THE DUKE DIVINITY SCHOOL BULLETIN

This publication is issued by the faculty of the Divinity School of Duke University through a committee composed of Professors Cannon, Spence, and Hießman of the Faculty; Reverend C. Wade Goldston of the Divinity School Alumni Association; and Mr. Joe Caldwell, representing the students of the Divinity School.

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THE ROMANCE OF CHARLIE SOONG

Perhaps no family in the recent history of the Orient has become more famous or exerted a more profound influence than the Soong family in China. The strength of this family can be readily understood when one remembers that the founder of the "Soong Dynasty," as it is often called, was the right-hand man of Sun Yat-Sen in the establishment of the Chinese Republic; that his wife, who was formerly Miss Ni, was a woman of unusual Christian devotion and force of character; that his three sons, T. V. Soong, T. A. Soong, and T. L. Soong, have occupied for years influential posts in the life of the nation; that two of his daughters, Ching-ling and Mei-ling, after receiving an American education, married two presidents of the Chinese Republic, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, respectively, and that the other daughter, Ai-ling, married Mr. H. H. Kung, a wealthy descendant of Confucius and now a cabinet member of the Republic of China. Owing to the limitations of space, the present article will deal mainly with those events in the life of Charlie Soong regarding which little has been known by Americans.

It is believed that the first information purporting to be authentic regarding the early life of Charlie Soong to appear in an American book is that contained in a McMillan publication of 1940, entitled News Is My Job, by Edna Lee Booker. According to this authority, Soon Chia-ju was born in the village of Kuisan, on the island of Hainan, off the south coast of Kwantung, China, being the youngest of three brothers. (The g was added to the name of Soon, after Charlie Soong returned to China). He was adopted by a childless uncle and foster-father, who had become a prosperous tea and silk merchant in Boston. This uncle brought the lad to the United States, for the purpose of training him in the business of importing silk and tea into the harbor of Boston. Evidently the boy's heart was not in his uncle's business, and one day, in the summer of 1880, as he wandered about the docks of Boston, he noticed the U. S. revenue cutter, Schuyler Colfax, at
one of the piers. Slipping aboard, he got into conversation with the chief officer Captain Charles Jones, who was a devoted Christian, as shown by his regular attendance upon the services of the Fifth Street Methodist Church in Wilmington, N. C., whenever the Colfax was in that port. Captain Jones became interested in the bright-eyed Chinese boy, and when the Colfax sailed for Wilmington, he carried young Soong with him as a cabin boy.

During the time that he served as cabin boy on the Colfax, he learned from the sailors how to make hammocks, and later he partly supported himself by making and selling these articles to the homes of the people in several southern states. The most significant fact in connection with his experience on the Colfax, however, was his association with Captain Jones, a native of South Carolina and a member of the Methodist Church, who exhibited a genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of his protégé. Captain Jones was the human instrument, in the hands of God, in bringing the boy in touch with certain influences in Wilmington which led to his conversion in the late summer or early fall of 1880.

It is believed from the data available that Charlie Soong arrived in Wilmington on the Colfax about November 1, 1880, or possibly a few weeks earlier. Original newspaper accounts appearing in the Wilmington Star show that he was baptized and joined the Church on Sunday, November 7, 1880, and this event doubtless took place at the close of the revival services which were in progress at the time of his arrival in Wilmington. Mrs. Mary Chadwick, whose maiden name was Mary Potter, was 18 years old when Soong first arrived in Wilmington, and remembers seeing him at the home of Mrs. Tom Ramsey on the evening after his arrival. He accompanied Captain Jones and Mrs. Ramsey to the Fifth Street Methodist Church revival, where he was converted while kneeling at the altar a few nights later. Mrs. Chadwick recalls how Soong and Captain Jones came to the home of Mrs. Ramsey, after the close of the service in which he was converted, and how the Chinese boy shook hands with every one in the house, telling each one how he had found the Saviour, and how he wanted to go back to China and tell his people about the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Mrs. Elizabeth Howell, who lives on the corner of Fifth and Worcester Streets, in Wilmington, was present at the Fifth Street Methodist Church, of which she was a member, the night Charlie Soong was converted. When he arose from the altar, where several others were kneeling, he seemed quite happy and his face was shining. Mrs. Howell recalls his thrilling testimony a few days later at a Sunday afternoon meeting at the Church. He spoke of his gratitude to the members of the Church for their many kindnesses to a stranger, and of how he wanted to secure an education, so that he might return as a missionary to his native land. Mrs. Josie Hewlett, a member of the Fifth Street Church, recalls having seen Soong many times when he was a member of the Sunday School of that Church and a regular attendant upon the Church services. She and Mrs. Chadwick remember that Soong visited Wilmington, after his graduation from Vanderbilt, and that he was presented with a Bible by the members of the Fifth Street Church, just prior to his departure for China in the summer of 1885.

An article appeared in the North Carolina Christian Advocate, under date of January 29, 1931, which states that “On the Sunday before Christmas, in 1880, he was taken into the Methodist Church by Dr. Craven, who was pastor, as well as college president, and the ceremony in the old college chapel, which was for many years the Methodist Church, is well remembered by old residents, and even the text of Dr. Craven’s sermon, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’” This statement, which was a dispatch from Trinity, the original site of Trinity College, near High Point, cannot be accurate, for the following reasons:

1. The annual report of Dr. Braxton Craven, President of Trinity College, to the Board of Trustees, dated June 9, 1881, states that “At our last conference, Rev. T. Page Ricard made a proposition to me to take a Chinese boy, then at Wilmington. Complete arrangements were finally made, and he arrived here some two months ago... The Durham Sunday School pays his board and the college gives the rest.” According to this official report, Soong entered Trinity College about the first of April, 1881, and therefore, could not have been taken into the church “on the Sunday before Christmas, in 1880.”

