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## Hastings: THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS IN FIFTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

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THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS IN FIFTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND. By  
*Margaret Hastings*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press. 1947.  
Pp. xviii, 302. \$3.75.

A study in the legal procedure and administration of the most active court in late medieval England, this book should be welcomed as a scholarly, well-documented contribution to the history of legal institutions. Miss Hastings has based her work primarily on extensive researches among the Fifteenth Century plea rolls, with supporting material from the Year Books and secondary sources. Successive chapters describe in detail the surroundings and work of the common pleas court, the officers of bench and bar, and the steps used in bringing a personal action. The author's examples of the technicalities, delays, and corruption which blocked the path of even a determined litigant are revealing of the remarkably cumbersome legal machinery which existed in the years immediately preceding the reforms of Henry VII. Although brief reference is made to the

political upheaval which marked Fifteenth Century England, a more complete discussion of the extraneous factors which influenced the court might have helped the reader better to comprehend the prevalent legal abuses. As it is, there seems to be an implicit conclusion that the only major contributors to English legal history in the Fifteenth Century court were Thomas Littleton and John Fortescue. Although the book is probably of chief value to the scholar, many chapters, such as the description of the extended training of prospective sergeants at law, should interest the general reader. Miss Hastings is an instructor in the New Jersey College for Women. The book is published under the auspices of the American Historical Association.