

LETTERS from INSULINDIA Gerard Cornelis Adolfs 1899–1901

*LETTERS*  
**Letters**  
*from*  
**Insulindia**  
*INSULINDIA*



2019  
Janine  
Prins

Compiled and delivered by Janine Prins in 2019.



A. GREINER

AMSTERDAM



Nieuwendijk 89.

Around the start of the twentieth century, Gerrit Adolfs, railway employee and semi-professional photographer in Java, and also my great-grandfather, wrote countless letters to his family in the Netherlands. A great number of these letters, dating from 1899–1901, were compiled and paired with photos taken by the author himself. After being handed down from person to person over the years, the two bound volumes, entitled *Letters from Insulinidia*, ended up with his granddaughter Julia Groen, who presented them to me a few years ago, wrapped in a tea towel.

The collected letters read as a chronicle of the colonial era during this period, observed with a certain distance and a sense of humour. I selected a small part of the material and had this reworked into contemporary Dutch and translated into English. This publication contains an estimated five per cent of the original content. It is likely that more letters were written before and after this period, but those have never been found. I limited myself to selecting only characteristic passages about recurrent themes, such as family, work, social relationships, political beliefs and experiences of living overseas. Long

**IMAGE** The Adolfs family from Amsterdam, with Gerrit on the left.

before there was Facebook, my great-grandfather felt an urge to share his experiences, and enhance these with clarifications, emotions and picture-perfect snapshots. Photographs, also of daily life, were glued to the pages with great precision. They sometimes bore messages on the back, expressly encouraging Gerrit's mother – who most likely compiled the letters – to show them to friends and contacts in Holland.

Gerard Cornelis Adolfs, known as Gerrit, (1871–1945) grew up in the heart of Amsterdam, in a family of small retailers, likely with German roots. His father was a cobbler, his mother ran a haberdashery. Some evenings, his parents gave dancing lessons to earn a bit extra. The young Gerrit couldn't find his niche, however, and embarked for the Dutch East Indies in 1894 to try his luck there. He turned out to be an ambitious man, who within a relatively short timespan rose from the rank of ticket inspector to stationmaster at the Semarang-Joana Steam Tram Company and at a much later stage presumably became something of a director for the Surabaya district. In his spare time he trained himself as a portrait photographer, a skill that he continually managed to capitalise on in terms of expanding his network and saving up money. He had his mother send him equipment from the Netherlands, put local craftspeople to work and convinced both indigenous nobility and 'the common man' to pose before his lens.

In his reflections, Adolfs regularly and approvingly quotes the Dutch writer Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker, 1820–1887), who in his book *Max Havelaar, or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trade Company* denounced social wrongs during colonial rule. Nonetheless, Adolfs himself was part of the colonial system, and he talks about the Javanese in ways that many contemporary readers will find offensive.

In these letters, Adolfs repeatedly mentions Transvaal, where at the time the Second Boer War (1899–1902) was about to erupt. Adolfs identifies strongly with the Dutch-speaking Boers from the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, who took on the British Empire in the battle over African territories.

Adolfs also gives special attention to the position of so-called *Sinjos*, young men of mixed descent born in overseas territories, also known as Eurasians, but better known these days in the Netherlands as *Indos* or East Indian Dutch. This is the large group of people 'of mixed blood' who were continually set apart from both native Indonesians and 'full-blooded white' Dutchmen living in the colony, also called *Belandas* or totoks. A substantial number of white colonial men married a woman from the East Indies, and so did Gerrit Adolfs. His wife, Henriëtte (Jet) Adolfs-Donkel, herself came from a line of European fathers and Asian mothers that can be traced back to the VOC era. She grew up in Semarang, where her father worked as a stableman for a hotel and also rented out two horses-and-carts of his own for people transport. She would have been of Indonesian, Dutch and Chinese ancestry, mostly spoke Javanese and, although she had the mixed parentage of a typical Eurasian person, she did not enjoy their legal rights. However, the eight children that Gerrit and Jet Adolfs eventually brought into the world did belong to the group of people 'of mixed blood' with Dutch passports; one had a lighter complexion, the other a darker one – in other words, a family with so-called 'layer-cake children'.