2. The Wilmington Star, of November 7, 1880, reports: “This morning the ordinance of baptism will be administered at this Church (Fifth Street Methodist). A Chinese convert will be one of the subjects of the solemn rite, being probably the first Celestial that has ever submitted to the ordinance of baptism in North Carolina.”

An article in the same paper, under date of Tuesday, November 9, 1880, says that “The service at the Fifth Street Methodist Episcopal Church, on Sunday morning last, in connection with the baptism of the Chinese youth alluded to in our last, is said to have been exceedingly impressive. The young man, whose Chinese
appellation was Soon, assumed the Christian name in baptism of Charles Jones." (Soong took the name of his benefactor, Captain Charles Jones, of the Colfax.)

It may be that the service referred to at Trinity College was held in connection with the transfer of Soong's membership from Fifth Street Church in Wilmington to the Church of Trinity College, which institution he had entered in the month of April of 1881.

There is reason to believe that Rev. T. Page Ricaud, pastor of the Fifth Street Methodist Church, at the time of Soong's conversion, played the part of tutor to him during a part of the winter of 1880-81, and was instrumental in enlisting the cooperation of the authorities of Trinity College, as well as of the Trinity Church Sunday School, Durham, and later of Julian Carr, prominent capitalist and Methodist layman, in behalf of the boy's education. The catalogue of Trinity College for 1880-81, under the heading "Special and Preparatory Students," shows the following item: "Charles J. Soon, Weichan, China." While at Trinity he lived in the home of Professor W. T. Gannaway, but did most of his studying in the home of Dr. Braxton Craven, whose wife proved to be a most devoted friend and competent tutor.

Writing in 1931, in the North Carolina Christian Advocate, Dr. George B. Winton, acting Dean of the Vanderbilt University School of Religion, says, "Soong, or Soon, as we called him, was here from 1882 to 1885." It would appear, therefore, that he did not spend much more than a year at Trinity and that he matriculated in the Theological Department of Vanderbilt University in the fall of 1882. It would be interesting to know how much academic training he had received prior to his arrival in North Carolina, but it is probable that he did some college work during the second session of Trinity College which he attended. His work must have been satisfactory however, since he was able within the following three years to secure a certificate from the Theological Department of Vanderbilt University. Rev. John C. Orr, writing in the World Outlook a few years ago about his personal acquaintance with Charley Soong at Vanderbilt, says "He prepared his lessons well, passed all his examinations, and graduated with honor in his class of four in theology."

Dr. Orr recalls a touching incident in Soong's life at Vanderbilt: "Some of the Wesley Hall boys met on Sunday morning in the little chapel before breakfast for an experience meeting. One morning, Soong got up and stood silent for a moment. Then his lips trembled and he said: 'I feel so little. I get so lonesome. So far from my people, so long among strangers. I feel just like I

was a little chip, floating down the Mississippi River. But I know that Jesus is my Friend, my Comforter, my Saviour.'"

During the vacation period, Soong sold hammocks, which he had learned to make on the Colfax, and also assisted some of the preachers in Tennessee and other states in revival services, with occasional visits to the hospitable homes of Julian Carr and other friends in North Carolina. Some of his letters written during the summer months show that the element of romance was not wholly lacking in his character. Writing of a visit to Washington, N. C., to Miss Annie Southgate, of Durham, he says: "I had a very pleasant time at Washington, although I know but few girls as yet. They say there are seven girls to one boy, and some of them are very beautiful. I have fallen in love with Miss Bell. Don't you think that is too bad, for I have to leave my heart in Washington and I go to China."

Just before his return to China, Dean W. F. Tillet arranged a farewell service for him in the chapel of Vanderbilt University. In response to the Dean's words of appreciation, he said: "I have been preaching some, and I have found pleasure and joy in preaching the Gospel of Christ. I go back to my people in China, to preach the Gospel of Christ to them, and to live the life of Christ among them." Charlie Soong was admitted on trial into the North Carolina Conference, which met in Charlotte in 1885, and by special request of Bishop Holland N. McTyre, who desired to appoint him as a missionary to China, he was ordained deacon at the same Conference by Bishop John C. Keener. On page 53 of the Minutes of that year, under Appointments, Durham District, appears, "Missionary to China—Charles Jones Soon."

Returning to his native land in the winter of 1885-86, Soong entered at once upon his duties as a missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. He served at Woosung, Soochow, Kuensau and at Shanghai, and it is believed that his missionary career terminated about 1892. His letters from China to his friends in North Carolina breathe the spirit of apostolic fervor and profound interest in the success of Christian missions in China. Miss Nora Chaffin, of the Department of History of the Woman's College, Duke University, has searched the files of the Raleigh Christian Advocate, and has assembled some of these letters written by Soong regarding his missionary labors in China.

Writing from Kuensau, February 4, 1887, Soong expresses to Mr. J. H. Southgate his deep sympathy in connection with the death of Miss Annie Southgate. He says: "Miss Annie was one of my best friends. Her Christian example is worthy of attention. When I left America, I had no idea such an event would have