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**THE MYTH OF LAZINESS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE
PRINTING PRESS IN COLONIAL PERIODS**

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Abstract

The act of stereotyping towards Malay race is still very much alive until these days, be it through word of mouth or even by using other mediums. And this is no secret as the act of labelling Malay people with various types of negative connotations being directed at that particular race which is done by other races in Malaysia or even by people from other country continuously occur until present days. One of the most common attributes that always have been associated to Malays is laziness. The stereotype exists because of several myths that have been going around for some time. This paper analyses some evidences of presence of materials that depicts the Malay as a race that is lazy as a whole. Articles which were extracted from Singapore Free Press, which is one of the earliest British newspapers in this region are discussed, showing how the British subjugated the negative traits towards Malay from their discourse. The most important part is that this paper will dispel such myth, which has been such popular ingredients in the stereotyping of the Malay.

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1. Introduction

The British first came to the Malaya archipelago as early as 16th century. When the local started to create problem with the British traders, the British used it as an excuse to colonize the Malay sultanates and the colonialism began (Osborne, 2000).

The colonial controlled the economy, production, the education, administrations, and even the cultural contacts, deprived the local societies. It was part of the colonial indoctrination that Western colonialism brought the benefits of Western civilization; the truth is that Western colonialism blocked the benefits of Western civilization (Victor & Harvey, 1995).

One of the main reasons why 15th and early 16th century European visitors on the whole did not venture an image of the native was because there was a thriving native trading class and the vital partaking of the native population in commercial shipping. Politically relations were also different: Westerners did not rule the archipelago. The first major and effective Western rule there, apart from the Philippines, may be said to have started with the Dutch. The exact point in time is difficult to establish but it can safely be assumed that by the middle of the 18th century the Dutch was the major power in the archipelago; it was then that the theme of laziness began to develop (Al Atas, 1977). This theme was not intended for the native population, they were not asked for their opinion or told of opinions which others held about them. They were simply discussed.

The image of the native is interwoven into the political and economic history of the region, the ethnocentricity of Western colonial civilization, the nature of colonial capitalism, the degree of enlightenment of the ruling power, the ideology of the ruling group, and certain events in history affecting colonial policy such as the rise of modern liberalism (Al Atas, 1977)

2. Problem Statement

Well known throughout the world and perhaps even within their own country by other races as cerebrally inferior. There are of course mutants who succeed in life, but the majorities are always on some form of welfare or require the support of some organization created solely to help them. As a race that is unable, as a whole to save themselves from their genetic intellectual incompetents, most of them resort to some forms of internal frustration which are then transferred to other factors beyond themselves. And when a race is stamped as unproductive or inactive, why it happens? And who or what to be blamed for that?

Malays have long been accused of malaise and apathy and this has in the past been attributed to the hot and humid weather in the country and a lack of educational opportunities for the large rural population' (Barr & Skrbis, 2008; Lee, 2011; Mohamad, 1970; Al Atas, 1977; Chin, 1997; Stimpfl, 2006). Malays malaise has been blamed for the Malays inability to compete against other races, prompting decades of affirmative-action economic policies that pundits say in hindsight have worsened the situation, and procreated generations of youths who believe that it is the government's duty to owe them a living.

At present, Malays are lambasted for jumping onto a 'subsidy-mentality' bandwagon. Like a spreading virus, the indolence of the Malays are associated with the country as a whole. The success or the fall of the country is pointed on the Malays who are the majority.

A finding from an international study timed intentionally to coincide with the London Olympic Games. (<http://www.malaysia-chronicle.com/index.>) for example, ranked Malaysia as the 10th laziest

nation in the world. Worse still, Malaysia turned out to be the most slothful nation by far in Southeast Asia, scoring 61.4% on the inactive index versus Cambodia's 11.2%, Myanmar's 12.7%, Vietnam's 15.3%, Thailand's 19.2%, Philippines' 23.7% and Indonesia's 29.8%.