The eldest child, Gerard Pieter Adolfs (1898-1968) would later become a reasonably well-known painter of an idyllic Dutch East Indies. The eldest daughter, my grandmother Julia Jaarsma-Adolfs (1899-1975), is referred to in these letters as Juultje, the apple of Gerrit's eye with a remarkable talent for the dramatic. This would serve her well in her later career: she was to become the first female criminal lawyer born in the Dutch East Indies, and of mixed blood to boot. As a lawyer in high-profile criminal cases, an advocate of property rights for Eurasians and a dignitary with many ancillary positions in pre-war and post-war Surabaya, she was at least as ambitious as her father. She, in her turn, married a white Dutchman from Friesland, a legal scholar who had written a dissertation about the laws governing land ownership in the Indies – but this is a story that unfolds elsewhere, in *Legacy of Silence*, a project that spans three generations of family history.

Janine Prins  
Jubbega-Schurega, August 2019

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Gerrit Adolfs, railway employee and self-taught photographer in Central Java,  
sent letters to his family in Amsterdam around 1900:  
a critical colonial's Facebook *avant la lettre*.

Noordoeraan April 1899.

7

L. Moeder en zwt!

Laat ik nu iets vertellen over mijn atelier wat ik op't oogje  
blijft bezig ben te bouwen. Ik heb daarvan reeds detail teekeningen gemaakt  
en haast ik me te zeggen dat atelier en donkere kamer een door mij  
zelf gevonden model is. Hier in Indië waar de zon grootelijks reecht  
boven ons staat hebben we andere keuzen dan in Holland of Europa.

LETTERS from INSULINDIA

APRIL

1899

-

AUGUST

1899

Ik nu heel prattig  
niet reken besloten  
en Noordlicht gebruik  
te timmeren en op

t nieuwe atelier klaar

lijken in elkaar zit.

en meer baangehou,

hier komt en meteen

te zamen is de af.

Ik reken hierop met al

gchier later werk van

en soms kunnen

word en dan eenen



LETTERS from INSULINDIA

Oh, we love our children so dearly, mother! If my heart and mind keep their strength for long enough, if I will be able to bring them up myself, preferably surrounded by nature as I do now, with trees, greenery, the Javanese, birds and flowers, then they will be the genuine article when they're grown up. Gerard and Juultje are both growing fast. Gerard is already talking so much and so well; he speaks Dutch, Malay and Javanese.

Noordoeveren April 1899.

7

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Laat ik nu iets vertellen over mijn atelier wat ik op't oogje  
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zelf gevonden model is. Hier in Indië waar de zon grootelijks recht  
lovers ons staat hebben we andere regalen dan in Holland of Europa.  
Zoo is bijvoorbeeld 's nachts Noordlicht Smorgens om 6 uur heel prettig  
maar om 8 uur reeds hinderlijk. Hoewel ik nog niet zeker besloten  
ben over de stand geloof ik dat ik meer zield dan Noordlicht gebrui-  
ker zal. Voor 't bewerken van 't hout heb ik 2 Javaansche timmerlui en op  
't Oogenblik maken we Sirappes voor 't dak.

Ik ben morgen mijn toestel wachters en als dan het nieuwe atelier klaar  
is met donkere kamer kunnen de lanternen komen.

't heute van mijn bouwerij is dat alles zonder één spijker in elkaar zit.  
Bij na alles past in elkaar en wordt met een bout en moer saamgehou-  
den. Ook de donkere kamer, die vlak achter 't atelier komt en meteen  
een verlengstuk vormt voor groepen op'te nemen. te zamen is de af-  
stand dan  $\pm$  9 meter. de breedte ongeveer  $3\frac{1}{2}$ .

