R BOUGHS

WILLIS BOYD ALLEN

FOREST HOME SERIES No. 8


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1800

CAMP REINDEER. See page 31

The Forest Home Series. No. 3.

A Sequel to the Mountaineer Series.

FIR BOUGHS.

BY

WILLIS BOYD ALLEN,

AUTHOR OF "THE MOUNTAINEER SERIES," "CHRISTMAS AT SURF POINT," "PINE CONES," "SILVER RAGS," "THE NORTHERN CROSS," "KELP," ETC.

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TO

MY LITTLE WEST INDIAN NIECE,

MARY ADELLA.

CONTENTS.

FIR BOUGHS.

CHAPTER I.

OFF FOR THE WOODS.

"WINTHROP, how should you like to camp out with King and me for a couple of nights?"

"Not all night, father, in a real camp?"

"Should you like to?"

"Oh, jolly, jolly! Will you take us, sir?"

"If your mother has no objections, we will start next Thursday morning and get back Saturday afternoon. Hugh will stay here

both nights, Polly, so you need n't be afraid of being left alone."

Mrs. Alden was a little nervous about it, in her heart, but she could n't bear to spoil their fun; so she smiled, and said she guessed she should have to get along without her three boys for forty-eight hours.

"You 'll be glad enough to come home," she added.

It was one Tuesday morning early in June when Mr. Alden made this proposition. Winnie and King had worked hard since the fifteenth of May in preparing and planting a garden near the log-cabin. He had wanted to give the boys some sort of a vacation for a day or two; and as he him-

self dearly loved to stay in the woods night or day, he had thought of this plan. Hugh was to take care of the cabin, as we have seen, during his absence; and a bright young fellow from the mill had offered to look out for the store from Thursday until Saturday night.

Never was a boy so happy as Winthrop, unless it was his brother King, who was one or two years older, and was therefore too dignified to hop about the floor, clapping his hands and shouting, as Winnie did.

Then, too, there were great preparations to be made. Blankets were selected, and strapped into as tight a bundle as pos-

sible. Tin dippers, a coffee-pot, a tin pail, and a small frying-pan were all the cooking utensils they required. For provisions they took pork, meal, salt, a little corned beef, tea, sugar, and a generous supply of bread, which kept Mrs. Alden at the oven the greater part of the two days that remained. Fish-hooks, lines, and bait were prepared and carefully examined, as Mrs. Alden told the boys they would have nothing to eat for three days but corned beef and bread, unless they caught trout.

Hugh gave one of his great, good-natured laughs when he heard of all this excitement.

"I declare," said he, "ye 'd

think a hull army was startin' off, by the amaount o' gittin' ready!"

Wednesday night was a hard one for Winnie. It seemed as if he never could go to sleep, he was so full of thoughts of the morrow; and his dreams, at last, were full of bears and Indians and trout of most extraordinary size.

Next morning he was awake and up almost as soon as the sun itself, which, as you know, is a very early riser in June.

In fact, the boy dressed himself and crept down from the loft so early that he found himself standing in the kitchen quite alone, before any body else in the house had two eyes open.

"Well," thought he, "I might as well go out and feed Whiteface. It 's the last time I shall see her for three days."

So he slid back the bolt softly, and made his way to the cow's shed.

Whiteface looked rather surprised to see him, and turned her head as far as she could, as much as to say: —

"What in the world are you up for at this time of day? I hope the cabin is n't on fire, or any thing!"

I have no doubt that 's what she tried to say, though all it sounded like was a soft and deep "*Moo-o-o-o!*"

"Ah, Whiteface," said Winnie,

"you 've no idea what a good time I 'm going to have."

He kept working all the time as he talked.

The cow seemed to listen with great interest for a moment or two; then she turned her head to the crib again and forgot all about Winthrop in eating her breakfast.

"Pretty soon," said the boy, "King will come out and milk you, and drive you down to the meadow. To-morrow morning Hugh will be the one to take care of you, and oh, Whiteface, you must be very careful not to tread on him, or turn over the pail, or — Hulloa, King, you up?" as his brother entered the shed.

"All ready for fun?" cried King, as gleefully as Winthrop himself. "Is n't it a glorious day for the start, Win?"

"Splendid! Did you finish putting on those sinkers last night?"

