

## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD, BUT ISN'T

**W**HAT ARE EUROPEAN CHILDREN being taught about the Great War? The answer to that question, if we could find the answer, has seemed to Mr. William G. Shepherd more than likely to show "whether there will ever be another war." Hence an investigation, whose results he gives us in an article in *Our World*. Says Mr. Shepherd:

## THE LITERARY DIGEST

May 6, 1922

p. 48

In Germany school children in various districts have different history books. In one district the book will contain all the old allusions to the Kaiser and the greatness of his family. In another district all of this has been cut out. There is such a discrepancy between the various books that the explanations of the school officials are highly entertaining. I sought out Dr. Becker, secretary of the Prussian ministry of education. He is an avowed Republican.

"There are two things that we are not teaching our children," he said. "One subject that is forbidden is the Kaiser and his dynasty. The other is the war."

"But there are history books that tell of the Kaiser," I said.

"Yes," he smiled, "but let me explain. You see, books cost a great deal of money. The old histories used to glorify the Kaiser. We still have many copies of these old books on hand. We can not afford to throw them away. But we have issued orders to all teachers that they must not ask the children to study the Kaiser and his dynasty. That part of the book is skipt over in every school in Prussia. But we have gone further than this. Whenever a publisher issues a new edition of a school-book, he cuts out every reference to the old dynasty. We have given orders to all the publishers of school-books that this must be done. The editing is carefully done, and whenever a child is given a new history book in the Prussian schools, you may be sure that every bit of Kaiser-worship and king-worship has been cut out of it."



"Has anything new been put in its place?"

"No. Editing does not cost so much, but the addition of material is a difficult thing."

"But are the children being taught nothing about the war?"

"Not a single word," said Dr. Becker. "The teachers are not allowed to discuss the war. Their history books do not contain a single word about the war."

"Is this done purposely?" I asked.

"Yes," he explained. "It's politics. You see there are six different parties in Prussia. Each different party has a different idea about the causes of the war, the events and the mistakes. As soon as the ministries of education start to prepare a story of the war for the school children; some leader of a party arises and says that the story is wrong, in some detail. Then we have to drop the whole thing and start over again. We must find some story that will suit all the parties, including the Socialists and the extremists on both sides. It is an impossible thing to do, and we have quit trying."

"Our latest plan is to have a chronology of the war appear in the school-books so that the children may learn the dates of various important events. We have four experts working on this now but while they agree on dates, they can not agree in describing what happened on those dates. Something about the inwardness of the war is bound to creep into any arrangement of dates, and so we are in as much trouble with our new plan as we were with our previous efforts. We must try to satisfy the parents of the children as well as the party leaders," continued Dr. Becker. "Parents are giving their version of the war to their children at home, and if our school-books give a different explanation from that believed by the parents, we will be in trouble."

"The schools are not as they used to be in the Kaiser's time. Then the government decided what the children should be taught, and that was the end of it. To-day, in every school, the children have their own organization, with a spokesman, who has a right to criticize the teacher on any occasion, or even



## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

go over the teacher's head, if necessary, to higher authorities. The parents have taken an interest in the schools and in what their children are being taught, and a parent may go either to a leader of the party in his district and make a complaint, which will reach us with a roar in due time, or he may complain to the school officials themselves."

I suggested that it must have been necessary to tell the children something about the revolution which changed the form of government in Germany.

"Well," hesitated Dr. Becker, "whenever that question comes up, we find it possible to refer to the attempted revolution of 1848 in Germany with which the children are familiar. We are able to point out that the revolution of 1918 was a sequence of 1848. There is a great deal in common in both revolutions, and sometimes we are able to show how the 1918 revolution was a sequence of the revolution in which the grandparents of our pupils were engaged.

"Certain democratic principles that caused the 1848 affair also produced the revolution of two years ago. The war gave these principles a chance to manifest themselves. That is as far as we can go in telling the children about the recent affairs in Germany."

What, meanwhile, are French school children being taught about the war? For an answer to this question, Mr. Shepherd went to Paris and sought out the minister of Public Instruction, who, tho too cautious to make a statement, himself, detailed a subordinate to talk:

"When peace came," said this official, "the school-teachers everywhere in France felt free to ignore the old military regulations and to tell their pupils in the class-rooms just what had happened during the previous four years. There were not text-books with which the teachers could work; so many of them began giving little lectures to their pupils.