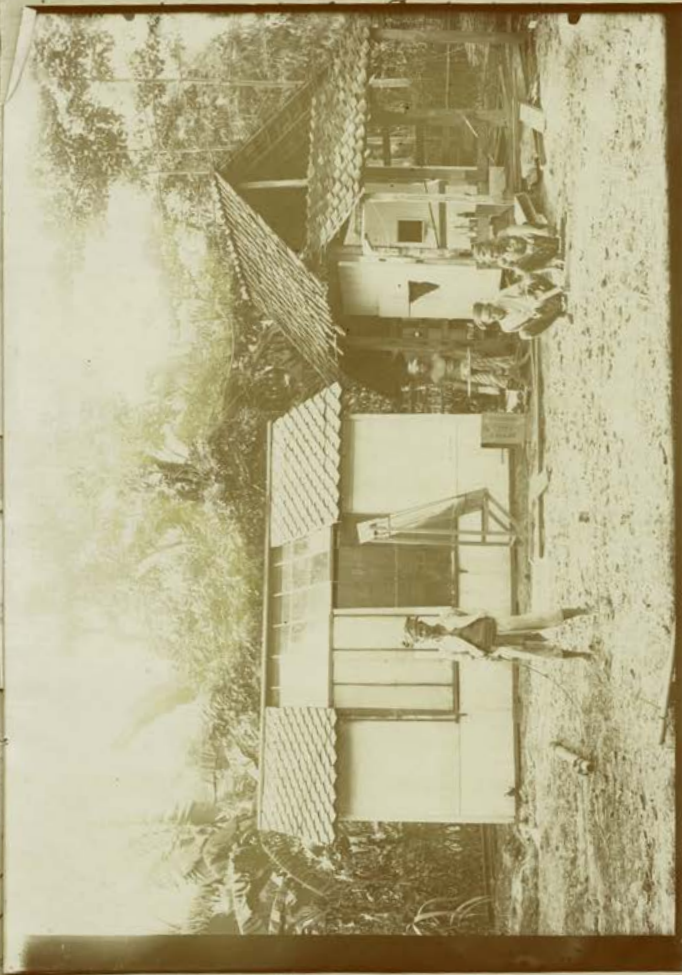
't is dus klein, maar ook makkelijk te transporteren. Ik reken hierop met al-  
les wat ik voor fotografie aanschaf om dat ik er misschien later werk van  
maak.

Ik zit daar achter in de timmerlood zelf mee te doen en soms kunnen  
die 2 oudjes leuk zitten vertellen. 't is 'n twee broers en den eenen

Here you can see the studio and the darkroom, which are almost finished. On the right are the two old carpenters, in the front the old *kakeh*, our coolie. The carpenter on the left is the man who talks all day long, the one on the right is the better worker. *Kebon* (indigenous gardener) is standing in the background with a whitewash brush. The trees in the background provide shade throughout the day, so that the studio is nice and cool from dawn till dusk. It's just so European in there. It's a delightful piece of land.

I'm now having a stand made for the enlargement of small portraits. This too will be made of wood. The carpenters are busy working on it and one of them in particular is a rather skilled cabinetmaker who is an expert at making the finer items. And it all comes at such a low cost because Javanese carpenters like him only earn 15 guilders per month.

In our district, in the entire area, there is a cattle plague: one of the most dreadful things to befall a Javanese. A cow here and a buffalo, goat or sheep there: there are cases everywhere. Little of it is



als is de man  
te werk man.  
us verduistering  
piss.  
laafde er een  
berot alle to,  
  
Schon meisjes  
likti. Hij verdu  
t haer trouwen  
dat ze ook daar  
tracht hem  
haar tot vrouw  
't verstonde  
h 207 hoo Boe  
ind of 27 en  
en huwde t lie  
r timmer man,  
ad laat alles  
lany's die reis  
t en de afgrind  
villiers de maan  
en box en sint of

vel hij versuift geheel en al dat is "totale maanverduistering"

brought to people's attention, but many of the native Javanese have been set back for ten years. Their water buffaloes and their paddies are as dear to them as the other members of the family.

The Petroleum Company is buckling. I too had to give up one third of my pay and, believing that I can earn more being out of the Company's employment, handed in my resignation as an agent. Poor shareholders. I know where your pennies are kept. My heart truly bleeds for you, but, oh Dutchmen, may it be done to you according to your word. From the East Indies the pennies have flowed into your Treasury. And so they will find their way back, at least in part. You have become great because of the Javanese, and because of them you shall grow small again.

