



The view across the Ch'inhuai River from a favourite lookout point on afternoon walks from the first house. The cliff at left formed part of Nanking's city ramparts.

Image from the collection of M. Lundie.

GUARDING A VITAL RESOURCE

There will be several mentions in these notes of an English cigarette being offered to local people as a friendly gift, a bribe, solatium or peace pipe. Perhaps I should explain that at that time smoking tobacco was regarded as a pleasant and largely harmless diversion. There was some slight recognition that it was deleterious to the lungs but we knew nothing of its malignant evils. Gifts were made in innocence.

The Chinese people were (and, I am told, still are) inveterate smokers — men, women and children. Old women, especially, enjoyed a fag or a pipe. A gift of a cigarette was always cordially accepted; English cigarettes especially so, for their novelty I assume. American packs were in the shops but were expensive. Our cigarette supplies came from Hong Kong and were always English.

One afternoon I found my path to the reservoir barred by an armed boy soldier of the Nationalist forces. I told him I often walked that way and, in cheerful jest, that, as a foreign diplomat, I was entitled to walk where I chose. This was wrong of me of course, and that my ploy was in fun was not perceived. The boy was at a loss. Any training would not have prepared him for confrontation

with a 'foreign devil'. What to do? He could have shot me I suppose, but I think he was rather too nice a boy for that. He chose the alternative of bursting into tears.

I was immediately contrite and said I realised I had not been polite and that I had acted unworthily. My apologies were to no avail. The tears poured down. So I asked him if he would allow me to be his friend and offer a gift of an English-made cigarette. There was a gulp, then silence. He looked around for somewhere to set aside his rifle and, at first, moved to put it on the ground. That didn't seem quite right so he handed it to me. He was genteel enough to turn away before hoicking up a gobbet of phlegm. This sensible manoeuvre is widely practised in China, especially on rising each morning (the Dawn Chorus). The boy then shot snot from each nostril, turned back to me smiling and held out both hands.

I was ready to be rid of the rifle; but no, it was not his rifle he wanted, but the cigarette. This I passed over. He took a piece of toilet paper from a pocket, folded it carefully around the cigarette then stowed it, telling me he would enjoy sharing it that evening with his friend. He retrieved his rifle, we smiled and bowed, and I retreated.

Not all encounters with armed sentries had this somewhat comic air. Soon after the Communist armies

took over Nanking I set off one afternoon to walk to the small shops near Shansi Circle. Aware that many of the large houses along Yi Ho Lu (in which the Australian Chancery was situated) were billets and had sentries at the gates I kept off the footpath and tracked down the middle of the road. Eyes were upon me but I proceeded without incident until well along the way a sentry who had watched my approach warily became agitated and rounded me up with his rifle and mounted bayonet. He forced me back against the garden wall with the point of the bayonet under my chin and went into a paroxysm of shouted rage. I was paralyzed and totally uncertain what to do. He was very young and I was probably the first foreigner he had ever encountered; I had to assume he was quite untrained in coping with foreign devils and I could not judge how he would react to calls or movement by me. After much too long a time a platoon spilled out from the house to see what the racket was about — my boy may have been shouting for help. I showed the leader my passport (which we now always carried) and he motioned me on my way. I tottered off, aware of eyes boring into my back.

I took care to return by back lanes and by stiles over dividing garden walls thus avoiding the streets.

NOTES FROM OLD NANKING



*The workshops and cottages of fishermen and labourers
between the Nanking city wall and the Ch'inhuai River.*

Image from the collection of M. Lundie.