

The Chemawa American

Printed at Chemawa, Oregon, and Devoted to the Interests of Indian Education

3 MAY 8

Vol. XXVIII

Wednesday, March 23, 1927

No. 27

WAPECKMAW

An interesting Indian legend written by Alfred Colgrove, a member of our senior class:

Once there lived a sea god called Wapeckmaw, so named because he lived on the ocean. He was a great friend to the Indians, and strove constantly to better their condition.

In the early days the Indians of the lower Klamath ate the pitch of the big pine tree. On account of the stickiness and taste of the pitch Wapeckmaw went to a far-off place called Juanik (meaning heaven above) to look for some food to replace the pitch.

When he arrived at Juanik he wandered around for a long time and found an acorn tree guarded by three women. These three women were cracking acorns and keeping tab on the shells. Wapeckmaw wondered how he could get one of the shells. He had great power, so he wished a shell to come into his pocket. He felt in his pocket and found the shell there. He took the shell out and said, "Oh, my lips are sore from cracking acorns." Then he rubbed his lips with the shell and put it back in his pocket.

The three women sat there in amazement and asked each other where he could have gotten the acorn shell? They said to themselves that there were no acorns in any other part of the universe. The women began to count the shells but the Sea God wished the shell to go back to the pile and the shell did. They counted them again and found them all there. They thought there must be another acorn tree some place, but where was it? Again they counted the shells and found them all to be there. He wished the shell and acorn to come back to him and it did.

He bade the women farewell and departed for home. After he left the women counted the shells again and found one to be missing. They knew they had been tricked. They chased this strange man. They were very powerful and fleet footed because they had been given added powers by the Supreme God that had delegated them to guard the precious acorns. The three women were gaining on Wapeckmaw and he realized he would soon be caught and killed. He saw a hollow tree and stepped inside and at his command the tree closed, leaving him inside. The women arrived at the tree where he was last seen and could not

find him, so they had to give up the chase.

He wondered how he would get out, so he commanded the hole to open, but it remained closed. He heard a tapping on the trunk of the tree and he said, "wee-ooh-tah-yak-sis (meaning, make a hole quick).

It was the sapsucker that heard Wapeckmaw, but the little bird made slow progress. He went for his big brother, the woodpecker. The woodpecker came and started his task and made much progress. He soon had a hole large enough for Wapeckmaw to come out of the hollow tree. Wapeckmaw asked the birds what they wanted for their reward? The woodpecker wanted his head and neck all red. Wapeckmaw made him promise to stay far away in the hills and be hard to find, so his attractive head would not cause him to be killed. The woodpecker promised and the Sea God granted his request. Wapeckmaw cut his arm and put blood on the head and neck of the woodpecker. To this day the woodpecker has a bright red head and stays far out in the hills and is very hard to kill.

Then the little sapsucker asked for his reward. He wanted just a little red on the top of his head. Wapeckmaw granted his wish and told him that he might stay around the Indian homes.

The crow wished a favor of Wapeckmaw. He wanted to be all red even to his toenails. Wapeckmaw wanted to grant his request but before granting it he wanted him to promise to live back in the hills, as the woodpecker had promised to do, and "I will make you very much prized by the Indians on account of your color." The crow would not promise and quarreled with Wapeckmaw. Finally Wapeckmaw consented, and told the crow to close his eyes and that he would fix him. Instead of making him red he mixed charcoal and water and made him black from head to foot. He told the crow to fly until he struck something and then to open his eyes and make a noise like a woodpecker. The crow flew away and lighted in one of the Indian houses, and tried to make a noise like a woodpecker. He could only "caw." He looked at himself and became very angry and returned to the place where he left Wapeckmaw. He found the little sapsucker there.

(Continued on page 4)