
Bacon's Laws the Typographical Monument of Colonial Maryland

appreciably narrowed the market in which Bacon had expected to find an easy sale for his compilation. Bissett's "Abridgement," as it is known, left the press in the year 1759.¹ It presents a mean appearance, and is a work which is usually spoken of with contempt as having been hastily compiled and poorly printed. In his Preface, Bacon did not dignify it by a mention in the enumeration of existing collections of Maryland laws.

SHARPE SUGGESTS A PLAN FOR THE PUBLICATION OF "BACON'S LAWS"

Throughout the years that the two Houses of Assembly were disputing the publication of Bacon's collection, other influences had been at work which eventually were to cause that collection to be published when all hope had been given up by its editor of receiving aid and encouragement for it from the Provincial Legislature. It was while Bacon was still hoping for favorable action on the proposals which he had submitted to the Lower House in 1758 that Caecilius Calvert, secretary to Lord Baltimore, made a suggestion to Governor Sharpe, the relation of which, although it is not entirely germane to the subject of Bacon's book of laws, yet serves to advance somewhat the story of its publication. Calvert and Baltimore seem to have feared that Benjamin Franklin, now become a great leader in the colonies, was contemplating the publication of aspersions on the conduct of Maryland during the last French and Indian War, and in order that there should be at hand the material for a reply to any accusations that he might bring against the Proprietary government, they had suggested to Sharpe that Bacon be employed to write a historical summary of the Province. Their idea in proposing this work was that such a narrative would show the difficulties which the Lords Proprietary had contended with for many years in the task of keeping their refractory people in line. To this suggestion Sharpe replied with his unflinching good sense, that no scheme could have been so well devised to discredit the Proprietary government as this which had been proposed. After asserting that Bacon, already somewhat unfavorably known to many in the Province, would be under the necessity of leaving his parish in order to be near the records in Annapolis, he continued his protest in these words:

"A Clergyman taken from the Parishioners by whom he is supported & who by Law are obliged to support him to Vindicate an ill Administration! would be one of the Exclamations I should expect to hear echoed thro the Province, & long would be the Catalogue of Vices whereof His Ldp as well as His Lieutt Governor might expect to be accused."²

¹On January 4, 1759, Bissett advertised in the *Maryland Gazette* his thanks for the many subscriptions made to his work and announced its early publication. It was advertised on June 28, 1759, as "just published."

²Sharpe Correspondence, May 26, 1760, *Archives of Maryland*, 9: 417.