(The study by Renowned medical journal, The Lancet defined inactivity as not doing five 30-minute sessions of moderate activity, three 20-minute sessions of vigorous activity, or 600 metabolic equivalent minutes per week) <http://www.thelancet.com/> retrieved on 11 November 13

So, the stigma that the Malays are lazy and indolence is nothing new. Malay scholars during the British time like Abdullah Munshi and after the British; Al Atas, Kassim Ahmad etc argues that there are misrepresentation of the Malays by the west particularly in political, social and economic order. Such attempt distorts the social reality and contradict to main presuppositions of the Malays and it results false consciousness among the group it represents (in this context the Malays). And finally, such wrong image becomes a large extent condition which prolong one generation to another. To some, those features and characteristics lead to the present characters of Malays today. Prior to that, the idea of labeling Malays with those negative traits is definitely arise tense and uneasiness among the Malays.

3. Research Questions

This research aims to analyse the news presented by the British writers on one English predominant colonial newspapers Singapore Free Press. It is based on the hypothesis that the British had always subjugated the negative image of the people (in this case, the Malays as being widely claimed by Malay scholars: Shamsul, Zakiah, Murad, Al Atas etc). Sometimes such image was drawn on the basis of cursory observations, sometimes with strong built-in prejudices, or misunderstandings and faulty methodologies. The general negative image was not the result of scholarship (Al Atas, 1977).

This paper has two main research questions: -

- How are the Malay being portrayed as lazy in the British colonial press?
- How true is the statement?

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper is qualitative in nature, by looking at the secondary data – articles from British colonial newspaper, Singapore Free Press. The methodology used is Content analysis. It was first used before as a method for analysing hymns, newspaper and magazine articles, advertisements, and political speeches in the 19th century (Harwood & Garry 2003). Today, content analysis has a long history of use in communication, journalism, sociology, psychology, and business, and during the last few decades its use has shown steady growth (Neundorf 2002). Content analysis as a research method is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Krippendorff 1980; Doyle 2000; Sandelowski 1995). It is also known as a method of analysing documents. In this case, the Content analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data.

The word “Malay” is becoming the key word in this paper. Malays were mainly mentioned in the Singapore Free Press within its 158 years of publications before the paper merged with Malay Mail in 1962.

Not all publications are in the forms of articles. Some are in advertisements, obituaries, classifieds, and notifications.

Singapore Free Press is chosen as it has the most completed and available versions British Newspapers in this region. Apart, most of the writers were British. Thus, their voice projected the real thoughts of the Colonial people towards the Malays during colonial period.

5. Research Methods

The approach of content analysis used is thematic Analysis. It is used to analyse classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data. It illustrates the data in great detail and deals with diverse subjects via interpretations (Boyatzis 1998). Thematic Analysis is well-thought-as the most suitable for any study that pursues to determine using interpretations. It runs a systematic element to data analysis, allowing the researcher to associate an analysis of the regularity of a theme with one of the entire content. It results accuracy and intricacy, which can enhance the research's entire meaning. It also s gives an opportunity to understand the potential of any issue more widely (Marks & Yardley 2004). Namey et al. (2008) said, "Thematic Moves beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focuses on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas. Codes developed for ideas or themes are then applied or linked to raw data as summary markers for later analysis, which may include comparing the relative frequencies of themes or topics within a data set, looking for code co-occurrence, or graphically displaying code relationships." (p.138).

The first step of analysing the Malays is by referring to the literature review in other sources than newspapers and looking at the common features given to them by British writers. From there, few themes related to the Malays are identified. The themes are clustered according to the same meaning. For example, lazy, peasant, sluggish and indolence are categorized under one theme. From the literature, it is found that Malay and laziness are among the most written mentioned topics.

Next, all articles and documents that appear the words "Malay" and "lazy" are sought from the attacked newspaper - Singapore Free Press. There are 89 articles related to Malay and laziness from the early years of its publication till the Second World War. Laziness is chosen because it has propagated as the character of the Malays till now. (Anthony, 2008)

6. Findings

The many traits of Malay character noted by British were explained in a historical and sociological manner. The problem occurred when the explanation was not based on the sociological of knowledge. (Al Atas, 1977). Some of the British were not professionals, they would be officers, low rank workers, travellers and so forth. As such, the work was done based on approach, rather than diverse conclusions. The findings regarding the issues of Malay and laziness in this paper are the extracts taken from the articles of Singapore Free Press.