"But the department of education found itself in trouble immediately. Parents deluged us with complaints. They said their children were being taught lies about the war. Socialist workmen said their children were being instructed in imperialism. Caillaux's followers said that teachers were lying about the origin and purpose of the war. Parents of the upper classes said their children were being taught Socialism in their study of the war. It was a trying time for us. We saw that something must be done; so we issued orders that teachers were not to try to teach their pupils about the war until proper text-books had been issued.

"Ever since then we have been looking for proper text-books.

But we can not find them. The text-book writers tell as many different stories as the teachers used to tell.

"You see," he continued, "the whole difficulty lies in the fact that we have seven influential parties in France.

"It was necessary for us to find text-books that would contain versions of the war that would satisfy members of all these parties. Well, that is impossible. We can not do it. Parents belong to one or another of these parties, and they raise so much trouble when their own version of the war is not told to their children that we have finally decided that the fathers and mothers of France must be the modern history teachers of France until the war has become more distant and party feelings lie down."

He explained how text-books are selected in France. A superior council of the ministry of education passes on all books which are submitted by text-book writers. The books which are approved are put on a list which is sent to all the schools of France. From this list the school officials in the various districts of France may choose the books which they consider best



## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

adapted for the local schools.

"At first," continued the official, "the text-book writers deluged the superior council with books about the war. The members of the council found themselves disagreeing about the facts stated in these books. Very soon the complaints of the parents began to pour in on us, and we decided that, if the council itself could not agree, neither could teachers or parents."

"When do you think you will be able to begin studying the history of the war in your schools?" I asked.

"Not until this generation dies," he answered. "You see everybody is in politics or has some political leaning. No text-book writer or school-teacher is free of political bias. He sees everything through the eyes of his own politics and beliefs. Whatever he wants to believe looks like the truth to him; whatever he doesn't want to believe looks false. And there we have the difficulty."

Leaving Paris, Mr. Shepherd went to London, where he called upon Mr. Richards, who has charge of the English school inspectors, and asked him what English school children were being taught about the war.

"We have an Anglo-Saxon dread," he said, "of permitting the government to control the schools. All school government in England is local. The government does not control the publication of school text-books. Any schoolmaster or member of a school board may go to any publisher and purchase any book he wishes and introduce it into the local school.

"The only thing the national government does is to inspect and advise. Our inspectors move about among all the schools constantly, and, if they find anything amiss—subjects being wrongly considered or improper books being used—they make recommendations which, in time reach the local authorities. And then the proper changes are usually made. The local authorities rarely disagree with the national school inspectors."

In a glass case in Mr. Richard's office were rows of text-books. He went to this case and took out a dozen or more small books.

"I won't say that text-books on the Great War are not being written and even put into the schools in some localities," he said. "But the inspectors have an infallible test for these books. If the books do not meet the test, they are usually withdrawn from the school."

"What is the test?" I asked.

"You see, all these books are written anonymously. No reliable and well-known text-book writers have attempted to write any text-book of the war. All the school histories that have appeared, with a very few exceptions, have been thrown together for greedy publishers, by hack writers. The paper is poor, as you will notice, the illustrations are unspeakably poor, and the statements of facts are absolutely unreliable.

"Every one of these unsigned anonymous text-books found by our inspectors in use in the schoolrooms is immediately thrown out. The result is that children in England are not learning the history of the war in our schools."

"What about geography?" I asked.

"Well, the teachers are presenting geography in a hit-or-miss way. The map-makers are not taking any chances or making maps for schoolroom use which may be right to-day but wrong to-morrow.

"As a usual thing the teachers use colored crayons and draw the new borders and the new countries in the old maps."

"And there you are!" gasps Mr. Shepherd. Altho in Germany, France and England every child must learn to read "the printing-press is paralyzed and the

## NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

historian is palsied when it comes to the task of telling the new generation about the war."



**"WASN'T THERE ANY WAR?"**

German school-books avoid all mention of the World War, but they can't fool these Berlin school children.