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## *Thomas Reading and the Issues of his Press*

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piled laws, the session laws for at least five years, and a number of smaller works of a legislative and religious character. In the light of these performances he is seen as no small figure in the literary history of a province in which he labored at important tasks from the year 1700 until his death thirteen years later. If one were to judge the quality of his handiwork from the Bray and Keith sermons and from the Body of Laws of 1700, the verdict would form a severe reflection on his skill as a printer, but, fortunately, at least one example of his later work, the collected laws of 1707, was of a character sufficiently impressive and dignified to demand commendation of his craftsmanship from the most critical observer. This is true in spite of the fact that his proof reading and spelling, things not connected with the mechanics of his trade, remained poor to the end.

The property which Thomas Reading left at his death was not large. The evaluation of his goods and chattels amounted to seventeen pounds and a few odd pence, and although the appraisers listed among his effects several horses, two wigs, ten pairs of "eastern Shore Shoes," and a partly built house, they made no mention of a press or of any other appliances of the printing trade.<sup>1</sup> Five years later, however, when William Bladen's estate was settled, there was listed among its many items and valued at six pounds, "an old Printing Press & Some Letters."<sup>2</sup> The presence of these articles among Bladen's effects accounts for their absence from Reading's poor store of possessions. The fact that the printing press was included in the inventory of property which Bladen held in Anne Arundel County, as distinguished from his St. Mary's and Kent Island holdings, has a significance which will be referred to in a later chapter.

If one may judge from the inventories of their personal estates, the first printers of Maryland seem not to have prospered notably in their trade. Nuthead died possessed of little save a press, some promissory notes and a broken-kneed horse; Reading left behind him several horses and some old clothes, but neither printing press nor other tool of his vocation.

with the preamble "Whereas the Printer is dead." The "Register" of St. Anne's Parish (copy in the Maryland Historical Society) records the burial of one "Thomas Redding," doubtless our printer, on May 9, 1713. Reading's inventory is dated August 18, 1713.

<sup>1</sup> *Inventories and Accounts*, 36B: 176, August 18, 1713. Ms. in Land Office, Annapolis.

<sup>2</sup> *Inventories*, 1: 324, November 27, 1718. Ms. in Land Office, Annapolis.