

## The Problem with the case of the “Delicate Mission”

There is a serious problem with the story I wrote for Volume IV of “Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes”, entitled in full as “The Case of Delicate Affair of the Reigning House of Holland”, and set 22 to 28 April 1887. The issue is the contradiction to the description of the case as given in ‘Case of Identity’ set 16 April 1890. This document explains how this error came about, and also my solution to the resulting problem.

The references to the “Delicate Affair of the Reigning House of Holland” are in “Scandal in Bohemia” and in “Case of Identity”. In “Scandal in Bohemia” there are scant details, the pertinent being that Watson is recalling three cases that he has heard of involving Holmes but that he was not involved in, the last being the Dutch mission, with an implication that this case occurred relatively recently, that is to say before March 1890. The second reference in ‘Case of Identity’, gives more details of the case, was completely overlooked. I was using the premise that the published date (in Chronicles Volume II) of January 1887 was not a rigidly fixed event. The Canon does not refer to the case by an exact name, it is a delicate ‘matter’ or delicate ‘mission’ for the Reigning House of Holland, it is Baring-Gould who gave the title of “Delicate Affair of the Reigning Family of Holland”. When I discovered the historical Schnäbele incident, that set the dating of my story precisely to April 1887.

Having completely overlooked the two Canonical references, I now have the problem of having written a Holmes story that contradicts the Canon, and I must provide a reasonable argument for the existence of the story.

The case referred to in the “Case of Identity” and in “A Scandal in Bohemia” is described as “*the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland*” and is assigned the title of “Delicate Affair of the Reigning House of Holland” by Baring-Gould. This case is set sometime in the three months immediately prior to “Scandal in Bohemia” (corrected date of 7 – 9 June 1889). This tale will forever remain *untold* because Watson had no part in it, and the nature of the case was so delicate that Holmes never revealed any details save those recounted in “Case of Identity”.

To better clarify the error on my part, I wrote what I purported to be an *untold tale* from the Canon. This is totally incorrect, a reprint of Chronicles Volume IV is needed to correct this assertion. I wrote a *new story* with a similar title to one mentioned in the Canon, thus I now choose to rename my story as “A Delicate Mission” in my chronology. The published name will have to await a reprint to have this error corrected. In the fictional world of Holmes and Watson:

*Watson’s great-great-grandson James Innes Watson mistook the discovered manuscript of a case with a similar name to an untold, and never-to-be-told case. He*

*submitted this manuscript to me as his literary agent for publication.*

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I choose to rename the two stories to be:

“Delicate Mission”

is the case published in Chronicles volume IV

“Delicate Affair of the Reigning Family of Holland”

is the case Holmes undertook without the involvement of Watson, and so can never be told.

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The actual known details of the never-to-be-told case are worthy of examination. From a “Case of Identity” is this quote:

*“He held out his snuffbox of old gold, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid. ... It is a little souvenir from the King of Bohemia ...”*

This is a contradiction, in the actual telling of that tale (“A Scandal in Bohemia”) Holmes’s reward is *“three hundred pounds in gold, and seven hundred in notes.”* When the case is concluded the King of Bohemia offers Holmes a further reward:

*“This ring - ” He slipped an emerald snake ring from his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.*

*“Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly,” said Holmes.*

*“You have but to name it.”*

*“This photograph!”*

*The King stared at him in amazement.*

*“Irene’s photograph!” he cried. “Certainly, if you wish it.”*

There is no mention of a snuff box, in fact this is the one and only mention of any snuff box, or of Holmes using snuff, in the entire Canon.

The second quotation is:

*“And the ring?” I asked, glancing at a remarkable brilliant which sparkled upon his finger.*

*“It was from the reigning family of Holland, though the matter in which I served them was of such delicacy that I cannot confide it even to you, who have been good enough to chronicle one or two of my little problems.”*

When James Innes Watson discovers the manuscript of the “Delicate Mission” he postulates that Watson did not publish it because:

“I speculate that once again Conan Doyle would not have liked Watson’s foreign languages components, or for the relating that Holmes was involved in preventing a war.”

I suggest it was more likely that Watson withheld the manuscript because of the delicacy of the times and

would not have attempted to publish the account until after World War I. And by then James Watson's postulation may be true.

In the preparation of "A Scandal in Bohemia" for publication it is possible that Conan Doyle knew of the existence of the "Delicate Mission", but he did not know the details, for he had never seen the manuscript, and he certainly knew nothing of the "Delicate Affair", for Watson never even wrote a manuscript since he was not a participant in that case.