To the Editor of *PBSA*:

Very few of your readers, I believe, will have had much opportunity to examine for themselves Phillipps MS 12341*, now at the University of Texas and the subject of Norman K. Farmer, Jr.'s paper in your recent issue ("Robert Herrick's Commonplace Book? Some Observations and Questions," *PBSA*, 66 (1972), 21-34). I hope, therefore, that you will allow me, as the person responsible for identifying Herrick's hand in the volume and as the author of the Sotheby catalogue description from which Mr. Farmer quotes substantial though selective excerpts, to comment as briefly as possible on what I must consider as in some respects a sadly unsatisfactory performance.

It is certainly true that this manuscript raises complex and tantalising questions which cannot be decisively answered in the present state of our knowledge (or ignorance)—indeed, it would be useful at this stage to have some clear indication of the most promising directions for future research. This only makes it the more regrettable that Mr. Farmer's paper contains so much that is seriously misleading, and that some of the manuscript's most significant features are either obscured or entirely ignored therein.

Since Mr. Farmer refers at the start of his paper to the Commonplace Books of Milton and Traherne, it seems necessary here to emphasise that these are compilations of an essentially different kind from the Herrick volume: a less ambiguous term for the latter would be "manuscript miscellany"—a class of manuscript which flourished in the 17th century, though of the other surviving examples none has been directly associated with a major poet of the period.

The most immediately striking features of this particular miscellany are: the wide variety of hands it contains, the facts that the datable poems occur in chronological order and that in many cases the items were entered individually, and that at least twice the first version of a poem is followed some pages later by a revised and expanded version (pp. 83 and 97-101, and pp. 343 and 345-46). These features distinguish the manuscript from the great majority of 17th-century miscellanies, and taken together they suggest that we are here unusually close to the actual source of the poems. Mr. Farmer's apparent failure to appreciate the significance of these features is typified in his curiously inaccurate references to the two poems which occur in variant versions. Of the poem on page 343 Mr. Farmer writes merely that he has been unable to trace any other version: he gives no hint whatever that this poem reappears in a revised and ex-
panded text on pp. 345-46, and that of the poem in this latter form several readily traceable manuscript copies exist (see, for example, Margaret Crum, *First-Line Index of Manuscript Poetry in the Bodleian Library*, A 1026). Mr. Farmer does refer to the two versions of “From Katherines dock” (pp. 83 and 91-101 of the manuscript) but he states that both are “written in the Herrick hand”: in fact, both versions are written in hands that do not remotely resemble Herrick’s, though both (like many other texts in the volume) have been occasionally corrected by him.

Almost all the verse manuscripts which survive from the 17th century are scribal copies more or less remote from the originals: very little verse has come down to us from this period in manuscripts actually written or revised by the poets themselves, and such authorial manuscripts as do survive obviously represent no more than a tiny proportion of what originally existed. Mr. Farmer’s failure to grasp the implications of this fundamental fact accounts for many of his problems with the manuscript. “Robert Herrick’s Commonplace Book” is the one manuscript volume directly associated with him which is known to survive: this gives it a unique importance, but it is naïve to assume that the volume is anything more than a stray survivor, for Herrick must surely have been also concerned in other manuscripts during the period of approximately twelve years (1612-24) covered by the book, a time when he is likely to have been mixing in both Cambridge and London literary circles.

There is therefore no reason to share Mr. Farmer’s surprise that the manuscript should contain only two acknowledged Herrick poems (*The farewell to Sacke and The Welcome againe*), especially if we remember—what Mr. Farmer seems to forget—that the manuscript belongs to a very early stage of Herrick’s literary career. Mr. Farmer considers it “curious” that one line in *The Welcome againe* should have been left blank by the scribe (evidently because he found his original illegible or incomplete) and subsequently supplied by the poet himself, since he knows “of only two other instances where this has also occurred in other early seventeenth-century poetic manuscripts” (viz. the MSS. of Fulke Greville and Henry King). Those who realise how few authorial manuscripts from this period survive will understand that it is, on the contrary, rather remarkable that we should possess two such close parallels to the Herrick situation.