I am currently working on a three-quarter view portrait of a Chinese that looks good and will probably be satisfactory. I would like to concentrate on photographing the native Javanese for a fair price and make a good job of them. There are a thousand times more Javanese than there are Chinese and Europeans.



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#### LETTERS from INSULINDIA

I'm busy printing a whole set of photos from Blora; a shot of the Regent with magnesium lighting. It's too ugly to send to Holland, perhaps if something better comes along.

I am c

trait c

be sat

graph

a good

Javan

en Organisaers de burgerweder / Resolutie / een fakkeltocht zoud als ik  
er voeger al meer tegesproken ben. t Gerdige is dat deelgenomen wordt  
door karbouwenjongens dat zijn dus " Kinderkjes van 7 tot 12 jaar en  
... ..



zijn fakkeltocht met oorlogs gekruis, hij zal getraakt hebben de kinder  
ren de waarde te leeren van hun beesten, hij zal hen hebben wille in  
franter dat karbouwen duur zijn en dat t jammer en zonde is wa  
neer te sterwen. Hij heeft begrepen dat de jeugd zo'n ziam onder

zigen taart en waartoe een flinke snalheid houdt. Een rookkolom wijst er  
boven in de uitgraving en een korte stoot op de Stoomfluit is nog een be-  
vel van de machinist om de Conducteurs te verzoeken de rammes te sluiten.



Daar is de kleine ster-  
ke machine van „Beyer te  
Kock“ met er staart van  
holzen wagens. Langzaam  
komt hij op 't Station waar  
de Passagiers met hun  
goederen reed lang wacht-  
ten. Ik sta buiten en ont-  
vang een morgen roet van  
de machinist en Stoker, en  
verruim ik nimmer hun

een opgevakt „frischs morgen Jongelui“ toete rooken. Een daarna komen de Con-  
ducteurs met het treinkoffert, de post en wat er verser nog aan bestel of  
vrachtgoederen valt overtenemen. Ik maak de postpakket open en zoek naar brief-  
ven van huis. Ik heb reeds een zakere voordigheid in 't kader gekregen. Ik kan  
soms voelen of de Hollandsche mail er in zit. Enfin, daarin snap ik menig,  
maar een tegenvaller. Hoog in houdschaf een brief of iets anders, de machine  
heeft hout en water ingenomen en twee tikken op de schel geeft 't sein dat  
volgens de machinist dat hij om te vertrekken daer is.

Ik zet m'n Stok, Kof of 't balkon en geef met m' hoofdknikje 't sein. De Con-  
ducteur fluit en langzaam als ze binnenkwan zet de trein zich in be-

Everything is babbling along like a gentle brook, we're enjoying such a peaceful and happy life here. What does upset us (or me, at least) is that we have a cattle plague here which in my vicinity has killed over three hundred buffaloes already. 🌱 What it means to lose buffaloes I know you will appreciate when I tell you they are worth more than horses, cows, sheep, pigs and goats to a European farmer. No buffalo; no ploughing. No ploughing; no sowing and harvesting. No harvesting, no rice. No rice: hunger. That is sad.

I am now going to give you a simple description by illustrating how I normally check the train. Slowly it rolls into the station where the native Javanese have been waiting for a long time with their goods. I am standing outside and get a morning's greeting from the engine driver and stoker. Shortly afterwards the ticket inspectors arrive with the train report, the post and whatever else there is to receive in terms of ordered and freight goods. I open the postbags and look for letters from home. Two rings of the bell signal that the engine driver feels the time to