"Every one of 'em."

"And did you put some red apples into the pail?"

"Eight. It makes it pretty heavy, but I guess it will grow lighter before long; eh, Win?"

Winnie gave a caper, to show that he knew what he meant, and dashed off to the wood-pile to start the kitchen fire and so hurry up the breakfast.

Pretty soon King came in with the milk. Stella came running down-stairs with a face bright

STELLA AND CREEPING JENNY. Page 15.

as the morning itself, and after a kiss for each of her brothers began to help as earnestly as the rest.

While she strained the morning's milk and put it away in a cool little half-cellar which the boys had dug the autumn before, King ground the coffee and Winthrop went to the brook for water, filled the kettle, gave Whiteface a good drink, and brought in a pailful for the house. Then father and mother came in, and lastly wee Jenny, who would soon lose her name of "Creeping," she was growing so strong.

At breakfast the family all bowed their heads as usual. Mr. Alden said: —

"Dear Father in heaven, let us not forget the hand which gives us our daily bread. And while we are apart, in the days that are at hand, wilt thou take tender care of thy children at home in the cabin, and those at home in the forest; we can not go away from home, for it is all home wherever thou art. Amen."

Half an hour later the boys, with their father, bade good-by to Mrs. Alden, Stella, and baby, and striking into a merry song as they went, started up the steep mountain-path.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING STORM.

"WHERE do you expect to camp, father?" asked King, after they had been walking steadily upward for about half an hour.

"I mean to go on about a mile further by this path, then strike off toward the south, and stop somewhere beside a brook that comes down between those two mountains you see beyond the valley."

"Are there any bears there?"

It was Winthrop who spoke this time.

"Oh, a few. But we are not

likely to see any. If there were any round here, some of the hunters would have run across their tracks and told us. Look at that striped squirrel!"

"What makes mountains, father? I mean — I know God made them, but how does he make them?"

"There are different ways. But most of it is done by thousands of little workmen."

"Workmen? How funny! That sounds like a fairy story!"

"It is stranger than the queerest fairy story you ever read, Winnie, and more wonderful. In the made-up stories, the giants and dwarfs and fairies do something great and startling just for a few

"Look at that Squirrel." Page 18.

minutes or days; but the little workmen I told you about have been working busily and happily for nobody knows how many thousands of years."

"Oh!"

"The way they make a mountain is to start with a high, level place and carry off little bits from every side, leaving a great piece standing by itself, which people call a hill or a mountain, according to the size."

"Do they work all the year round?"

"Yes, indeed. Only in winter their work is to split off pieces, and in the summer to carry it away."

"What can they be?"

"I know," exclaimed King. "It must be the brooks and rivers, beginning with the very littlest mites of streams, only a few drops of water running together."

"That 's it," replied his father, with a smile at the boy's earnestness.

"But how do they split it in winter?"

"Why, don't you see, Win? The water gets into the rocks and the ground, and freezes, and so splits it by swelling, the way ice always does."

"But some hills — see that one right ahead — are just smooth and round. What makes that?"

King could n't answer, and looked to his father for an explanation.

"Many, many thousands of years ago — after the evergreen time that your mother was telling you about, boys — wise men say this part of the country was covered with thick ice. It moved slowly down the valleys, deepening them, rounding off the hills, and carrying huge rocks from place to place."

"That must be what brought those big rocks in grandfather's old pasture in Maine!"

"Exactly. When the ice melted, down dropped the stone, wherever it happened to be. The great rocks that have been left in that way are often called bowlders."

By this time the party was ready to leave the path. They struck off in the new direction,

having now no guide except the "lay of the land," as Mr. Alden called it, and their compass.

It was much harder work than before, as the tough boughs of the low firs and spruces barred their way or sprung back in their faces. Then too the moss, though deliciously soft beneath their feet, was treacherous and often covered sharp rocks or decayed logs, over which the travelers stumbled. A few miles away were high cliffs where eagles built their nests. They could see one of the huge birds hovering over the forest.

At last Mr. Alden called a halt and proposed lunch.

"Good!" said Winnie, throwing down his bundle. "I 'm as hungry as a bear."

EAGLE BUILDING HER NEST. Page 22.

