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By Leonard Dubkin

*Illustrated by Suzanne Suba*

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## A. J. Cronin Creates Robert Shannon

*THE GREEN YEARS.* By A. J. Cronin.  
Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1944.  
347 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by NATHAN L. ROTHMAN

THIS is not one of Dr. Cronin's more effective novels. To get right down to the truth, it is rather a weak and tentative effort, lacking both the assurance and the dramatic outline which are generally characteristic of his work. Some of this lack of tone is certainly the result of design rather than accident, since the story is simply an account of a boy's growth from eight to eighteen. Such a tale would be expected to ramble, to unwind like a kitestring rather than to expand from any dramatic center. Yet even here, in the history of a youth, some position must be taken by the writer other than that of friendly narrator. He may take a youth's view of life, give it to us through eyes drowned in new sight, ears and nostrils assailed with the wonderful, agonizing freshness of sensation. Or he may give us the man's view, looking backward, with some vision be it bitter or proud, just so long as there is an achieved vantage point from which all past and present falls into place and has meaning. You do not need to be Joyce or Wolfe to do either of these things; it would be enough to reach for them.

Dr. Cronin's Robert Shannon is neither one thing nor the other. His is

not the hot, immediate experience of youth, nor the remembered pantomime, long ago played, now understood. Robert has none of the spirit of youth, none of the spine of maturity. He seems in fact to have been created expressly to appeal to our least critical sentiments, a cautious, affecting little man of sugar and water, sweet and harmless, no visible character. He is an orphan in Scotland, living with grandparents, he is the only Catholic in his school, he must struggle for a kind word and the right to walk in his school yard, he is deprived at the last moment, by illness, of a coveted school prize that was his, his best friend is killed in an accident. All of these crosses are piled upon his back to show how he can bear them and walk his ten years—yet somehow it seems that nothing has happened. There is not the feeling of real suffering, or its surmounting, here. You need more of a character for that. It comes down to this, then: that young Robert Shannon is not a successful, living creation, and not all the adventures in unhappy Scotland will make him so. The other characters about him are similarly unrealized, the fantastic grandfather, the gentle Alison, the knightly and fated Gavin, all faintly Dickensian in flavor without having the original rich stuffings inside their skins. The book is altogether a mild, even soothing affair, despite its unhappy circumstances. This is a combination of effects that may indeed please many readers.

## For an Aviator Killed Over Germany

By Paul Engle

WHAT should a fighting man  
Take to his death beside  
Powerful anger and  
A private inner pride

That he used in one act  
Of terrible, clean tension,  
Skill of hand, the eye's  
Delicate suspension?

Wanting but solid earth,  
The friendly look, the bare  
Hearthstone's warmth, he died  
In the aloof cold air.

He did not train for death,  
Practising night and negation.  
By life, touch, love he turned  
Athlete of resignation.

What can we say above  
Ground for him gone under?  
Not prayer, pity, praise,  
Nor weeping, only wonder,

Only astonishment  
A man of quiet name,  
Dark, calm and kind, should die  
In fury and in flame.

For life unplanned, light, free,  
Any commemoration  
In rigid stone would be  
A marble mutilation.

Let us have one intent:  
Grow grief in our own face  
To be, in that live place,  
A mobile monument.

Not that he was brave,  
Left family and friend,  
His was a mightier end—  
A world grows from his grave

This frantic fact alone  
Defies the sound for sorrow,  
We walk into tomorrow  
Over his breath and bone.

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BY WENDELL BERGE, ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

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am sure that this work will reach a wide and appreciative audience among all concerned with industrial as well as political freedom."

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## WAR BONDS *Not a Gift, But Thrift*

## "Bohemian" Valhalla in Philadelphia

*BABES IN THE WOOD.* By Marion Sturges-Jones. Illustrated by B. Shermund. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1944. 223 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by SARA HENDERSON HAY

MARION STURGES-JONES'S reminiscences of a teen-age spent during the teen-age of the century is a thoroughly delightful book. It is inevitable, of course, that it must bring to mind Cornelia Otis Skinner's recollections of the same period, but "Babes in the Wood" certainly does not suffer by comparison. One never feels that Mrs. Sturges-Jones stretches a point to be funny, or verges on the burlesque. Her heart is equally light and gay, but it is her own heart, and she and her mother emerge from these pages as completely engaging personalities, described with vividness and wit, with tenderness combined with an unsparing sense of humor.

The book takes us back to 1917-1918, when the author and her mother lived what their exceedingly conservative Montreal relatives and friends considered a shockingly Bohemian existence in a boarding house peopled by eccentrics on a shabby but perfectly respectable street in Philadelphia. Mother was an incurable romantic, stage-struck ever since she had played a minor role in a James K. Hackett performance many years before, and she

never ceased thereafter to consider herself "of the Profession." Young Marion, so to speak, cut her teeth on a stage door, and was better acquainted with the drama and the great names and personalities thereof than she was with the Three R's and what her relatives believed were the proper interests for little girls. When her father died, she and Mother refused the shelter of the family, and with courage and the shield of inviolable innocence continued their "Bohemian" way of life. Mother added to their meagre resources by being a paid companion to a succession of rich old ladies, and at one time she got a really glamorous job as receptionist at the Ecole de Ballet Russe, which was conducted by one Nina Virovna who turned out, regrettably, to be not all she should have been.

Marion, after a brief and highly uncongenial career as secretary to a Presbyterian minister, head of a large net-work which controlled Sunday School missionaries, went to work for the War Department, where at the age of seventeen she found herself supervising a large staff of civilians and enlisted men. Her experiences in this position where Army personnel twice her age were, to put it mildly, astonished to find themselves managed by a Junior Miss; hers and Mother's bouts with their landlord, who also kept an antique shop and was given to shifting their furniture about without warning; their excursion to Merry Wood Manor (Kamp Kill Kare under any other name . . .); the charming of Willy with a homemade pink organdie dress; the pitfalls which in their unassailable innocence these two ladies trod lightly over without ever realizing they were there—all are recorded here with zest and gaiety and gentle nostalgia. Those of us who remember the False Armistice of 1918 will find that chapter particularly poignant.

"Babes in the Wood" has the quality of being both endearing and very funny. It is comedy of the best sort, with a little flavor of pathos, genuine and unpretentious, and it will strike a responsive chord in the breasts of many people who remember the days. Those who do not remember will, I am sure, be equally captivated. The delightful illustrations by B. Shermund add to the charm of the book.

### ANSWERS TO LITERARY QUIZ

1. John Milton. 2. George Sand. 3. Robert Burns. 4. Pearl Buck. 5. Izaak Walton. 6. Charles Lamb. 7. Jonathan Swift. 8. William Shakespeare. 9. Eugene Field. 10. Robert Frost.

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