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## Book Reviews

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## BOOK REVIEWS

CIVILISATION AND THE GROWTH OF LAW. William A. Robson.  
New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935. Pp. xv, 354.

The subtitle of this book very aptly describes its contents—"A study of the relations between men's ideas about the universe and the institutions of law and government"—and yet does not begin to hint at the wealth of interesting and readable material contained therein. The author is a barrister-at-law of Lincoln's Inn and a reader in Administrative Law at the University of London, and he has written several other books on law and government. Drawing on a vast store of illustrative material, he makes the book hard to set aside once it is begun. Yet he has at the same time made a fine contribution to the history of the evolution of law.

The material is divided into three parts, the first dealing with the origins of law, the second with the law of nature, and the third with the nature of law. Beginning with earliest society, Mr. Robson pictures the laws of the tribes and the importance of strict adherence thereto, and traces the development of the idea that law was divinely inspired, illustrated in the Bible by the Ten Commandments as given to Moses by Jehovah. The transition from oral tradition to the written word in an attempt to preserve the letter of the law is closely followed, with interesting examples—taken from the various religions—of the modes through which such changes came about. One of the best things about the book is the way in which the beliefs of religion, superstition, magic and science are woven together to form the system of rules in the community. The tests used for ascertaining the judgment of the gods upon a wrongdoer, and the gradual growth of the concept of justice in the abstract, reveal the part that superstition has played throughout the centuries.

In the second section, the author discusses the effect that human laws and political institutions have had on man's conception of the universe, showing the interrelation between these great forces controlling civilization. The contributions of the world's great thinkers, such as Plato, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Bentham, and the various political and social philosophies of the long epochs of history are briefly outlined.

Finally, the last section of the book takes up the relationship

of contemporary science to contemporary law, and the dependence of one upon quantitative exactness while the other becomes more and more a matter of tendencies or approximations, often clouded by petty details and insignificant technicalities. The conflict between custom and law in some cases, such as the attempted Prohibition experiment, is balanced by the merger in other cases of the two, public habit and sanction of the greatest number becoming the law of the community. The book ends with a hope for the future of civilization based on the power of man to shape his own destiny, now that he is freed in so large a measure from the bonds of determinism and domination by the gods. The attainment of a new freedom and responsibility encourages the belief that out of the tangled mass of laws of today will come a coördination of law and human nature to the end that society in the future will be that well-planned ideal towards which all men hope and yearn.