Mr. R D. Prince who is British himself for example, was in British Malaya for 15 years shared his experiences. Before British came, there was a great deal of lawlessness like murder, piracy etc. Railways, roads and their modern improvements have been affected. He writes: -

... *The Malays are very loyal and during the Great War made valuable gifts to the motherland, including battleships and a fleet of aero planes...*

And about a Malay, he adds

He possesses a genius of taking things easy: rice, fish vegetables are provided by a kindly providence, why should he interfere and break his back in a tin mine

Singapore Free Press. 15 March 1920, page 12.

And Prince descriptions over the Malay in general: -

...Mat is 5 feet 3 inches, of brown merry eyed, manhood, prominent cheek bones, flat nose, coarse black beard, brilliant black eyes, stands firm on his feet, swims like an otter, hunts, is reserved with strangers, but will borrow money readily from a friend He is lazy; 25 coconuts and five acres of rice will supply all his wants. He is quaintly superstitious and has some very wise proverbs and sayings.

Another British guy who enjoyed his tour in the country by car was accompanied by a local, Samat wrote about the Malays too.

A rectangular box containing a snippet of text from a newspaper article. The text reads: "and laboured; we have learned to love its grandeur, its little brown men (the Malays) have become to us as our children—British Malaya, our adopted home!"

Figure 01. Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

He described Samat as a marvel, and saluted him as he knew every inch of road through peninsular.

A rectangular box containing a snippet of text from a newspaper article. The text reads: "of road throughout the peninsula. His happy face is a reflection of his happy nature, and when one can enter into his life, his domestic affairs, and the legendary and lore attached to his ancient race, one is never lonely. The"

Figure 02. Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

When the British came to the Malay land, they intended to make it from a land of impenetrable jungle people with ferocious savages into a prosperous country. It is from taming the indomitable spirit of the Malay and virgin jungle into a wealthy and productive country are feats of colonization of which England may well be proud. For them, Malays are characterized as blood thirsty and lawless in the extreme. They are lazy who seek only to live a quiet life with as little trouble as possible.

British claimed the *Laziness* or the attitude of the local, becomes the main obstacle to the investment of capitals in the islands, and is traceable directly to the altruistic policy of the government, which says that the land must be preserved for the original inhabitants, and not delivered over to the Chinese and other industrious oriental labourer's.

Meanwhile, the acme bliss for a Malay is to own a house, rice fields, coconuts and other necessities in le wherewith to support his wife and family, which is probably an extensive one without the necessity to

work. He is contended to life and a devoted lover and a good father, and his capacity for promiscuous love is unbounded.

The following lines will show the laziness of the Malays in the eyes of The British: -

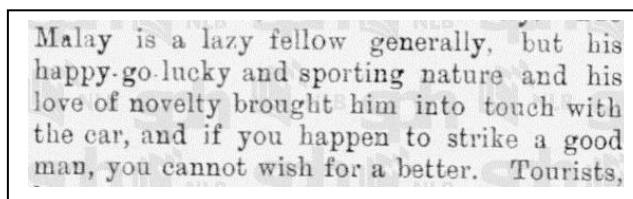


Figure 03. Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

The laziness of the Malays was comparable to other races, especially the Chinese and this was described in farming. In one article, the bad quality of land in the Straits (the three states in Peninsular) was based on the contain of sulphate of iron and sulphuric acid it has. The Malays, sadly perplexed and prejudiced by the failure of their crops. The Chinese, know how to convert their sour land into good and productive soils.

“The Malays are lazy and careless and will not take the pains. A Malay considers that he has done all that is necessary.”

Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

The Malay were said to feel proud to obtain a favourable return from his own singular industry. If the crops turn out unfavourably, he is still pleased with himself, and pronounces the land acidic. He then, removes to another locality instead of correcting his mode of cultivation. If he is referred to Chinese method, he will give answer.

“The Chinese way is good but difficult. The Malay way is different. I don’t want to be in trouble, doing difficult work”.

Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

The comparison between the two races also was penned in timber industry: -

“The population is very scanty and vey lazy, only cultivating their rice fields and collecting rattans. In any attempts tow or the local mines, it would be requisite to introduce Chinese labourer’s.”

