

Traveling by Rail in the Dutch East Indies

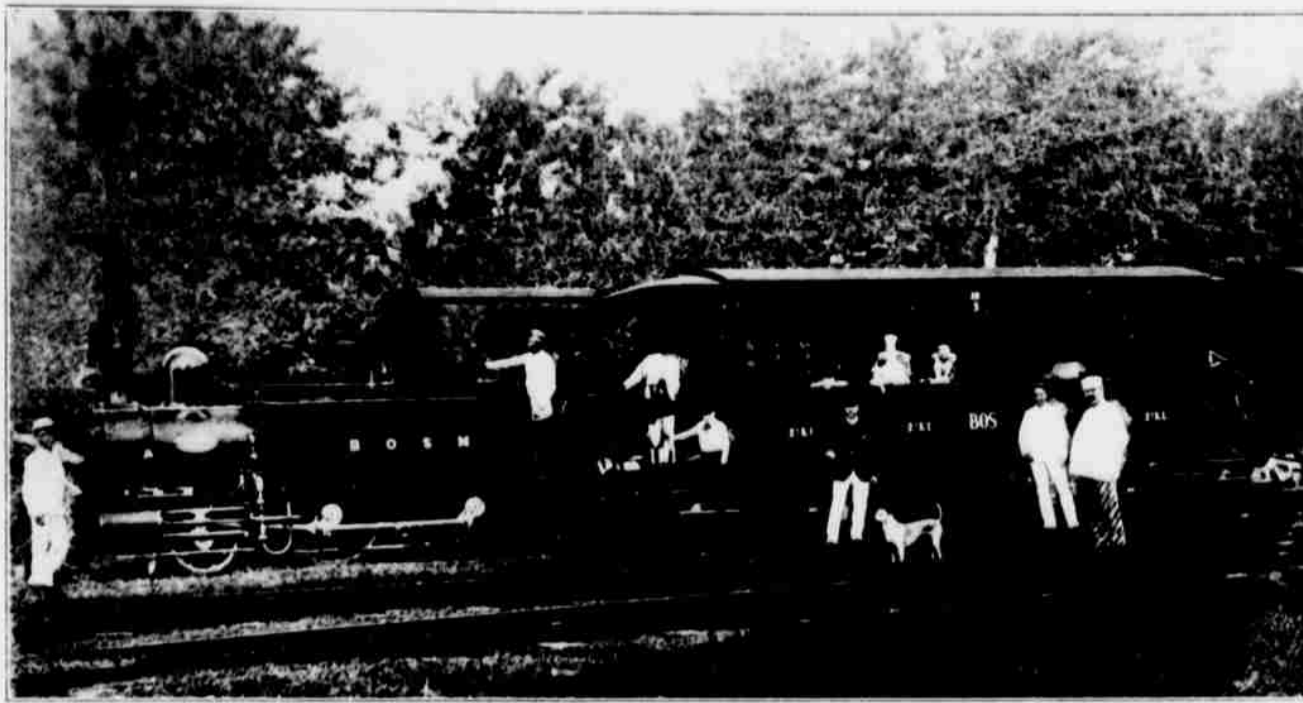
MAOS, Java, Sept. 6.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—Railways in Java! Yes, hundreds of miles of them! I have just crossed the island on a trunk line as long as from Boston to Pittsburg and I write these notes at the station of Maos, about half way between Soerabaya and Batavia. The Dutch of the East Indies have ten times as much railroad as we have in the Philippines. Their roads are the best of their kind, and, although they are almost on the equator, that red-hot belt about Mother Earth's waist, they are built to stay. This is one of the most mountainous lands in the world, where it never rains but it pours, but nevertheless the roadbeds and embankments are such that they withstand the tropical torments. In many places the banks are walled with stones and in others they are criss-crossed by lines of stones two feet wide. There are many culverts and also stone drains, plastered and whitewashed so that they form white lines running down the green banks.

This is irrigated land. For thousands of years before the Dutch came the Javanese had terraced the mountains and carried the water in aqueducts from one hill to the other. In the railroads the irrigation system had to be preserved and in places the water is now carried high over the tracks. Sometimes there are waterways above and below the roads and not infrequently you pass a great tank in which the water is siphoned from one side of the track to the other.

One of the railroad difficulties here is keeping down the vegetation. The roadbeds must be kept perfectly clean and the grass on the embankments is shaved like a lawn. The tracks are ballasted with rock and the ballast protected by little walls of cobblestones four inches high, which form a gutter outside the line.

Javanese Tramways.

