing to pay the utmost farthing that could be honestly demanded of him, but he could not but resist the grading attempts and unjust exaction to which he was obliged to submit, and above all, the insulting manner in which the act was performed. He fully supported the prayer of the petition. (Continued cheering.)

Jasper Parrott, Esq., M.P., was greeted with long cheering—Gentlemen, as a member of the Legislature, it would have been perhaps more becoming to me to have contented myself with supporting the prayer of this petition in my place in the House of Commons. (Cheers.) Yet I cannot refrain from saying a few words now, and giving my hearty support to this petition. (Continued cheering.) Gentlemen, I have had some intimation that there is to be an amendment moved on the present occasion. ("No, no!") But, gentlemen, remember this, that if there is an amendment proposed, what will be the proposed object of it?—Why, to favour the tithes-receiver, and not the tithes payer. (Great cheering.) Tithes are a tax not only upon industry, but upon that industry which feeds mankind—upon that species of exertion, which it is the object of all wise laws to cherish and promote. There is some class of persons to whom it is more injurious than to all the others—viz. the consumer. The farmer, being a capitalist, must, in the course of his business, not only replace his stock, but must, as any other trader, have the ordinary rate of profit of the capital he lays out; otherwise he would cease to cultivate, as the trader would cease to trade. For instance, if he lays out £1,000 in the production of goods, and before he carries them to market £100 (the tenth) were taken from him by the tithes proctor, he must make enough of the remainder to replace the £100 with the ordinary rate of profit—consequently he must raise the price of his goods for that purpose. This is the way in which the consumer is affected; I believe, to a very considerable extent. It will, therefore, be seen that proprietors and occupiers of land, and all the consumers of the produce of land, are greatly interested in effecting at least a great modification of the present system; and if they make common cause, which I hope they will, I have no doubt but that they will succeed. (Cheers.) But, say those who wish to continue this unfair impost—we admit the system is bad, and it ought to be altered—we will transfer it from the occupier to the owner of lands—tithes shall not be taken in kind, but the owner shall be charged with an equivalent in money for it. There is justice for you—I take this money from one class and place it on another; what horrid injustice—take that which was a tax on the stock of one, and place it on the freehold property of another. May the ministers who attempt such an interference with property meet with that condign punishment which they will richly deserve. But who are the occupiers of land? Are they all tenants? Why nearly half the land in this country is in the hands of men who are both proprietors and occupiers—who chiefly form that magnificent body of yeomen, who, by throwing their weight into the scale, have contributed so much to place the present county members in their situation of representatives of one of the greatest counties in the empire.—(Continued cheering.) A voice—"they won't go again." Will these representatives, then, attempt to fix on them an equivalent for the tenth of the gross produce of the land? I hope they will speak out, and say yes or no, that the electors may know how to estimate their services.—But say the sticklers for tithes, whatever benefit is done to the tenant will be given to the landlord.—What a fallacy! If the tithes system were modified, the landlord and tenant would be both benefited by the profit on a greater outlay of capital—in permanent, and the other in temporary improvements. Cultivation would be extended and more produce brought to market, which, of course, would lead to a reduction in price proportioned to the tithes tax removed. (Hear, hear, and cheer.) The consumer, however, is the person who would reap the principal advantage from this. The poor, who have now no employment, would then be engaged in husbandry, and thousands and tens of thousands who are now pining in misery and want should be profitably employed. But the petition is for fixing the maximum of the equivalent for tithes, at the tenth part of the clear annual value of the land, while the decisions in the courts have upheld the tithes receivers in a tenth of the gross produce of the land. But this was in

darker ages than the present, when boroughcraft and priestcraft bore sway, and when the decisions of courts partook of the spirit of the then existing governments. We have now a Reformed Parliament; and I contend, whatever grievances the people labour under, it is the duty, and I hope it will be the will of Parliament to redress speedily and effectually. To Parliament we must look for redress; and if the owners and occupiers of land and consumers of produce stick together, and press their case boldly, firmly, and respectfully, not suffering themselves to be disunited by men who are not practically acquainted with the operation of the tithes system, or who wish to preserve tithes to their present full amount, though under another name, for the sake of the paragon connected with it, I have but little doubt that they will succeed. (Cheering.)