Singapore Free Press. 1 August 1850, Page 3

When the British administered the Peninsular, the magistrate was the British. They wrote a lot about the Malays as they mingled with the community. Being addressed as: *Tuan Magistrate*: their two main jobs are exercising a general control over everybody and everything in the district; like work of buildings, roads or bridges and the second, land officer or know the land laws at their finger’s ends.

In one of the articles, the magistrate described the tedious work of a magistrate mingling with the Malays which he finds pleasant and smooth and the people in mining area or the Chinese which are touched with crime like murder and must be treated without feel pusillanimity (timid)

The Malays are merely do. Pour passer le temps by themselves. (To pass the time).

Singapore Free Press. 1 August 1850, Page 3

The author (who is the magistrate) also describes his time with the local whom he thinks courteous, pleasant, and unconventional (Malay) and become on a social equity with their quests without any artificiality. He is somehow also against the idea that ... *natives are proverbially stupid and lazy according to western ideas and constant fault finding with somebody or other is hardly conducive to an even temperament.* The articles also state that it is a matter for regret when an officer us not in touch with the natives in whose land he lives and draws his salary. (Singapore Free Press. 20 November 1893, page 3)

After decades of colonizing, the negative images on the locals remain. The laziness of the local also leads to the loss of thrust from the British in every aspect. It can be seen in administration when the locals were given low posts only like clerk or peon. Lord Carnarvon the secretary of state for the colonies for example, voiced the uneven power among the British resident, who had few yearly meetings with the State council-consisted of the Sultan and Captain China. The residents had said the *sic volo sic jubeo* power, the lord disapproved

“Such a council would, as you observe, give an opportunity to some of the principal chiefs to take a useful part in the administration of the country”

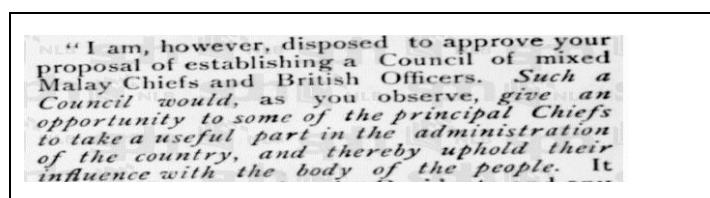


Figure 04. Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

For him, this is needed as

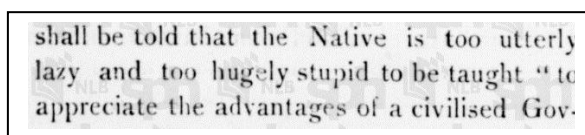


Figure 05. Singapore Free Press. 12 May 1909, Page 8

The same example was given towards the people in Johor,

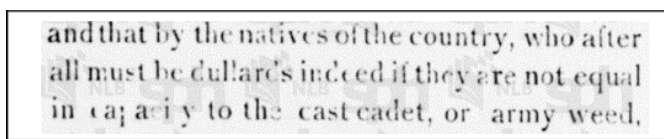


Figure 06. Singapore Free Press. 13 November 1886, Page 3

And because of that, the resident is, in this case, become the better and more subservient economist. The increasing employment of steam vessels and the establishment of numerous lines of steamers have made it of the utmost importance to secure regular supplies of coal at a moderate cost, made the European governments in the archipelago, have made research after the mineral. Deposits of coal discovered, mentioning places where the existence of coal had been ascertained, like Malay Peninsula, Sumatera, Borneo and Philippines.

This time, a thorough exploration of Penang remained to be made, somehow, the British could see the potential of it. The nature of Malay Peninsula was given in depth with descriptions of coal found. Which the quality was even better than the coal in London. The coal is characterized as resembling the best cannel coal. The Malays were described to work at coal mine but reluctant to do so.

