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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE CHIEF MINISTER, MR. LIM YEW HOCK,  
AT THE SINGAPORE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE DINNER COMMEMORATING  
HENRY NICHOLAS RIDLEY ON SATURDAY, MARCH 29, 1956, AT 9.15 P.M.

We are met together tonight to pay humble tribute to Henry Nicholas Ridley, one of the greatest benefactors of this country in which we serve, and to leave in permanent form a record of our tribute. This bronze bust by Mr. Maurice Lambert of Ridley holding the rubber sapling in his hand will remain as a casting of our feelings and as a reminder for a generation which will grow up not having known him.

This is a generous civic gesture by the Rubber Association towards the man who gave them their reason for existence. It is a form of "piety," in the sense which is common to East and West of dutiful respect for past creators and benefactors.

On October 24 last year, Ridley died within seven days of reaching his 101st year, and 47 years after his retirement from his post as Director of our Botanic Gardens, but not from active life. That he botanised till he was 85 and swam till he was 84 gives one answer to those who seek the secret of long life and the unbalance of life insurance accounts - not to mention, Government pension schemes.

Ridley's was a life of constant and restless yet purposive activity of mind and body. His interests were not confined to rubber and once he had succeeded in opening up the Plantation Industry of Rubber by showing how it could be successfully and successively tapped, his mind turned to the relentless search among the rich flora of Malaya.

He came to Singapore as Director of the Botanic Gardens in 1888, but it was for him only his base of operations and his laboratory. All Malaya was his province. He was a pioneer of Malaya in the literal sense in which a pioneer is a foot-soldier, for he went out into the jungle paths by foot in search of his botanic specimens.

Ridley did not bring the first para rubber seedlings to Malaya. The first consignment of 1876 died of neglect. The second lot of 22 arrived in 1877 and Ridley found 1,000 of the tree from these seeds growing in the Botanic Gardens when he arrived in 1888. He discovered how to tap them continuously and tried to persuade others to see the future prospects of rubber production as he saw them. It is surely typical of the way in which the peoples of Malaya have interacted to their mutual advantage that the first man to take Ridley at his word was Tan Chay Yan who set up Malaya's first plantation at Bukit Lintang, Malacca, in 1896.

But it was the beginning of the motor-car industry in 1906 which gave Ridley the bonnets into which to put the bee which had been very much in his bonnet for 18 years. He must have remembered with a good-humoured smile the time when Sir Frank Swettenham ordered him to abandon his exotic and uneconomic researches. Sir Frank had sent a Dyak up a rubber tree to see if rubber grew on it, and, the report being negative, Sir Frank ordered 100 trees cut down. But the millions of living trees of today have out-numbered the 100 dead of yesterday, and carried Sir Frank Swettenham's name higher in the annals of history by the resilience and durability

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which rubber gave to the history of Malaya. And for this industrial revolution - creative and wealth-producing - Ridley got no financial reward, but he won the reward he wanted, the reward of knowing that he had overcome the inertia, the prejudice, and the short-sightedness which prevented the flowing of the full flood tide of Malayan economic history. And every one of us who rejoices in the rising standard of living and of social services in Malaya must remember him with gratitude. He surely made possible the economic foundation of Merdeka.

But if imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we should learn from the example of Ridley. He lives on in his work in Malaya - the rubber trees are his standing guard of honour.

But let us honour him by following his example. Both Malayan territories are coming up against a financial supersonic barrier - both require a financial break-through if we are to meet the mounting costs of the social services which must be provided. We need the same tireless, experimental, imaginative, and devoted qualities of Ridley to find opportunities of employment for our younger generation whose educational standards provide an expanding pool of skill on which we can draw and the waste of which would be tragic indeed. Industrial opportunities must be sought and found - the responsibility lies with both the public and the private entrepreneur. The need awaits the man to see and accept the challenge and the opportunity to be seized. Let Ridley's memory, made visible to us in this bust today, stimulate us to seek fresh fields and pastures new; let his pioneering spirit travel this fair and fertile land again; and let the new spirit of self-government prove that it can provide the liberating force of new ideas to match its new incentives. I forget the name of the original American rider whose name is preserved in the phrase, but let us Malayanise the phrase and adopt as our motto - "May the spirit of Ridley ride again;" and to start this new journey, I am glad to act as starter and unveil this bust to Ridley's lasting memory.

MARCH 29, 1958.

(Time issued at 1900 hours)

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