Not only the trunk lines, but also the tramways of Java are well built. There are a number of steam tramways now being constructed and many such are doing quite well. I went over the one from Djokja to Magelang a short time ago with its civil engineer. This was Mr. J. F. Van Bethen



LOCOMOTIVE AND CAR, JAVA RAILROAD.

offices and telephones. The ticket agents are often Chinese. They are the cashiers of the country and handle the greater part of the change.

The cars are first, second and third-class, the natives generally taking the latter. The fares are low and the third-class tickets make up the largest part of the receipts of the road. They amount to about \$6,000,000 a year.

Every large station has its first and second-class waiting rooms, and each has a restaurant, where you can get a fair meal for from 50 to 75 cents. Before you reach the meal stations the conductor telegraphs ahead and orders your dinner, or you can have him telegraph for a dinner to be brought to you on the train. Such meals are served in sets of porcelain boxes, which rest one over the other, a half dozen boxes comprising an ordinary train luncheon.

sofa, lying there on his back, his fat abdomen shaking like jelly under his expanse of white linen. The other three Dutchmen were smoking and chatting. They spoke English and I found them good fellows.

The compartment beyond this was for the second-class passengers. Here were half a dozen Chinese dressed in white duck, all gorgeous with rings and scarfpins. Each had a black queue, in which was braided red silk, tucked inside his jacket. All had gold watchchains and carried canes. There were also some of the poorer Dutch, including a couple of women, who wore sarongs and slippers in Javanese style, and a pretty girl with beautiful eyes and a ravishing smile and a face so dark that you could tell she had native blood in her. The third-class cars had plain wooden benches. They were crowded with natives, women and men, packed in as close as sardines.

Barefooted Conductors.

From time to time the conductor came in for the tickets. He moved about like a ghost, opening the door without noise. He was in his bare feet and as he walked he made no sound. His costume was a calico sarong, or bag, which reached from his waist to his ankles, a navy blue jacket and a turban, over which he wore a cap. He put his hand to his forehead as he entered our car and again raised it in salutation as he examined each ticket. There were barefooted porters at every station and barefooted cabmen ready to drive us to our hotel. Their charge is equal to 20 cents of our money; the hotel carriages charge twice as much. There were no newsboys on the trains and nothing was sold while the cars were in motion. The latest Dutch dailies are to be had at the stations, and they are also on file in every depot reading room.

Tropical Garden.

My trip across the island has given me a good idea of the country. I cannot describe its beauties. There is no land like it on the face of the globe. I have visited the picturesque parts of India and the valley of the Nile in the winter when everything is the greenest of green, but I have never seen anything like Java. If you will imagine a garden as big as the state of New

York and as beautifully kept as Central park you might have a faint idea of it. But you must add volcanic mountains green to their tops, which are lost in the clouds; you must put in feathery bamboos, groves of coconuts and orchards of bananas and vast meadows on which buffaloes and ponies are feeding. You must terrace the hills with rice fields, some covered with the golden grain ready for harvest and others with emerald sprouts on the silvery face of the waters. Now one of the mountains has 10,000 steps of this nature and now you shoot out of the rice into great tea plantations, into groves of red quinine and on into woods as blue as the Blue Ridge of Virginia.

Among the banana trees are little bamboo play houses, the homes of the natives. You cross magnificent roads spotted with coolies, bare to the waist, trotting along with baskets fastened to the ends of poles which rest on their shoulders. Some of the poles have ends turned up like bows. They are borne by men who are carrying rice in from the fields. Other men have loads of goods which they are taking from one town to another. There are women thus loaded as well as the men, and near Djokja I saw hundreds of young girls carrying burdens in bags on their backs.

Land of White and Green.

I have spoken of the railroad stations being white. Indeed, all Java is of the whitest of whites and the greenest of greens. The Dutch go wild over whitewash, not only in Holland, but all over the world. Everything they have built here is coated with newly slaked lime. The villas of the cities are dead white, with columns in front of them the color of Parian marble. The bridges are white, the fence along the roads, whether they be made of bamboo fishing poles or of heavier wood are covered with whitewash and the same may be said of the drains and the culverts, the warehouses, the factories and especially the vast sugar factories, which cover acres and which have white smokestacks leaning out in their snowy purity against the blue sky. White, indeed, is so much the fashion that the people whitewash as we clean house—a new coat is put on everything once and often twice every year. The rainy season covers every-

thing with damp and mold. over the smell of lime fills everything is then coated inside and the buildings put on their whitest mer dresses. Some of the hotels keep whitewashers busy all the year round, as do also the larger property owners. The white even extends to the clothing of the foreigners. The Dutch officials dress in white duck. They wear the white canvas shoes and white helmets, and even the military officers wear white.

