

THE PRINCE OF PARTHIA: A Tragedy.
By Thomas Godfrey. Edited with an In-
troduction by Archibald Henderson. Little,
Brown.

It seems strange that while so many early American writings of less importance have been reprinted, the first tragedy written by an American should heretofore have been available only in the original edition of 1765. At last an attractive reprint appears on the occasion of the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the first stage representation of the play in Philadelphia. Professor Archibald Henderson, of the University of North Carolina, furnishes an extended introduction. Thomas Godfrey, the author of "The Prince of Parthia," is usually associated with his native city of Philadelphia, but his new editor stresses the fact that the play was written at Wilmington, N. C.—a city, as the reader is more than once reminded, "noted afar for its lavish hospitality and the polite learning of its inhabitants."

Notwithstanding the reputation of the elder Godfrey as a mathematician and that of the younger as a poet, biographical information regarding either is meagre. The picture of the father in Franklin's "Autobiography," the memoir of the son by his fellow-poet, Nathaniel Evans, and the references in the life of Provost

William Smith are fairly well known. Professor Henderson has made careful search in more obscure places, and is able to add some data regarding Godfrey's life, and especially regarding the performance of the play. Authenticated facts are, however, less numerous than inferences, and it is evident that to a professor of pure mathematics "doubtless" in the statement of a conclusion means something far different from "Q. E. D." When a real nugget is found, the most is made of it. It is an interesting, if not an important bit of information, that in 1760 the name of the poet appears in a list of delinquents who did not work out their road tax as required by law. But was it necessary to add: "Thomas Godfrey, like many of us, cared more for poems than for picks, for spondees than for spontoons. Perhaps," etc., etc.? It would have been more profitable if the editor had developed farther his few excellent comments on the young dramatist's literary relationships.

Godfrey was in no sense a great poet, not even a poet of great promise; but he was remarkable for the number and the variety of the English masters whom he was able, at the age of twenty-three, to echo in a way that showed appreciation if not originality. It is still worth while to inquire how far this feeling for the truer English poetry was common in the Philadelphia and the Wilmington of his day, and how far he was, notwithstanding his few advantages and his early death, an individual prophet of better things in the literary development of his section of the country. Many known facts go to show that his real importance in the history of eighteenth-century American literature has not been adequately recognized.