statief was sterk en stijf als ik als fotograaf kon wenschen. Een moest  
posteren meende ik, en wou dat dan deffig „artistieke draperie“ in  
open lucht / en plein air /: Links de trambrug, recht de gouvernement  
brug. De 2 luspen opwe toogrend zijn touwen van mijn geïmprovi-  
seerd statief. Beide bruggen loopen over een zijtal van de kali Rucie  
een heerlijk stroomend water. Ik stap daar achtere af en staar dan droo-  
mend in 't pliskende water beneden. Gewaantijf bosen en de javaantjes  
en 't geheel is een lief om te zien. De javaan die daar was poseerend  
staat in 't toornbeeld van de Bergjavaan. Sterk en gespierd, taai van  
gestel in koope mate, eenvoudij en matkelij in 't aitchen, zonsen moei-  
te te regeren en dom. Een werk machine die in guld deulogel en draad  
verdien. Sterk als 'n buffel maar ook als 'n buffel door een kind te  
verteedere, en te temmen. Ik mag te gaarne liden, en ik krijg alles  
van hem gedaan.

„t 'n gepieft,“ zij ik  
tegen hem, „t is al  
klaar.“ maar nu,  
blijft hij staan niet  
begrijpend dat 't zoo  
gaans gaat. De ka-  
meraven, echter kel,  
fen mee roepen, „Ma'  
broer 't is al geraad  
je mag weer weg



depart is upon us. The engine has taken on wood and water. 🌿 We steam through the *desa* (a rural village with surrounding fields) as if through a green portal. The bamboo hisses over the roof of the wagons, on the left and right clucking chickens fly away, and there are groups of local Javanese here and there still shivering in the morning chill. 🌿 Coursing through the rolling hills, we speed on faster and faster amid flooded paddies. Now comes a part that offers us views over magnificent fields, with delightful forest on the horizon, behind which the Merbaboe and Merapi peaks loom up in all their glory. 🌿 The mist disappears entirely and we reach the first halt. 'Tram stop' it says on the sign on the left. I usually get off here. By then I've had enough time to collect the tickets or to go over the checklist.

The two loops in the foreground are ropes belonging to my improvised tripod. Both bridges span a tributary of the River Lusi, a lovely flowing river. I often get off there to stare dreamily into the flowing water below. The indigenous Javanese usually bathe there and it all makes for a very charming sight.

The Javanese man who is posing there is the epitome of the mountain Javanese. Strong and muscular, with a very tough constitution, straightforward and accommodating in his requests, easy to rule, and ignorant. A working machine that returns your investment with interest. Strong as a buffalo, but, like a buffalo, he can be mollified and tamed by a child. I like having them around, and I get them to do anything.

I read in the telegrams that Her Majesty visited Bronbeek and in my mind I can hear the hurrahs of the invalid soldiers, who still have a spark of fire in their bodies. There is a certain sweetness in it and I believe she would do well to fire up the soldiers on Atjeh here in the Indies for a change. 🍃 This brings me back to Napoleon. I can feel and understand that his guards were utterly devoted to him. Napoleon was a giant on all counts, and all other rulers look small in comparison. I can understand how France is still proud of such a person to this day. I think about Transvaal. Will it come to war there, I wonder?

I have been taking a lot of photographs in recent days, and I am so very glad to have already recovered the cost of my studio. I am waiting impatiently for a letter with information about frames and chemicals. Of course, I am somewhat peeved again that it is taking so long.

Your package has arrived. It triggered a cry of joy. The tin soldiers are being lined up in ranks and files. They will later represent Napoleon's guards in the battle of Waterloo. Equally put to good use will be the kit box, which will figure as the Rajah's Palace in the Lombok War. We thank you for the lovely little dresses for Juultje and also for the photographs, especially the one depicting three generations.

I have been taking so many photos during the last couple of days, it's been an absolute dream. Groups on bicycles and horses, and in carriages. Also reproductions of long-forgotten fathers of the Chinese. And they all promise to send their wives too, in a kind of garbled Malay, enough to make you cringe. They pay generously and are as trustworthy as the

Java Bank. 🌿 I also delivered the bicycles today. I earn 75 guilders for each one. I wouldn't want to sell to Europeans with their silly pretentiousness, but don't mind the long-tailed Chinamen who know what they want. But they're also solid and trustworthy. I'm not afraid to invest my cash for those folk. They too pay in cash and bow and thank me for my help. 🌿 No wonder then that I'm busy and on the go from morning till evening.