In the Rice Fields.

The chief crop of Java is rice. In my trip across the island I have never been out of sight of rice fields. The rice grows on every hillside and in every valley. It must have water and the irrigation works which have been built to supply this are unequalled in any part of the world. The soil of Java is a volcanic mud. It is as rich as guano. It is of such a nature that it can easily be made into walls which will hold back the flooded patches.

The larger canals are stone walled, well built, with many locks, but the water drips from field to field as the little mud embankments are opened by the people.

In many places I saw the people at work. Here they were planting and there harvesting the rice. The lands are plowed and weeded by the men, but the planting and reaping are done by the women. The rice is set out plant by plant in the flooded fields, the women wading through the mud up to their knees as they plant. Much of the farming is on shares, a man and his wife agreeing to plant and harvest a patch for one-fifth of the crop. Sometimes a number of people will join together and take several rice fields. I see crowds at work in the ripe grain. The men and women are working together, and especially the young men and young women. I am told that harvesting time is the chief courtship time, and that the boys and their sweethearts usually become engaged while cutting rice. The work is not at all hard, for each stalk of rice is cut separately with a little knife which is held in the fingers. The stalks are put together in sheaves not much bigger around than a man's leg and in this shape they are taken home and threshed out at leisure.

At the beginning of the rice harvest the people have picnics and feasts. They erect temples in the fields to the goddess of the harvest. Each temple is about as big as a pigeon house, and the offerings consist of an egg, a dish of fruit and bits of sugar-cane and cooked rice.

As the grain ripens shelters are erected on poles in the fields and children or grown-ups are stationed in them to watch the crop or to scare off the birds. Sometimes strings are stretched from one part of the field to the other and by these scarecrows are manipulated so that the boy in the shelter can frighten the rice birds a half mile away.

Government Watches the Rice.

The rice lands supply the food of the natives and the Dutch government watches them very carefully. It insists that all contracts made shall not interfere with their cultivation and it provides that they shall be taken care of for the people. The government aids in their irrigation and it is due to it largely that Java, with the thickest population perhaps on the face of the globe, does not have famines.

The natives are lazy and shiftless. Were they not protected the Chinese or other capitalists would corner the rice and it would be for sale at high prices. As it is

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WOMEN HULLING RICE.

van den Berg, a young man who was educated at the Lehigh university and who graduated there in 1895. He is a relative of Lord Van Bethen van den Berg, the Dutch resident governor at Bandung. His road is about forty-eight miles long and it pays on account of the heavy shipments of tobacco and sugar from the plantations through which it runs. The tram is built on high embankments throughout most of its course. It has some steep grades and it is crossed above and below by drains and artificial waterways. I was interested in the protection of the bridges by huge crates made of bamboo filled with stones. If you will imagine a bamboo basket as big as a railroad car, filled with boulders of various sizes, thrown into a stream above a bridge to break the flood, you may get an idea of such protection. Baskets of this kind are of all sizes. They are used to hold up the embankments and to prevent washings and to strengthen all sorts of waterways.

At the Rail Road Stations.

The stations are better kept here than in the United States. They are well built, being made of stone and stucco, covered with whitewash and roofed with red tiles. Every station has a home for the station-master. It has a lawn and garden about it and palm trees and tropical flowers. Many of the stations have postoffices connected with them and all have telegraph

Each box contains some hot soup, meat or a vegetable, and these with fruit form the menu. A servant brings the food into the train and waits upon you while you eat, leaving you at the next station, to go back on another train with the dishes.

Across Java by Rail.

My ticket from Batavia to Soerabaya cost me 39 guildens, an average of about 25 cents per mile. This was first-class. Had I taken second-class I could have gone for 2 cents and third-class for six-tenths of 1 cent a mile. I had a servant with me and I sent him third-class. I paid extra baggage on all over sixty-six pounds, at the rate of 3 cents a pound, and my baggage cost almost as much as my ticket.

Let me give you a picture of the first-class compartment which I had from Soerabaya to Maos. It was about as wide as our cars at home, but not more than ten feet in length. It was in fact a little room about 6x10, walled with glass at the sides and entered by a door at the rear. It had four seats at the corners and two arm-chairs of mahogany and wicker. The compartment contained also a leather sofa, which could be put up or down at will, and a table a foot wide and four feet long, upon which we ate our luncheon. My fellow passengers were four portly Dutchmen clad in white duck. One of them monopolized the

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