"We can't stop long, boys, because I want to reach the camping ground early. We must build a good shelter to sleep in, and I don't quite like the looks of the sky.

Winnie glanced up at his father in some alarm, but was immediately re-assured by his calmness. Somehow Winnie felt that if his father was with him things would come out right, no matter what happened. It would be a great deal better, he said to himself, to be out in the woods in a storm with his father, than in the snuggest of houses without him.

After a short half-hour's rest they pushed on.

"See!" cried King, as they came

out into a little open spot, "how black the clouds are!"

Mr. Alden had already seen them, and pushed on as fast as the boys' strength would allow.

Suddenly he stopped.

"Hark!" said he. "I thought I heard thunder."

They all listened intently. The forest was so still that it seemed as if they could hear their hearts beat. The only sound was the rush of a brook a few rods beyond.

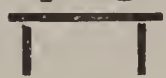
Pretty soon the sound came again. There was no mistaking it—a long, low rumble of thunder, echoing far off among the mountains.

"That settles it, boys," said Mr.

Alden promptly, starting on again. "We must camp in that little clump of evergreens right ahead. It 's of no use to think of reaching the spot I was aiming for before the storm comes. See, there are some white birches, just what we want, and plenty of firs for bedding."

In a couple of minutes they had reached the place he had pointed out, and then how all hands did work!

Mr. Alden cut down four or five bushy young firs with a dozen clips of his axe, and directed Winnie to break off short boughs and pile them in a heap. King was sent to peel birch bark, the biggest sheets he could get off. Mr. Alden him-

self trimmed three of Winnie's fir-trees and placed two of them upright, with one across, like this  . Then he lashed two long poles to the tops of the upright ones, letting the ends reach back to the ground. More poles were laid on for rafters, and then sheets of bark were placed across like shingles, as fast as King could bring them. Some of the larger boughs were flung upon the bark, to keep it from blowing away, and other branches were placed against the side of the camp towards the wind.

Winnie's boughs were now thrown in, and the blankets and provisions on top of them.

Meanwhile the sky grew blacker

and the thunder louder every moment. It took the three workers about half an hour to build the camp, and just as the last bundle was placed under shelter, big drops of rain began to fall.

CHAPTER III.

IN CAMP.

"HURRY up, Win! Pull your feet in out of the rain!"

The three campers threw themselves at full length on the heap of fragrant fir boughs, glad enough to get under shelter.

Winthrop crept over as near his father as possible. He could not help being a little bit afraid, as the lightning glittered among the trees, and thunder crashed overhead.

How it did pour! The sheets of birch bark kept off most of it, but a stream did trickle down here and there, keeping the boys dodging from one side to the other.

"Are you afraid, father?" Winnie asked once.

"No, my boy. You would n't be afraid if you saw me mending the roof of our cabin, would you, no matter how hard the blows sounded?"

"But lightning would kill me."

"So would the hammer if it hit you. And God is ever so much more careful with this thunder and lightning than I could possibly be with my tools."

After an hour of heavy rain, the storm rolled off over the mountains, the rain ceased, and the setting sun shone out brightly.

"It's a regular gold-pour instead of rain-pour!" cried King, pointing to the glistening tops of the firs all around them.

The first thing to be done was to build a fire. The camp had been built near a large rock, and in front of this Mr. Alden proposed to have the camp-fire. Everything, however, seemed to be soaking wet.

"I don't see what we can use for kindlings," said Winnie disconsolately. "The trees are just dripping."

"I guess we'll find a way."

Mr. Alden was an old camper, and knew just what to do at such a time as this.

"You peel off some of the inner strips of that birch bark, Winthrop. Reach up under the rafters, where the rain has n't come through. Now, King, you and I will find some dry splints."

Taking the axe he walked up to the dead trunk of an old pine; a "stub," as the woodsmen call it. It was full of holes where woodpeckers had built their nests in it, and was, all together, about twice as high as his head.

"Now, then, look out!"

And whack! went the axe into the side of the old stub.

Another blow, and another. Long splints, riven out of the very center of the tree by the axe, began to fall. Presently there was a good armful. "Dry as chips!" King joyfully shouted to Winnie.

In five minutes more the red blaze was dancing up through the wood, and crackling in the jolliest way imaginable.

