

"OLD COUNTRY" CHRISTMAS 73

Still more dissipation in this letter, mother, for on Christmas Day "the parson" asked me to spend the next evening at his house, and six o'clock found me at the rectory door in my Sunday best.

I had expected just a quiet family party, but found that I was only one of a crowd of eighteen young fellows—from eighteen to twenty-five years old, all Englishmen—whom "the parson" had gathered together for an "Old Country" Christmas.

I was introduced to each one as Tom Lester, and the "parson" called them all by their Christian names. It was rather embarrassing, but I was much relieved to find that I knew two of them already—the engineer and the Plymouth sailor man who were with the threshing gang. They were very friendly, and soon made me feel at home with the rest. With the exception of one other, who was "hired man" on a farm close to town, they were all living in Minnedosa for the winter, and twelve of them were "keeping back" in the rooms over an old wooden store in Main Street. These were generally known by the rest as "the Pirates," and their "back" as the "Pirates' Den." Only three of the whole party had regular work for the winter; four were carpenters and two bricklayers, who had had regular work and good wages till