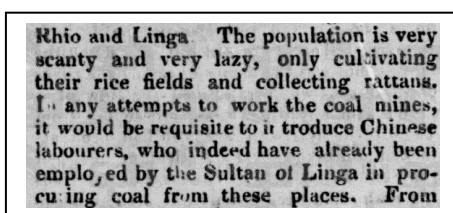


Figure 07. Singapore Free Press. 1 August 1850, Page 1

These people stayed near the river. This is in line with Al Atas (1977) who wrote about the Malays who stayed near the river, but they were not lazy. This is supported by Osborne (2000) who lived in Malaya for twelve years as a secretary to the Governor gave a brief history of Malay. He had seen the Malays as follows: -

“The Malays are a charming race attractive, loyal, amiable and very good friends with excellent manners. They are not good servant and lazy: as they can get a good dinner for about three farthings of the money where there is no need for them to worry”

He added that Malays spent their life most on the river and when one realized what rivers meant to civilization long before roads were made, once an understand all that the rivers mean to the Malay. The Malays again were described lazy,

“The Chinese and Europeans mainly are the industries because Malays themselves are too lazy. Even of their staple food of rice they will not trouble a grow a sufficiently and then a crop fails, this and other food products have to be imported.

Singapore Free Press. 24 December 1924, Page 14

Interestingly, not all British thought Malays were lazy in common. According to Krippendorff K. (1980), saying Malay is lazy and Malay will not work is a common saying in the mouths of Europeans in Malaya. The Malay will often decline to work in the particular manner in which the European desires him to do so, for example as a mining coolly or plantation. In short, the Malay by no means are not idle. He writes,

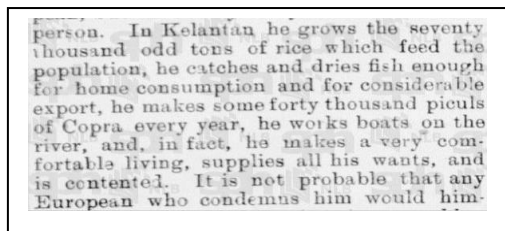


Figure 08. Singapore Free Press. June 1908, Page 5

Another article 3 November 1909, page 4, also talked about the worm diseases that most Malay suffered which made them pale and sick.

“...these people were not lazy, but sick”

The doctor who claimed that statement said the similar symptoms also attacked to the people in Carolina because of the same temperature. Somehow, the newspapers took it up facetiously and it became the joke.

To go deeper, the Malays who live in a placid life undisturbed by the tireless pains of Briton or Chinaman to wrest from the soil the wealth that lies hidden in their land. Is it a fact there are still some people who believes that peace of mind and contentment is all that counts in this world. It is a realization too to see a whole race of people (in this case the Malay) rejects a strenuous life and looks upon those who rush around to no purpose as fools.

Discussion

Leisure and quality time with the family became a very much entrenched way of life within the Malay community. The Malay, doesn't care for the house upon the hill where lives the white man surrounded by the trappings of a modern civilization. He sees the industrious Chinese coolie bent under heavy burdens and perspiring in a strenuous effort to lift and carry and shakes his hand as he mediates on a performance so out of keeping with what he conceives to the ideal life.

There is a term in the Malay tongue that expresses a volume and which calls up in the mind of the Malay, the things in life most desirable. The word *cukup* is expressed everywhere regarding the ambitions, the outlook and the aspirations of the brown race. And what is the meaning of *cukup* to the Malay?

To be a happy child well cared for in the ancestral home that is *cukup*; to be a proud father the head of the household, with your numerous offspring gathered about you that also *cukup*; to have an assured income, the more unearned the better, is *cukup*; to live in the shadow of the mosque so Allah may lead his services in warding off evil is *cukup*; to live in a place where domestic comforts are plentiful is *cukup*; to be able to go on a train, or motor car, or any other vehicle is *cukup*; to be far removed from the jarring

association of other races, particularly the white man, is *cukup* ; in short, to be free from the travail and vexation of spirit of whatever nature is *cukup*; the one thing of consequence in this vale of tears.

Peace and security to dream one's life away in an aimless existence amid the squalor and the native *Kampong* that seems the height of ambition with the Malay. There he can stroke the tail feathers of his favourite fighting cock to his heart's content, there he may gamble his few coppers away or with his winnings buy something that appeals to him in the nearby shop of a Chinaman. So, it doesn't matter to him if he loses.

Culturally, Malay enjoy always a nice life. Unlike their counter parts from China and India who have to labour the soil and suffer extreme climatic forces just to guarantee their persistence, Malay never have to suffer these destitutions badly. Everything thrown into the lush soil of the Malay Peninsular will bud into a vigorous plant within short span.