"We won't try to catch any fish to-night," said Mr. Alden: "it 's so late. To-morrow morning, though, we must have trout for breakfast."

A simple meal was prepared, of beef, toasted bread and butter, and tea; they all ate with great relish, and had a merry time over their first supper in the woods.

The half-hour of fading daylight that remained they used in gathering fire-wood for the night. Mr. Alden felled a good-sized birch, and cut it into six-foot lengths for the fire.

When all was prepared, and the flames were hissing and humming cosily among the wet twigs, the campers once more threw themselves down on the fir boughs,

over which they had first laid their heaviest blanket.

"Almost Fourth of July," mused Winnie, listening to the fire that snapped as loudly as crackers. "I wonder what we shall do."

"Oh, celebrate some way, I guess," said King. "Father," he added suddenly, "it's a splendid time for a story. Can't you tell us one about the Fourth?"

"Well, let me see," said Mr. Alden thoughtfully. "I don't know but I can. I can tell you about a boy who made a little Declaration of Independence all of his own."

"Oh, good! Let's hear about him."

"Very well," said Mr. Alden. "I 'll make the story last just as long as that birch stick does. The one in the middle, I mean. When that breaks in two, I 'll stop telling."

"Ho!" said Winnie, "I 'd just like to sprinkle a little water on it."

Mr. Alden stretched himself out comfortably, and began as follows:

"Hooray for the Fourth! Only two weeks off!"

Rob Sutton rushed into the house after school, slamming the door after him. His mother had winced a little at the sudden noise, but met her boy with the pleasant smile he loved to see.

"What are you planning to do on the glorious Fourth, Rob?" she asked, as he looked up into her face.

"Oh, Dick Reed and I are goin' to get up at three o'clock and set off two bunches of crackers an' half a dozen cannon-crackers, and then fire off his new brass cannon, and" —

"There 's one thing I have n't heard yet," observed Mrs. Sutton, her arm still round the boy.

"What 's that, mother — pinwheels? Just wait till night!"

"No, I was n't thinking of pinwheels nor Roman candles," she said, laughing outright this time. "I was a little surprised that you did n't plan something that should

really keep in mind the anniversary. You know what the day is for?"

"Of course, ma'am. The Declaration of Independence!"

Rob straightened up a little as he said it.

"Well, if I were you I'd have one this year."

"A 'declaration of independence'? How, mother? There's nobody ruling over us now. I just wish there was a war; would n't I fight 'em!"

"Why did n't you shut the gate behind you, yesterday, Rob, when you went to meet Dick? You know how the cattle got in and trampled on the garden."

Rob hung his head at the recollection.

"I could n't stop, ma'am. I had to be on hand with the fellows."

"*Could n't* stop? *Had* to be? I thought 'nobody ruled over us' nowadays."

"Well — I mean" —

"Don't think I am scolding, Robbie. We finished all the sober talk about the gate yesterday. But, you see, you were really a servant to your desire to play. When you put off going on my errand till too late this morning, it was laziness that commanded you to stand still, and you obeyed. If I were a boy I 'd declare independence on the Fourth of July, once for all — independence of all unjust and bad masters, like the one I spoke of."

"That's splendid!" cried Rob, catching the idea at once. "I'll get Dick and some of the other fellows to join. Would you write it out, mother? 'When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one boy to run errands' — that 's the way it ought to begin."

"Hardly necessary to write it, I think," answered Mrs. Sutton, with her gentle smile. "There is just One to whom you may repeat all your promises and declarations, and who will help you till you have 'perfect liberty.' Now run off to your dinner, and we 'll see how your resolutions prosper."

Dick Reed was enthusiastic over the new way of observing the Fourth.

"That is," said he, "if you don't leave out crackers."

"I don't see," remarked Rob gravely, after a moment's reflection, "that crackers have any thing to do with it, or pin-wheels. I'm not quite sure about serpents, because they scare girls, an' it 's no fun lettin' 'em off unless there 's somebody round to screech when they begin to fizz."

Serpents were accordingly ruled out.

"Like tea in the old times," put in Roland Jackson, a third patriot.

