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ISLAND FOR DELINQUENTS.

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Prosperous though Singapore is it has slums, and a young criminal element infesting the waterfront. The prison authorities are trying an experiment, taking the teenager gangsters from Changi goal, away from the port altogether and shipping them off to an island a few miles distant. As this batch embarked, they still had the criminal instinct to hide their faces. How they felt about the move it was impossible to tell.

On Pulau Senang the young offenders could look forward to something like a holiday compared with prison life. They'd have no chance to escape, but as they made their way to the temporary camp set up by a pioneer party, could they have wished for a bigger contrast to a jail? Their first job was to tackle the jungle, make it habitable and cultivate it. A tough assignment for a bunch of small time gangsters; but very soon for the first time, they were handling tools, not weapons.

Next job - to level the site of the projected camp.

By now, a bargeload of bricks had arrived. That meant more hard work, especially on an island that's almost on the Equator. It had all become a challenge, which they cheerfully accepted. One of the easier jobs - driving the cultivator.

Very few westerners will know what that is - tapioca; not everybody's cup of tea in Britain, but in South East Asia, a valuable food. The plan was to make the little colony as self supporting as possible; and in the process among the various jobs they were learning, they might find the sort of work they'll be able to do when there're free again. That, in fact, was the main object of the island experiment; and in a very short time they lost all feeling of being prisoners.

They even managed to assemble a generator. What a thrill when it delivered the goods:

They are being taught to read and write, using both western and eastern characters. So they'll no longer be illiterate hoodlums, when they return to Singapore, but physically and mentally fit, and in all ways able to hold their own as good citizens.

Those tapioca roots flourished into a good crop.

The vegetables were good enough for a horticultural show.

Letters from friends and relatives keep them from feeling isolated. They're all friends with the guards, so men, who still can't read, can get their letters read to them. The same mail brought a letter to the Camp Commandant authorizing the release of one prisoner; earned by extra good work.

Though a prisoner no longer, he'd take a lot of happy memories home with him. On the island he made some good friends. There'd be lots of jobs he could do in Singapore, where he'd return not as a jailbird, but a man qualified to earn a living. The future is up to him.

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GATHAY FILM SERVICES LIMITED.

"ISLAND OF HOPE"

Commentary

1. This is the beginning of an adventure. Strange, you may say - it looks like the end. But watch and see.
2. These grim young men, unable to look us in the eye with open faces, are gangsters, detained indefinitely - for as long as their anti-social and often criminal activities persist.
3. We don't know exactly what conditions of home life - of no work - of fierce competition in a tough, slum world brought this about. But we feel pretty sure that most of these men are redeemable. If society made them like this - then society has a duty to turn them back into decent, law-abiding citizens. Or at least to try.
4. This then is the experiment: the adventure.
5. It's goodbye to the harsh enclosed walls of Changi Gaol as they set off for an unknown life on a lonely island a few miles from Singapore.
6. A quick look at Pulau Senang - and they know one thing for sure. There's going to be nothing 'Senang' about it for them. No easy, leisurely life here - for there's almost nothing on the island except jungle and coconuts. Not even much water, not to drink anyway. A challenge, if ever there was one.

7. There's one thing to be grateful for - a shed put up by an advance party. It's somewhere to sleep, - and protection from the rain.
8. All their supplies have to be brought by boat and then carried on a man's shoulders: food; and later, building materials: no light weight in the hot sun and quite a distance to walk with the load.
9. They start work from scratch, just like pioneers.
10. Clearing the ground first. Maybe the technique's not too good - many of these young men have never been out of an overcrowded city slum - so it's hack it down in any old way. It's better than being shut up in prison, anyway. It's tough at first, but there's a funny sort of satisfaction about it.
11. With the ground cleared, supplies start to arrive for the building projects: (barracks for the guards, quarters for themselves.) Cement, timber, tiles, pipes, bricks.
12. And then half a hill has to be dug away. This is where their quarters will be.
13. It's a bit better when the building starts. Specially if you've never done it before. You have to pick it up from those who know - and learn by experiment.
14. That looks a bit rough - but he'll improve.
15. One thing, there's enough to eat. They've never had such appetites. Must be all this fresh air. Already they look healthier and feel better with the exercise, to many quite a new experience.

16. That's quick work. The job's speeding up now, partly because they're all getting better at it, partly because the end's in sight - with a more comfortable bed as the reward.

17. And then the last stages. Well - what do you know! I did it myself. Never touched a brush before! And he's not the only one to feel that glow of satisfaction from something well done - with your own hands. What a change in their faces.

18. Then it's moving-in day. They never knew they could feel so happy about such a simple thing as a roof, and a dry, airy place to sleep in. Especially when they'd built it themselves.

19. Now there's a bit of time to relax before the next project starts. And nothing can describe what this feels like to a hot and tired man.

20. Phase 2 begins: Gardening. They have to become self-sufficient as soon as possible, and this means growing their own food. First, clearing the grounds, learning to use the mechanical aids they've been lent, a little clumsily at first -

21. And then to plant, beginning with the easy tapioca, and going on to a variety of leaf vegetables and gourds.

22. Now the island is beginning to look inhabited - to feel tamed, and life gets more varied, with many simple amusements:

23. There are things to make, and some book-binding to be done.

24. The vegetables are nearly ready to cut to lay at the cookhouse door -
 - and they've built a water tank to make them independent of every shower of rain.

25. Now there's time for basketball, and team spirit grows with every game.

26. Who would have thought that so many months could pass so quickly? The tapioca is ready to cut and the vegetables to harvest. There's been a litter in all the animal families too, and eggs are rolling in.

27. Time has brought other changes: In their gangster days they were sworn enemies but sweat and toil have brought them together - as friends.
 Yes - real friendships are made, even with the staff, for mutual trust grows in raw conditions like these.

28. Soon there will be no need for a friend to read letters for they're learning to read and write, both the national language, Malay - and their own language too.

29. Now the work projects have become much more skilled: a generator put together by the men themselves - and hey presto there's light!

30. Repairs and maintenance to all the equipment they've learned to use - especially an outboard motor.
 Who would have thought this possible? Least of all the men themselves.

31. And so it's time for celebration; and even if the 'props' are improvised, the spirit is very real.

32. At night their own hand - not up to the Singapore Six yet perhaps, but a triumph for Pulau Senang.

33. And then the great day comes for one happy young man - release. As it will come to all those who avail themselves of the opportunities given to work for their own reformation, redemption and salvation.

34. He's thrilled of course - but when the time comes there are almost regrets: for friendships made, and jobs well done. Can life be as good 'outside'? He hopes so - and we hope so for him.

35. And so he goes in gratitude for being given back his dignity as a man. A successful experiment? Only time will tell. But worth trying - and something a self-respecting society may well be proud of.

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25th April, 1961.