I can sometimes experience a childlike joy at travelling again, and now not so cramped, but comfortable and carefree. Look up all those old places, and see you again, and then head back to complete what I started here. 🌿 I've also taken out a magazine subscription since I've been promoted. It's such a pleasure to see those lovely magazines and read about Europe. The yearning for Europe is kept alive, and despite everything we still keep somewhat up to date about all the goings on in the faraway West.

tentyd, te wachten en jek gaat al in de Convent teken. Ik heb haer  
 al voorbereid of een vergifing, want it vind dat zo iek sich  
 niet zoo voor uit laat bespelen. We zullen eekle wachten, met ge  
 lag iek over Chocolandjes en  
 dan de weromstuit.  
 begroet wordt zijk we tevrede.

Met m'n zwaans  
 Of m'n paars  
 En m'n Melon oft hoofft  
 En den vijans es opin  
 . . . . . de schied al sehooff  
 . . . . .  
 Die Roverwies  
 verijans was onschuldij  
 Wouter die Picters

als behoofde te schrij  
 ven dat te zelf ge,  
 te niet minder brie  
 t toch niet besp als  
 is tevrede zijk en nat  
 war niet dwingez  
 haer toch nog een  
 stijl, want dat heeft  
 van een letters en  
 levans winter in te  
 (hun achterklain)  
 een hart naar dat  
 lacht kunne, lolik  
 paar jaren sleekt es  
 de harte diep reed  
 suader

Java Bank. I also delivered the bicycles today. I earn 75 guilders for each one. I wouldn't want to sell to Europeans with their silly pretentiousness, but don't mind the long-tailed Chinamen who know what they want. But they're also solid and trustworthy. I'm not afraid to invest my cash for those folk.

They need  
help.  
from :

#### LETTERS from INSULINDIA

I can  
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about  
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to dat

I look at colour plates with Gerard, and these days the history of Napoleon is on the programme. 'This man dead yes, dad, yes, *kassian* (sad), yes?' I, of course, try to stimulate his perceptivity and have him count the number of horses and cannons, flags: 'Where is the red, white and blue coloured flag?', so that he will learn to distinguish red, white, and blue, and truly learns by playing. For Juultje I play the piano and violin and she is not ungrateful.

tertyd, te wachten en jek gaat al in de Convent teken. Ik heb haar  
al voorbereid op een vergifing, want it vind dat zo iek sich  
niet zoo voor uit laat loepalen. He zullen eekle wachte, met je  
lag iek over Chocolandjes en  
dan de weromstuit.



begroet wordt zijn we tevreden.

t zoo dikwijls behoefde te schrijven  
nieuw hooren dat ik zelf ge,  
Hoe, el ik niet minder brie  
eget, var ik toch niet befaald  
maar altyd tevreden zyt en nat  
is ik, al haar niet dwingen,  
ik is voor haar toch nog een  
niet voor stijl, want dat heeft  
doende maar voor letters en

innee, des levens winter in te  
gans, want de moeder, nog volhouder, ze moeten hun achterkain  
kind sien, nog zal en vurige hoop keuren, in hun hart naar dat  
ogenblik als ze in de ogen van hun nageslacht kunnen, lolk  
ken. En ik is der meeste wel waardig. Nog in paar jaren sleekt es  
wat er ook gebeew, ze zullen hem omhelzen, de harte diep reed  
van evarely. Ja, ja, ze moeten volhouden, moeder

We've had a couple of heavy showers again. The animals are getting lively and the air resounds with glee. Wells that had run dry are filling up, and the local Javanese can bathe again. This is impossible for the vast majority of locals in this area, especially in the dry season. They have to walk three kilometres to the *kali* (river), which is a tiresome affair for them. Their clothes are also washed in these first showers. I can see them all standing and walking about in their fresh clothes, whereas they stank to high heaven yesterday and were sticky with grime.