He has the paddy fields that produce rice which his women would pound out every day; he can catch the fish from the river in front of his house and plucks the ferns for vegetables just behind the house. The coconut trees bear fruit that he may harvest throughout the year, and not to forget the rambutan, bananas and all sorts of fruits that yield large bunches from which he may help himself. Thus, he has no reasons to feel worry but that doesn't mean the Malay is lazy. The term lazy itself is too harsh for the Malay. If he is lazy, he would die of hunger. If he is lazy, he won't work on the paddy to get the rice.

Besides that, his wants are few. He is content to live in a grass hut or a *nipa* shack. Twenty-five coconut trees in full bearing and a field of rice is all a family requires. His climate is kind to him. He doesn't need to be in the heat working hard as life is sufficient or enough He lives his span of life on sufficiently joyful terms to satisfy every desire. For the Malay, there is no reason to follow the white and yellow races in their mad scramble for things beyond his ken.

The white man with his programme of sanitation and other civic improvements is to the Malay an irritation. The first is a disturbing element that break in on the Malay's peace of mind and prevents him from enjoying the *cukup* to which he feels entitled in accordance with the traditions of his race. In addition, The Malay has this "*tak apa*" or "*it's fine*" attitude too. Unfortunately, these civilizations came on a collision course when the Chinese started migrating into the Malay land. When Chinese and Indians settle in the Malay area, for the later it is "*tak apa*" and pity the Chinese and Indians, so they do not mind moving to rural area. In addition, the greatest desire of the Malay is to be at peace with his neighbours. Meanwhile, Chinese and Indians are the races that have suffered for thousands of years to survive back home. For them, this "*tak apa*" attitude shown by Malay should be taken as an opportunity, but they themselves would never show such attitude. So, the white man keeps up tearing the earth and build his roads and his railroads, his harbours and his edifices. The Chinese digs and delves in the tin mines and putters around with his market gardens. The Malay in his kampong will have nothing of this alien activity.

So, it comes to pass that the original owner of one of the world's richest countries is entirely indifferent to the progress made all around him. Alien ideas and alien methods everywhere display their alien successes, but they pass him by and he looks out upon them from his leafy shelter in the cool shadows with disdain. For Malay it is fool of Chinese and White to exert themselves in such dreadful manner when they might take it easy in the shade. For him, those people have strenuous lives. They make a material progress and accomplish material results. That is their way of being happy. It is not the way of the Malay.

He rejects, even despises, the ways of these other people because it is not *senang* as he knows to do it. For him, it is “*tak apa*” to suffer working when he has the choice not to do it.

7. Conclusion

History comes from the past thus it cannot be changed, past remains as past. Somehow, if it brings some wrong thoughts or ideas which are continuously presented at present, then such ideas or thoughts need to be corrected. The present people need to know such wrong doings and the new generation in future know the truth. The same thing implies in the case of the bad image on Malay from the eyes of the west. All these while, we are stigmatized as a lazy native, it is the time then to prove the laziness is propagated by the west due to certain agendas. Those ideologies are dominated by uncritical and superficial kind. There is a need to unmask the colonial ideology, as its influence is still strong. The persistence of the bad image of the Malays still exerts a strong influence amongst an influential section of non-Malays and also influenced a section of the Malay intelligentsia. It will impair the effort towards national integration as there exists certain discriminatory practices in the employment of Malays- a number of employers have avoided Malays because they believe Malays are lazy. Many people thought that by nature Malays are not endowed with the capacity to do the business. All these ideas derive their origin from colonial image of the Malays

The Malay may be reserved and inclined to take the easy course, but he is not slow to learn when he has some encouragement. And he has a natural logic and an aptitude which fit him more for mechanical, electrical, clerical, agricultural or other skilled work. History has shown that the Malay travels far to be in trading. Some are great warriors with good craft men in shipping. The Malay is content to be a skilled manual labourer. When he remains on the land, he has a knowledge of his native soil and native plants which is unrivalled and even in that he is ready to learn from science.

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Singapore Free Press. 20 November 1893, page 3

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