

Great Banking Co. China
pay to order or bearer
One Thousand pounds
One thousand
CHUNG LING SOO
程蓮魚家



LI
SING
FOO
PRESENTS

"A DREAM OF WEALTH"

THE
CHUNG LING SOO
MYSTERIES

Val. France

A Dream of Wealth

Chung Ling Soo's spectacular effect, "A Dream of Wealth," which he apparently first introduced in 1912, involved the production of hundreds of £5 notes from a casket previously shown empty, and culminated with the appearance of an enormous note for £1,000, making an effective backdrop. In common with other stage performers of the time who needed to display their affluence, Soo used imitation notes put out by Dunville & Company's Royal Irish Distilleries, Belfast. One of these notes was illustrated in Will Dexter's *The Riddle of Chung Ling Soo* (1955), facing page 97, and is also depicted on the next page.

However, it would appear that the success this illusion engendered and the talking point it undoubtedly became, led Soo to use specially printed "fivers" as an advertising novelty. The illustration shows the specimen in my collection (seen on the next page) which bears the date 1914 and is, incidentally, the only one I have seen. It would be interesting to know if there are other specimens

bearing different dates and I should be grateful if any reader who could throw some light on this matter would be kind enough to let me know. [Over the intervening years only Peter Lane has responded and his specimen also bears the date 1914.]

My own "fiver" was the gift of [the late] Mr Reg. Pocklington several years ago. As a boy Reg. went up on stage to assist Soo with the Eggs from Hat when he was playing the Palace Theatre, Hull. As Reg. put it, with the brashness of youth, and in response to Soo's whispered query "Do you know how it is done?," he told him that he did and that *he* too was a conjurer! "Splendid!" said Soo, who went through his routine in fine style with his young assistant. Some little time later, back in his seat, an astonished Reg. put a hand in his pocket for his handkerchief only to encounter a hard-boiled egg which bore the rubber-stamped message "Compliments of Chung Ling Soo!" This feat impressed Reg. even more than the other wonders he saw on stage that night.



Billy McComb has recounted in *Magigram* (1971) how, as a youth of about sixteen, he went to Dunville's Distillery in Belfast. There a kind official gave him some of the "fivers" with the comment that they had had a lot of trouble because they

resembled the white "fivers" of the day sufficiently closely for them to be passed on race-courses and to taxi drivers in the dark, and that, in consequence, they would not print any more. In view of the apparent scarcity of the Chung Ling Soo



“fivers” it seems quite feasible that, for similar reasons, Soo was requested to stop issuing them; there is the allied possibility that existing stocks were destroyed. Here again, perhaps one of our older members might be able to comment on this conjecture. [None did so.]

The Marvellous Chinese Conjurer generally succeeded in surrounding himself with mystery, not the least of which was his birth place. Will Dexter, in *The Riddle of Chung Ling Soo*, surveyed the many different locations recorded in the literature and adduced conclusive evidence that Soo (William Ellsworth Robinson) was born in New

York City. One of the many claims was that Soo was of Scots-Chinese descent. To foster that claim, one of his posters purported to show precisely that. Oval portraits at the top left and right hand corners depict a bearded Scotsman and a Chinese lady, labelled respectively, “His Father” and “His Mother,” and the background flags carry the Scottish lion rampant and a Chinese dragon. Presumably this was, as William S. Gilbert had Poo-Bah remark in a different context, “Merely corroborative detail, intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative!”

REFERENCES

- Dexter, Will (1955). *The Riddle of Chung Ling Soo*. London: Arco. Ltd.
 McComb, Billy (1971). *Magigram*. Vol. 3, No. 6 (July-August).