Captain Buller, R. N., argued for a fixed commutation of tithes, and moved an amendment similar to the original petition, excepting the fixing the amount at which tithes should be commuted. This gave rise to great disapprobation, which prevented the hon. gentleman from proceeding. Edward Divett, Esq., M.P.—Gentlemen, I confess, from the statement which I heard from my honorable friend—and no man understands the question better than he does, or is capable of entering more fully into it—I had hoped that the petition would not have been so positive on one point. I had hoped that I should not have had to utter one word against it; but, gentlemen, I cannot in fairness agree to any measure that comes to that conclusion now. (Great disapprobation.) I am merely expressing my belief—now I am most anxious to settle this question as speedily as possible, because I believe it to be of the greatest importance that it should be done—but when gentlemen come and tell us, that it is not the landlord, but the renting farmer, who would be benefitted by it—I cannot assent to this. I am bound to tell you that the renting farmer, if tithes were commuted now, would not benefit one farthing by it.—("That will not go down.") Under these circumstances I think I am right in seconding the petition of my hon. friend. ("No you are quite wrong.")

Mr. R. Watson (of Dorset)—There is every probability of this question being brought forward in parliament early in the ensuing session, and I therefore feel it my duty to tell them honestly and openly the opinions of the South Hams on the subject. (Hear and cheer.) We are entirely of opinion that a commutation of two shillings in the pound upon the annual clear value of the land is a just and equitable commutation; and when we have done this, we consider that we have done our duty like honest men and Christian men. The honorable gentleman who proposed the amendment told us, that tithes were a tax upon rent.—Now I'll tell him what we in the South Hams consider it—we consider it a direct tax on capital and industry—and we do not mean to submit to it any longer. (Cheers.) We admit the tithes-holder to be a sleeping partner—and as such we, yeomen in the South Hams, are willing to give him all he can reasonably expect, and honestly desire—we will give him a tenth of the profits—we will give him two shillings in the pound—(hear, and continued cheering)—but what man, I should like to know, would give a tenth of the business, capital, and all, to a sleeping partner? (Hear, and cheer.) We do not wish to rob any man, nor do we mean to let any man rob us—we ask for justice, and justice we will have.—("Bravo. Go on, Watson.") Gentlemen, I am happy to see so great a body here to-day, because I understood that the interests of the many are to be sacrificed to the interests of the few. (Hear, hear.) I hope that the Church will see that it is not their interest to throw any obstacles in the way of the settlement of this question. I should advise them to come forward and make terms which they have an opportunity.—(Tremendous cheers.) It is possible that we can compete with our Irish brother, (or the Scotch, they have no tithes?) If we are to be borne down by tithes and taxes, I say it is not possible, and therefore I hope that his Majesty's ministers will set earnestly about the settlement of this question.—("Send him up for Totesse.") Mr. Watson concluded, amidst long continued cheering, after reiterating his surprise at the opinions advanced by Captain Buller and Mr. Divett.

T. Northmore, Esq., adverted to the pressure of the poor laws, and the mode in which the tithes laws promoted their pressure. He said he had met with a curious fact in the Poor Law Commission Report:—Two gentlemen, Mr. Pridoux and Mr. Fraser were examined, respecting the waste lands in Devon. Mr. Fraser said there were 320,000 acres, and he firmly believed that if this land were cultivated, it would yield nearly £300,000; but Mr. Pridoux said he did not doubt this, but the greatest obstacle to it was the tithes law.—(Hear, hear.)

Colonel Seale, M.P., was warmly cheered on rising to support the petition.—I have the honor to represent a constituency not altogether agricultural, but I do consider it my duty to appear here this day, on this agricultural question—(hear, hear)—because it is not a question in which the agriculturists alone are interested, but it is one in which the interests of every class of the community are more or less mixed up.—(Cheers.) Therefore, it is, that I, the representative of a commercial constituency, have felt it to be my duty to attend to-day, and I not only give my support to this measure here—which I think is most just and reasonable—but I certainly shall do all in my power to promote its final triumph.—(Long continued cheering.)

George Templer, Esq., not only objected to the form and character of the petition, but was bold to say that the meeting itself was uncalled for.—(Great uproar—"Ah, George! you're a night-tampler, you're quite in the dark.") The High Sheriff—Gentlemen, it is my duty to see that every gentleman has a fair hearing, and unless you do so, I shall dismiss the meeting. Mr. Templer then proceeded to object to the petition, because the subject was now under the consideration of government, and it was a direct interference with the government—the petition itself a direct dictation. (Great uproar.) This

petition had been brought forward by a member of parliament, and it was notorious that it had emanated from that member. (Uproar, and cry of "Name.") The honorable member for Totness. (Three cheers for the member for Totness were given instantaneously—several persons in the crowd exclaiming, "We will have him for the county.")

Mr. Parrott—It originated with a great body of the owners and occupiers of land, and was ultimately brought home to the door of Mr. William Wroford, who seemed by no means ashamed of having been selected to draw it up, which fact was communicated by Colonel Seale.