The night before the Fourth was hot and sultry. As soon as the sun set horns began to toot in the town of Birchville, where Rob lived,

and guns to pop. Invalids turned wearily in their beds, and wished the great day were ended instead of beginning. Men with gray in beard and hair remembered their own boyish days and longed to go out and toot with the youngsters. Rob retired early, having left a piece of string hanging out of his window, with the end a few feet from the ground. The other end was attached firmly to his thumb, and Dick was bound by solemn agreement to "yank" the aforesaid string at exactly 2.55 A.M.

"I 'll pull," said Dick earnestly, "till you wake up or come out o' that window."

ROB'S OPEN WINDOW. Page 40.

At this point in the story the great birch log sagged a little, then fairly broke in two, sending up a shower of sparks into the dark sky."

"Oh! oh!" cried Winnie. "We must n't stop there, father. Do finish it!"

"Well," said Mr. Alden laughingly, "if you 'll put on another log and stir up the fire a little, I 'll tell you about Rob's celebration."

CHAPTER IV.

ROB'S CELEBRATION.

"THERE," said Winthrop, creeping into the shelter again, and brushing pieces of wet bark and moss from his jacket, "that fire will last as long as the story does this time, I guess."

"All ready, sir," said King. "Did the boys' plan work well?"

Mr. Alden answered by going on with the story.

Rob found no difficulty next morning in waking at the summons. It was half an hour sooner than the appointed time, to be

sure, but Dick never wavered for a trifle like that. With pockets stuffed full of delicious-smelling red crackers and slow-match, the two boys crept off to a vacant field near by. There they found half a dozen others similarly armed, and grouped about a good-sized brass cannon.

"Wait till just three!" commanded Rob, who was the leader. "Lucky we thought of this place to fire. One of the selectmen called on my father only last night and said we must n't make a disturbance in the other end of the town before six o'clock."

The boys fidgeted, lighted their slow-match, and swung it about in fiery circles.

At a quarter before three, Roland Jackson fired a cracker right in their midst, by accident.

"Well, we might as well begin now," said Rob, rather relieved at the excuse. "Horns all ready? Bunch of crackers? Cannon loaded — grass in the muzzle to make her speak? Now, when I say three."

"One — "

Before he got any farther a slight little figure flitted into the circle.

"Oh, boys! please don't fire off any thing loud. My mother's sick, and father — he's " —

"Drunk!" finished one of the boys roughly. "I saw him drinking last night. Let's go ahead.

What odds will it make? They 'll all be firing soon."

"Please!" began the girl.

"Oh, go ahead, Dick. Touch off your cannon. The slow-match 's all burnin' up. I say let 's fire, don't you, fellows?"

There was a murmur of assent, and one or two called out, "Fire away!"

"Please!"

"You shut up an' go home, Doll Harkins. We can't have all our fun spoiled by" —

"Can't! Who says we can't?"

It was Rob's voice, clear and strong in the dim twilight. He had been silent until now, fighting his battle.

"Who says we can't?" he re-

peated. "I, for one, can do what I please. I do want to have a good time, and a regular old slam. But I want still more to do the right thing. I can't answer for any of you fellows, but the want-to-have-a-good-time sha'n't rule over me, I can tell you. I go in for independence."

Rob paused for breath after his speech. The boys were puzzled. This was a new view of the matter.

"Hooray for the Declaration!" shouted Dick, half under his breath. "Put my name down under yours."

Well, you can easily see that the tide was turned. Boys have good hearts, and the whole crowd

stuffed crackers into pockets once more, to go to far-off fields or wait until a later hour.

Dollie dried her tears, and went back to her mother, who was sleeping restfully in a little hovel near by. In the course of the day Mr. Sutton called there, and left brightness and hope, for the girl's father was not a bad man, and was full of remorse when he came to himself.

As for Rob and the rest, they made noise enough during the daylight hours to last for a twelvemonth; at least, so thought the neighbors.

"I told Him about it last evening," Rob whispered to his mother, when she sat down by his bed

that night, and kissed her boy's forehead. "I didn't know how soon I'd have to 'declare,' but I guess He helped me, don't you, mother?"

There was silence for a minute or two in the little camp, as Mr. Alden finished his story.

Then Winnie, having remarked that it was "first-rate," gave a tremendous yawn.

The other two laughed.

"I guess it's somebody's bed-time," said his father.

It was a long time before Winthrop could get asleep. The forest was very dark, and he could not help fancying he heard wild beasts stepping softly to and fro behind the camp.

