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## *A History of Printing in Colonial Maryland*

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indebtedness. It is probable that the expense of an assistant in his parochial work, of the maintenance of a family consisting of a wife and three daughters, and the inevitable expenses accruing to editorial and publishing work of the sort that he was engaged in seriously cut in upon the salary which he received as rector of the richest parish in Maryland.

One would prefer to bring this account of Thomas Bacon to a close in a happier strain, but from such knowledge as is at hand, the conclusion is inevitable that in spite of so much unselfish devotion to others, so many efforts in behalf of the poor and despised, so great labors on a work of public usefulness, this lovable and industrious man died poor and unregarded after years of bodily suffering and mental disquietude. Today those who would do honor to his memory have not even the satisfaction of reading his epitaph. It is supposed that he was buried inside his parish church of All Saints, but when that church was torn down in 1813, all record of the bodies beneath its floor was lost.<sup>1</sup>

### THE BEGINNING OF THE "LAWS"

In November 1753, Thomas Bacon, then resident in his first parish, on the Eastern Shore, petitioned<sup>2</sup> the Justices of Talbot County for permission to make use of the printed copies of the laws in their possession, in the prosecution of a work which he affirmed to have been approved by the Governor, and which he described as intended to take the form of "a complete abridgement of all the Laws in force in this Province, digested alphabetically under proper heads." It is in this petition that there occurs the first intimation that Bacon had in mind either a compilation or an abridgement of the statutes.<sup>3</sup>

The early years of his labors on the "Abridgement" passed without incident. Nothing more was heard of the progress of his work until March 1757, when, being then at the height of his troubles in court, suffering in spirit from these and from the loss of his son, and suffering in body from

<sup>1</sup>Admirable accounts of the life of Thomas Bacon are to be found in Harrison, S. A., *History of Talbot County, Maryland, 1661-1861*, ed. by Oswald Tilghman, 2 v. Baltimore, 1915; and in the article by the Rev. Ethan Allen, D.D., in Sprague, Wm. B., *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 5: 117-121. A discussion of his charitable projects was contributed to the *Independent* for August 14, 1899, by Bernard C. Steiner under the title, "A Pioneer in Negro Education;" and in "A Maryland Merchant and His Friends," in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, v. 6, the present writer gave some facts bearing on his life and quoted at length from such of his letters as have been preserved in the Maryland Diocesan Library.

<sup>2</sup>Bacon's petition to the Justices of Talbot County is given in full in Tilghman's edition of Dr. Harrison's work, noted above.

<sup>3</sup>On May 14, 1752, Jonas Green had issued in the *Maryland Gazette* proposals for the publication by himself of a body of laws. As nothing was heard of this work afterwards, it may be assumed that Green, willingly enough, had been induced to forego his own plans in view of Bacon's greater fitness for the task.