

Mr. EDWARDS: What is the annual potato production of the three Maritime provinces?

Mr. HUGHES: Even under present circumstances, when there is no great inducement to the farmer to pay particular attention to the growing of potatoes, we can easily produce 250 bushels to the acre. In Aroostook county, in the state of Maine, where they give special attention to the growing of potatoes, they produce 275 bushels to the acre.

Mr. EDWARDS: What is the aggregate production of Prince Edward Island?

Mr. HUGHES: I cannot give the total production, but I think that in 1912 something over 7,000,000 bushels were produced, on about 30,000 acres. That could be easily doubled or trebled. On 70,000 acres in Aroostook county the production was about 18,000,000 bushels. If we had access to a fairly profitable market, we could easily produce 20,000,000 bushels of potatoes in Prince Edward Island.

I want to point out one special advantage the farmer has in producing potatoes. It has been said that the continuous production of wheat exhausts the soil; for that reason the growing of wheat has sometimes been called the mining of the soil. The growing of potatoes or other vegetables can never exhaust the soil, for the reason that the soil must be well cultivated and tilled every year in order to produce a good crop. After a good crop of potatoes has been produced on any soil you can get from that soil almost any crop you wish to grow, particularly clover, which is a very valuable crop, enabling the farmer to feed his stock and enrich the soil at the same time. No part of Prince Edward Island is far from the sea, and an abundance of sea manure which is especially valuable for the growing of potatoes, can be obtained for nothing. We have the advantage of a friable soil with natural drainage, a cool climate—no great heat and no extreme cold—the very best conditions for the growing of potatoes. But the farmer cannot largely engage in the production of potatoes, for which the soil and climate are specially adapted, because he is shut out of an adequate market for his products. The hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Clark) suggests that the decrease in our population can be traced to this circumstance. I have no doubt that it can, because the more prosperous the people are, the more inclined they will be to remain on the farm. The hon. member for Northumberland (Mr.

[Mr. J. J. Hughes.]

Loggie) has moved an amendment which is at present before the committee—an amendment which appears to me to be a most reasonable one. It merely asks that the duty on American potatoes coming into this country be taken off when the embargo on Canadian potatoes going into that country is removed. If it is a good thing for us to have a free exchange of potatoes with the United States, then it is surely a good thing for us to try to have the present embargo removed. I say here—and I think I can prove it to the satisfaction of every member of this committee—that the duty on American potatoes entering into this country is not and cannot under existing conditions be of any appreciable advantage to the farmers of Canada.

Mr. SEXSMITH: Then why did the Liberal Government raise the duty from 15 cents to 20 cents?

Mr. HUGHES: The reason was, I presume, that at that time the United States had a duty of 25 cents a bushel against Canadian potatoes, practically a prohibitive duty; and if we could not have reciprocity in trade we could at least have reciprocity of tariffs. Now the conditions are entirely changed. The United States now has a duty of 10 per cent against Canadian potatoes, a very small duty indeed. Under the reciprocity agreement we were offered free potatoes. Canadian growers of potatoes will never again have such an offer made to them.

Mr. SEXSMITH: You admit that the duty was beneficial to the farmer at that time.

Mr. HUGHES: No, I do not.

Mr. SEXSMITH: Then, why did you raise it?

Mr. HUGHES: Because, if the hon. member has followed my argument and if there is anything in it, I have proved that the price of potatoes in the United States must, generally speaking, be higher than in Canada, except perhaps during June, July and August, when we have not potatoes to supply our own needs.

Mr. BEST: Why is it that in a country where so many potatoes are produced there is not an abundance of potatoes in July, when they command a good price?

Mr. HUGHES: Is the hon. gentleman a farmer?

Mr. BEST: Yes, sir, I am a farmer who grows potatoes.