Having at last dropped into a heavy sleep, he was aroused at about midnight by a long, dismal note from the depths of the woods.

It almost froze Winthrop's blood in his veins, it was so like the wolf's howl he had read of in books.

"Father, father!" he whispered with a shaking voice, "I 'm afraid!"

Mr. Alden, who had himself been drowsing until his son spoke, reached over and clasped his little frightened hand. In a moment the terrible voice came again.

"Ow-oo-o-oo!" it echoed in the darkness.

"What is it, father?" asked Winthrop again, clinging to his father's hand.

"Only an owl, my son. Go to sleep again, dear."

Oh, what a comfort that was! Winnie's hair seemed to smooth itself down again.

Still he could not let go his father's hand, but held it from the very memory of his fright; and, so holding it, went to sleep.

CHAPTER V.

TROUT-FISHING.

When Winnie awoke the next morning, the first sound he heard was such a beautiful one that he almost held his breath to listen. Winnie had never heard a flute, and did not know that it sounded like one; but he knew it was a bird singing gloriously, and that is even better than a flute.

"A hermit thrush!" exclaimed Mr. Alden, who was already awake.

Then they listened again to the wonderful music.

But Winnie was too real a boy

to lie in bed long hearing a bird sing. The air was full of the balsamic fragrance of the fir, and with a rush of delight he realized that he was in the woods, and had still a whole day and night to come before it would be time to go home.

All three of the campers, now thoroughly roused from sleep, jumped up and ran to the brook, where they had a wash in the delicious clear water.

"Whew!" cried Winnie, scattering the bright drops round him like a sparrow in its bath; "is n't it cold!"

"Splendid! Shall we go on any farther to-day, father?"

"I guess not, King. I don't

believe we can find a better spot than this, and here's our camp, all built."

"What shall we name it, father?"

"I think we'd better call it 'Camp Reindeer.'"

"Why?"

"On account of the *rain, dear*," said Mr. Alden, with a twinkle in his eye.

"O-oh!" cried King, with a shout, "what a joke, father! I thought you called it so because there were n't any reindeer here"

"Or because it *rained ere* we were ready," suggested Mr. Alden solemnly.

Winnie had been thinking it out. Now he chimed in with his suggestion.

"We 'll call it 'Reindeer' because it *rained here*," said he. At which, of course, there was another shout.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Alden, their rather hasty toilet being completed, "if you want any breakfast, you 've got to catch it first."

"All right, sir. Here goes. Come along, Win, with the bait."

King was a good fisherman for a boy of his size, and had often provided the Mountaineers with a good mess of trout.

"Very well," added his father. "I 'll build up the fire and have some tea and hasty pudding ready by the time you are back with the trout. Don't stay more than an hour, King. Keep close beside

the brook, and in any case stop fishing when you 've caught two dozen. That will be enough for breakfast."

Winthrop was greatly excited; he had never been fishing before. King cut two short, slender rods from some young birches growing by the brook-side.

"If we were down in the meadows," he said to Winnie, as he trimmed the rods, "I 'd take alders. But up here on the mountains we must just take the best we can find."

His brother watched the operation of trimming with great interest, and as soon as the rods were finished, helped King tie the lines to the tips. The hooks and sinkers were already on the lines.

"Do you suppose it hurts them awfully, King?" asked Winthrop, who was a tender-hearted little fellow.

"I don't believe it is very comfortable to be hauled out of the water with a hook," admitted the older boy. "But people who have studied about it say that fish can't suffer so very much. Insects suffer less than fish, and so on. I believe we were meant to catch fish and eat them, anyway; and we 'll be just as merciful about it as we can. It 's no worse than we do to cows and even sheep."

Winnie looked relieved, and crept off to another pool. King now began to fish, and their string lengthened rapidly. They caught

no more, however, as large as Winnie's first prize.

The fish bit well, and it was within the half-hour that the twenty-fourth trout was landed. The boys drew in their lines, stuck the hooks into the soft bark of their rods, and started up-hill for camp.

"Hurrah!" shouts Winthrop, as he sees a column of smoke mounting gayly among the fir-tops. "Look, father!" holding up the string.