Mr. Templer having acknowledged his mistake, had nothing further to offer that the meeting was at all inclined to hear; and after proceeding a few minutes amidst much interruption, he relinquished his task, as not even his great talents could induce the meeting to accept his sentiments, which were duly offered.

Lord Eborington was loudly called for, and warmly cheered—Gentlemen, it was not my intention to address you until after the motion which is about to be made, that the petition be presented by the county members—(hear, hear)—but some doctrines have been laid down by my hon. friend who spoils last, against which, in this stage of the proceedings, I must enter my protest. (Cheers.) I meet in the first place protest against the doctrine, that any county meeting, called by the sheriff for the purpose of petitioning the legislature on any subject, is uncalled for—"He's a pretty fellow to talk like that!"—If it appears that the object for which they have called that meeting is one that demands the attention of the legislature, and if, in the petition which they propose to the legislature, they express themselves as this petitioners expressed, in terms of due respect to the legislature. (Hear, hear.) I trust that I may be allowed to put forth some claims to your indulgence, as far as I believe, the first person, sixteen years ago, who ventured to express my sentiments in favour of a just and equitable commutation. (Cheers.) Gentlemen, I am happy to find that these sentiments—that the principle of these sentiments has been admitted by all parties on the present occasion. (Cheers.)

The necessity of the change has been admitted by the bishop of the diocese, in his charge to his clergy; and he has added, that the clergy, as a body, are anxious to concur in any measure of fair commutation. (Cheers, and laughter.) Not seeking an equivalent for their tithes, but willing to meet the payer on terms that would be considered equitable. (Cries of "hear, hear.") Gentlemen, I wish from my heart that this light had broken in upon the right reverend prelate, and upon others of his order, at an earlier period. (Cheers.) I wish from my heart, for the sake of the church as well as the state, that they had not delayed concession until concession loses more than half its grace, and I fear more than half its benefit. (Cheers.) I say this as a sincere friend of the church; and I wish that the right reverend prelate, of whose production I wish to speak in terms becoming his situation in this county—I wish in the document to which I allude, that he had not included in its subjects of Church Reform, which do not, to my mind, agree with the object he ought to have had in view—(hear, hear)—and to my mind he does not appear disposed to go into that question in a very satisfactory or conciliatory spirit. (Hear, hear.) Gentlemen, I can make great allowance for the conservative habits and zealous party feelings of the right reverend prelate, but I think it would have been much wiser, much more discreet in a member of the legislature, and particularly a member of that bench—(hear, hear)—who are supposed to be, and who ought to be, if they are not, less under the influence of political excitement than any other persons—(hear, hear)—I think it would have been much more discreet in him if he had not applied the terms "pleasantry and sacrilege"—(hear, hear)—to an act of that legislature, and which, whatever he and others may think of it, is now become a part of the law of the land, and which he, in consequence, is bound to obey and respect. (Cheers.) Gentlemen, with respect to the terms upon which a commutation of tithes is to be effected, it is painful to me to differ from so large a portion of those around me at the present time, among whom I see many of those with whom, in the course of my political life, I have been in the habit of acting in concert. (Hear, hear.) But I should be more sorry for the act, if I could, at a meeting like this, of my constituents, leave them in doubt whether I did or did not concur with them on this question. Gentlemen, a great part of the argument which has been adopted in favour of the proposed plan is founded upon a notion of tripartite division in the application and use of tithes property. (Hear.) At the present moment, I think I can challenge my hon. friend to show us a single statute, from the great charter down to the present day, in which any such tripartite division is recognized or admitted. (Disapprobation.) It is certainly true, that previous to the dissolution of monasteries, a great portion of the poor of the land were maintained by these monasteries; but I believe they were so maintained, not in consequence of any right, either by statute or canon law, but by charity alone. (Mr. Northmore—By canon law.) My honorable friend enjoined by canon law. Certainly, the canon law enjoined the occupiers and the members of these religious houses—does it does to the clergy in general, as it would for the lady—the general exercise of hospitality and charity. But if there were any legal right on the part of the poor to any such portion of tithes, how comes it, that at the dissolution of the monasteries and the presentation of the tenth to King Henry VIII, no mention whatever was made of any such claim to these religious houses—(hear, hear)—nor in the statute of Elizabeth, which, as is well known, is the foundation and ground-work of all our poor laws, were there any claims of that sort on the persons to whom grants were made of those benefices? Upon the dissolution of the monasteries, no claim whatever was brought forward by them as a right on the part of the poor to any portion of what they so possessed; and I contend, that if such a right had been in existence, it would surely

(FOR CONTINUATION SEE FOURTH PAGE)





