



## CHAPTER TWO

*William Bladen, Publisher, and his Printer, Thomas Reading—  
The Bray Sermon of Annapolis, 1700—  
The Body of Laws of 1700*

**I**N SUCH of the northern colonies as had printing presses available during the closing years of the seventeenth century, there were printed with fair regularity the annual session laws of the assemblies, and, occasionally, bodies of compiled laws. Nothing of this sort, however, seems even to have been contemplated in Maryland until the year 1695, when, doubtless on the initiative of the new governor, Francis Nicholson, zealous always in intellectual and educational matters, the Upper House proposed to the delegates,

“That when the house have compiled such a Body of Laws as they think may be the Standing body of Laws of the Province that they then imploy Some able Lawyer in England to digest them and put them into better Language, and So have them returned in again for perusall and approbation of the whole Assembly & afterwards to Send them back in Ordr to procure the Royall Assent to the Same and have them printed.”<sup>1</sup>

At this time in the colony the only form in which the body of law existed was in the several collections of manuscript session laws in the possession of the counties and the government. The disadvantages to court and people of this arrangement were perfectly understood by everyone, but for some reason no action was taken by the Lower House on the remedial suggestion proposed by the upper chamber, and again, in May 1697, their Honors returned to the matter with a recommendation “That a former proposall about haveing the lawes digested into better Language by some able Lawyer in England be considered anew and is again recommended from the board.”<sup>2</sup> This time the Lower House took formal action by referring the matter to a standing committee,<sup>3</sup> but as nothing was heard of it afterwards, it may be assumed that the committee buried the proposal deep beneath its accumulation of business.

<sup>1</sup>U. H. J., October 15, 1695, *Archives of Maryland*, 19: 231.

<sup>2</sup>U. H. J., May 28, 1697, *Archives of Maryland*, 19: 511.

<sup>3</sup>U. H. J., May 31, 1697, *Archives of Maryland*, 19: 517.