"Well done!" says Mr. Alden, turning the string round admiringly. "That's a big one at the bottom."

"I caught him, the very first one."

"That was a good beginning. Now put your rod away, Winnie, and watch me while I dress the fish, so that you will know how yourself next time."

Winnie is much interested in this, and finally thinks he could do it as well as his father, if he were cast away on a desert island.

"Only they lose their knives, getting ashore from the wreck," remarks King thoughtfully.

"Ah, but they make new ones from rusty iron hoops!" cries Winthrop.

They laugh, wash faces and hands again, and sit down to breakfast, Mr. Alden having meanwhile fried the fish.

"Plates!" cries Mr. Alden; and

King jumps up, runs off a little way, and returns with half a dozen pieces of clean birch bark.

What a jolly breakfast! Mr. Alden tells stories, and keeps the boys laughing half the time. Winnie does not relish tea without milk, and prefers brook water cold as ice. While the campers are enjoying themselves, the thrush sings sweetly in the depths of the forest.

"Now," said Mr. Alden, after the meal was over, "what shall we do next?"

Winthrop was in favor of going a-fishing again, but it was finally decided to take a walk to the top of a mountain not far away. The view was grand.

The way back to camp seemed very long. The boys were tired, and looked forward to a good rest on those fir boughs.

"Are n't we most there?" asked Winnie at length.

His father glanced at him rather anxiously.

"I 'm sorry you 're tired, my son," he said in his tender way, without answering his question directly.

After half an hour's more hard walking he suddenly stopped and said: —

"Boys, I may as well tell you that I don't know the nearest way back to camp. It can't be far away, but I think we had better have lunch before we go farther."

Fortunately all three had filled their pockets before leaving camp. They were very hungry, but Mr. Alden made them save half the supply; and they knew he was afraid they might have to stay out all night.

On they tramped again, growing more and more weary. There was no sign of a storm this afternoon, but the air was hot and sultry.

Lower and lower sank the sun.

"We may as well be looking for a place to camp," said Mr. Alden quietly.

Winnie looked up into his father's face, and tried hard to be brave. But hunger, fatigue, and dread of the dark night in that lonely place, all twitched at his

lips and made a lump in his throat.

"I think that would be a good place" — began King, when Winnie uttered a cry of fear.

"O father, father," he whispered, "there 's a fire in the trees ahead! Can it be Indians?"

The others stopped and looked eagerly in the direction pointed out by the boy. They could see nothing.

"You must be mistaken," said Mr. Alden. "Besides, there are n't any Indians about here, that I know of."

"Oh, I saw it, sir, just as plain! It flared right up, and then died away. There — look, look!" his voice dying away to a whisper again.

All three advanced slowly. The flickering light of a fire could now be seen plainly.

All at once King gave a joyful shout.

"Home again! Its our own old camp-fire, and here we are, safe in camp!"

Sure enough, there was the shelter, looking snug and home-like. One or two old brands in the fire had been puffed into a blaze by the wind, and it was their first light that Winnie had seen.

Oh, how good the soft fir boughs felt! As soon as the campers had had a fifteen minutes' rest, they set about their preparations for supper. King had time before

dark to walk down the brook a little way, and catch some trout. He brought in a string of fourteen, some of them pretty good-sized ones.

Very thankful and happy, the man and his two sons sat down to their evening meal. Just as they had finished and had built up the fire for the night, hark! the hermit thrush began to sing as sweetly as ever.

The boys slept that night as they never slept before, and the sun was high Friday morning before the camp was fairly awake.

After breakfast they packed up their blankets, gave three rousing cheers for "Camp Reindeer," and started for home.

The walk was a pleasant one, and as the last part of the way was down hill, it seemed an easy one.

Polly, Stella, Hugh, and Baby Jenny were all out in front of the cabin when they reached home.

"Glad to see ye back," said the backwoodsman. "Did n't know but ye 'd like it so well ye 'd stay the year out up in the maountains."

"I am very thankful," said Polly softly, as she held her dear ones in her arms again.

"Den, Den!" cooed Jenny, creeping and toddling up to be taken notice of, while Stella's face shone like the little star she was.

The story of the "Fir Boughs" is ended, but there is much more to tell about the Forest Home and the Mountaineers.

The next volume will be called

A Leaf of Laurel.