Mr. Farmer goes on: “In contrast to the Herrick book, though, both the King and Greville manuscripts are obviously final and clean copies which a scribe had been engaged to make”. Both the King and the Greville manuscripts are obviously fair copies (though to describe them as “final” ignores the fact that Greville subsequently revised his manuscript quite extensively in places) but it is baffling of Mr. Farmer to suggest that the two acknowledged Herrick pieces differ in this respect: anyone who has examined the volume will know that these
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two poems are fair copies likewise, and decidedly elegant fair copies at that—it can hardly be an accident that they are the only poems in the volume entered by this particular scribe, whose hand is calligraphically much the most distinguished of all the hands therein. The real difference, of course, is that both the King and Greville manuscripts are specialised collections of acknowledged work and were compiled comparatively late in the careers of their respective authors. What the Herrick manuscript suggests, on the other hand, is that these companion “Sack” pieces were the two poems of his own which Herrick was most proud of at this early stage of his career, and this also naturally explains why they were among the most widely circulated of his poems. Mr. Farmer does not mention that Herrick has carefully corrected the texts of these two poems in several places: one of these corrections is particularly significant since it is not a mere rectification of a scribal error but a deliberate revision made to improve the rhythm, viz.

the alteration of

as Cleopatra came to her Anthony

to read

as Cleopatra to Marke Anthony.

Mr. Farmer suggests more than once that the Herrick MS. versions of certain poems are inferior to versions which he has found in other manuscripts, though nowhere does he support his claims with actual quotation. When—as we must hope will happen—the texts from the Herrick MS. are reproduced in full beside Mr. Farmer’s rival versions, it will I believe be recognised that in general the Herrick texts are distinctly superior. The qualification is necessary for two reasons: (1) the Herrick MS. undoubtedly contains scribal errors, many but not all of which have been corrected by Herrick (2) the kind of scurrilous “underground” verse with which we are here primarily concerned seems hardly ever to have been set down twice in an identical form: those among whom such things circulated evidently felt free to alter and “improve” them at will, and many of the variants thus produced are more or less indifferent.

The question cannot be usefully pursued until the texts themselves have been published, but it is impossible to let pass Mr. Farmer’s seriously misleading references to two manuscripts which he cites for comparison with the Herrick volume, viz. MS. Tanner 299 and MS. Egerton 2230, to both of which he attaches a quite unwarranted importance, and which he describes as “two significant manuscript collections of satires on Robert Cecil—the only two such collections I have been able to locate anywhere”. In so describing them Mr. Farmer suppresses the fact that neither contains the important satire “Advance, advance my ill-disposed Muse”, which occupies pp. 75-78 of the Herrick volume and of which no other text seems to have been traced. Mr. Farmer makes
no mention whatever of this bitter invective against Cecil, though it far exceeds in length any of the anti-Cecil satires in the two collections for which he claims unique importance.

MS. Egerton 2230 is actually a miscellany of obscure provenance transcribed in a single hand, probably about 1630, and consisting largely of amatory verse including corrupt versions of several of Donne’s love poems. Donne’s editors have recognized that the manuscript is textually worthless, and no more authority can be claimed for any of its other texts: Mr. Farmer does not tell his readers that these include inferior versions of several other poems also found in the Herrick volume, among them a blatantly corrupt version of the punning poem “Lady chain’d to Venus dove” (Herrick MS. p. 82, in Herrick’s hand).

MS. Tanner 299 is the Commonplace Book of Archbishop Sancroft (whom Mr. Farmer rather oddly persists in calling Sandcroft) and Mr. Farmer compares it with the Herrick volume on the grounds that both are “devoted to topical events, letters, and other occasional pieces.” The comparison is seriously misconceived. Mr. Farmer recognizes that the anti-Cecil satires were composed shortly after the Secretary’s death in May 1612 and were entered into the Herrick volume at the time, but he says nothing to indicate that Sancroft, on the other hand, was not even born until 1617 and was actually compiling his Commonplace Book as late as the 1670s: thus to his transcript of one of these anti-Cecil satires (“Here lies Hobinall”) Sancroft append a reference to John Shirley’s Life of Sir Walter Ralegh, published in 1677, whence Sancroft studiously repeats the (in fact extremely dubious) ascription of these lines to Ralegh. Mr. Farmer appears to be quite unaware that the anti-Cecil satires were far from “topical” to Sancroft, and that he collected them retrospectively—as indeed he collected the other items in his Commonplace Book—for their historical interest.

