

[1875, June 29]

[From: Pickering, B.M.]¹

[To: Lord Alfred Tennyson]

196 Piccadilly W

June 29 1875

Sir

Several years ago when the books of the late Sir C.W. Dilke² were sold by auction I purchased a volume containing "The Lover's Tale"³[.] I unfortunately lent it to Mr. Richard Herne Shepherd⁴ he expressing a great desire to read it and I at the time believing him a trustworthy person[.] Soon after this I found that he had dishonestly printed this poem from a transcript he had taken from my copy. On that occasion (by paying the printer, when he pretended he could not pay unless he sold copies) I induced him to suppress the copies and he handed me his transcript

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but either he had a duplicate transcript or a copy of the printed type for I have just discovered that he has a second time put the poem into type[.] Mr. Locker⁵ mentioned to me that an advertisement

¹ Basil Montagu Pickering (1835-1878) was a publisher who specialized in rare books and first editions of nineteenth-century poets (see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB]). Pickering published *Tennysonian* in 1866.

² Charles Wentworth Dilke (1789-1864) was a newspaper editor and writer who, at various stages in his career, contributed to or led such publications as *Retrospective Review*, *London Magazine*, *The Athenaeum* (of which Dilke became editor in 1831), and the *Daily News*. Dilke had many friends and acquaintances among the literary elite of the country, including John Keats, Leigh Hunt, George Eliot, and Percy Shelley (see ODNB).

³ Tennyson wrote "The Lover's Tale" around 1827-8 (in his "nineteenth year," according to the original Preface. It would not be published until 1879, although a small circulation of printings had been released to friends in 1833 and suppressed shortly thereafter. Tennyson thought the poem too imperfect for publication. "The Lover's Tale" tells the story of Julian's ill-fated love for his cousin and foster-sister, Camilla. The poem may have been based on a story from Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

⁴ Richard Herne Shepherd (1840-1895) was a bibliographer. He published bibliographic accounts of a number of well-known authors and poets, including Tennyson, Thackeray, Dickens, Carlyle, Swinburne, and Ruskin (see ODNB).

⁵ Frederick Locker (1821-1895) was a poet and friend of Tennyson. His first published collection of verse was called *London Lyrics*.

had appeared in “The Academy”⁶ offering a copy or copies of “The Lovers Tale” and he said that the advertisement had been traced to Mr. Shepherd[.] a few days after hearing this I accidentally saw at a printer’s office a ^title^ sheet of The Lovers Tale marked “Revise” in Mr. Shepherds hand-writing and with other instructions in his writing

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[illegible] this poem other of your early poems were named in the contents[.] I think it is only fair that you should know this but I should be obliged by my not being mixed up in the evidence against either the printer⁷ w whom I believe to be an honest man and unaware of the nature of the transaction ~~and~~ or as ~~to~~ ^against^ Mr. Shepherd ^to whom^ I have no ill will ~~to him~~[.] I have repeatedly employ-ed him as corrector of the press⁸, the which he does excellently, but I have no desire to be a party to an act of this nature[.] I am Sir

Your obed’t Servant

BM Pickering

P.S. I enclose addresses[.] your lawyer will easily stop the matter if you require him to do so⁹

⁶ The *Academy* was founded by Charles Appleton in 1869. At the time of the writing of this letter, the periodical was being published weekly. Unlike many other periodicals of the day, the *Academy* published names of contributors (see *The Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* for further information).

⁷ S. & J. Brawn. See addresses on enclosed letter from Tennyson to Pickering on the same topic.

⁸ “Corrector of the press” refers to an individual employed to proofread texts for printing. Although the position of “corrector” existed from almost the earliest days of printing, the nineteenth-century saw a substantial increase in the number of individuals employed as such. These individuals were paid very little, and John Camden Hotten, an early biographer of Charles Dickens, refers to them as “literary drudges” (see p. 88 of his 1870 biography *Charles Dickens: The Story of His Life*). In 1854, a trade union was formed for the increasing number of correctors called the Association of Correctors of the Press. The University of Warwick Modern Records Centre currently houses the minutes, reports, and correspondence of the union.

⁹ For a full account of the printing scandal referenced in this letter, see W.D. Paden’s article “Tennyson’s *The Lover’s Tale*, R.H. Shepherd and T.J. Wise” from *Studies in Bibliography* 18(1965): 111-45.