Mr. Farmer utilises his introduction of Sancroft into this context to bolster up the notion that the Herrick volume may have belonged to George Abbot, Archbishop of Canterbury—a notion which Mr. Farmer is curiously reluctant to abandon, though had he recalled the extremely bawdy nature of many items in the volume, and the fact that Abbot was a severe and Puritan-minded churchman, he would at least have made it easier for his readers to assess the inherent probability of a notion which he is himself inclined to take much too seriously. In reality, as Mr. Farmer half acknowledges, the notion is quite without any solid foundation: it is a fancy originating in the mid-19th century and prompted by the fact that among various jottings and pen-trials on the flyleaf of a kind familiar to all students of 16th- and 17th-century manuscripts—jottings which include the name of the celebrated Cambridge carrier Thomas
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Hobson—occur the formulae George Archbyshop of Canterbury his grace and Georgius Cantuariensis.

I regret that the wording of my Sotheby catalogue description has been taken to mean that the volume necessarily belonged to Herrick in the sense of being his private and exclusive property. Mr. Farmer understandably questions whether the manuscript actually "belonged" to Herrick in this latter sense, but still seems to assume that it must have been the private property of some individual: it is here that the comparison of a miscellany such as this with such an essentially personal compilation as Milton's Commonplace Book can be particularly misleading. The great diversity of hands in the Herrick volume proves that it was handed about and may mean that it was regarded as the common property of a group of friends, though that Herrick was in some way supervising the compilation is shown by the fact that his is the one hand which occurs throughout making corrections in texts copied by others (he appears as corrector, indeed, on many more pages than Mr. Farmer indicates). It is quite consistent with Herrick's supervisory rôle that most of the actual transcribing was done by other hands—indeed, this is precisely what one would expect—and it is significant that such few pages as were in his hand are often dashed off at a speed which is certainly not matched by any of the other hands in the volume.

I refrain from any attempt to discuss the identification of Herrick's handwriting, since such a discussion could be intelligible only in the presence of the relevant documents. When Mr. Farmer observes that, while the hand is distinctive, he is aware of having seen others that resemble it, he is perfectly correct: the fact is that any hand—and certainly Herrick's is no exception—possesses affinities with other hands of the same period, combined with personal and identifying characteristics whose perception is at least partly a matter of intuition developed by experience. It is unfortunate, however, that Mr. Farmer should refer to Herrick's "indecisiveness in the use of secretary e and italic (or Greek) ε", since in the manuscripts that we possess Herrick never uses italic e (which is of course a quite distinct form from Greek ε), and since the kind of variation in the treatment of ε which Mr. Farmer ascribes to Herrick's "indecisiveness" is a normal feature of numerous 16th/17th-century hands.

Conclusive evidence about the authorship of the anonymous pieces in the manuscript may always be lacking, but it is hardly in itself an argument against Herrick's authorship merely to observe, as Mr. Farmer does, that such pieces have never been associated with him before. These audacious and ephemeral satires belong to a genre that by its very nature remained unacknowledged, and in fact, though they were obviously produced by writers of talent, they have never as yet been convincingly attributed to any author at all. In my judgment,
the style of certain pieces (e.g. the autograph poems on pp. 82 and 253) is at least thoroughly consistent with the possibility of Herrick's authorship.

There is no space here for an adequate consideration of other aspects of the manuscript to which Mr. Farmer has done less than justice, but I cannot resist in conclusion pointing out that there may have been a connection between Herrick and John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln and Lord Keeper, during the period when the volume was being compiled. Pages 292-315 contain copies of letters to and from Williams covering the period 27 July-21 September 1622: the conclusion of one of Williams's own letters is in Herrick's hand (pp. 312-13) and constitutes the only prose in his hand in the entire volume. Considerable interest thus attaches to a fact which Mr. Farmer nowhere mentions, namely that Herrick later addressed two poems to Williams (Poetical Works, ed. L. C. Martin, 1956, pp. 52 and 413) in the former of which the poet speaks of unkindness he had received from Williams in the past. I am not alone in thinking that the possibility of a relationship between Herrick and Williams in 1622 is one of several promising avenues for research suggested by the manuscript.

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