On 1 November new tram rates will be introduced for people and animals and freight. There will also be three classes, and the third class is specially reserved for coolies and *orang ketjil* (common people). The upper-class Javanese and the Europeans who are short of money can now enjoy a more decent ride. The first class sometimes costs eight times as much as second class and it's no wonder that many see no other option but to take seats amongst the 'riff-raff'. If I had to pay for myself, I would go there too, because the difference lies only in the people

and not the carriages, at least not in any way worth mentioning. By the way, those tram carriages don't offer much 'comfort' as it is — it's all hard benches, which are best suited to cope with the heat and the Javanese fleas.

I would just like to express my hope that my photographic equipment will arrive soon, that you will often write to us, that Truus will buy us some paper soldiers, not glued to anything and small; Turks on horseback, French and German infantry, Cossacks and the like. Infantry, artillery and cavalry etc. Then some of those wooden cannons that cost 3 cents a piece in the French bazaar. Anything to complete our army.

laelende Java  
en half om het de  
Onder meinsde te  
geer konder, er is  
over in paas weke  
H. zond heden een  
kwooring. Een foto  
Ik heb een prachtige  
verkoopster aan een  
toch aan marktelijk  
Schrijf hem nog a  
beoig. t. H. een n  
leestrommel. In  
t. verbeeld me nog  
Regent van Blora  
naar mijn geld m  
enr: enr: en dag  
Volgende brief ee  
briekke twee pr  
Zwaartjes van de  
van het en voor  
Pas goed of de  
Stuus, sterkte



Koninkrijk van G. Aug. 1899



LETTERS from INSULINDIA

This November it will be five years since I left Europe. I'm still not bored and I can last a long time here this way. Today I photographed the Regent of Blora in full regalia. It could well be that I will never see my fee, but *soedah* (so be it). He calls me his best friend and the native population now holds me in high regard. He's a good bloke, but poor, despite his sizeable yearly allowance of nearly 9,000 guilders. He has a large family, and a number of concubines.

laehende Java  
en half om het de  
Onder meinsde te  
geen konder, er is  
over in paar weken  
H. zond heden een  
kwooring. Een foto  
Ik heb een prachtige  
verkoop van een  
toch van markelijk  
Schrijf hem nog  
Gezig. t. H. een n  
leestommel. In  
t. terveeld me nog  
Regent van Blora  
naar mij geld in  
eur: eur: en dag  
Volgende brief en  
briekke twee pr.  
Zwaartjes van de  
van het en voor  
Pas goed of de  
Stuus, sterkte



Rhaden Emanngony Jolro Regoro  
Regent van Blora.

Is groot uniform.

It is een goed vent, maar arm, ondanks  
in zijn traktement. - 19000.- per jaar.  
Hij heeft een grote familie, en is paar  
binnigen.





LETTERS from INSULINDIA

SEPTEMBER

1899

-

JUNE

1900

water geret.  
Men kan zien  
hoe gencog  
lijft dat werk  
van stapel  
looft. De mas  
zingt in mot,  
genlieds en  
de Sappit  
wandelen of  
hurs gemak  
bij met in in cap.  
aan reker vroeger  
d'iet te over  
de sa boenderan.  
en is vorse de Javan  
hoofdzake de be  
ien, den staekt bij  
altie lagon gelager  
l ontkeint en heeft  
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LETTERS from INSULINDIA

The paddies have been sown and the *sawah* (paddy field) ahead of us has been transformed into a giant billiards cloth. I've enclosed a photo of what we call 'harrowing' here. It involves flooding the *sawah* with a good amount of water. The man sings his morning tune and the *sapis* (cows) leisurely step forward in time with the song. He steers with his whip. The harrow is made completely of wood. In the background you can see our tramway. The copse behind it is the edge of *Desa Koen-doeran* (Kundurán village). The earthen dyke is the so-called 'Galangan' and is to the Javanese what irrigation is to Europe.



water gezet.  
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Op de maas daaraan voorwaarts. Steven doet hij met in zwaai.  
De egge bestaat geheel uit hout en het is daarvan zekere vroeger  
al een afbeelding ingadiend. Op de rechterzijde ziet te voren  
trambaar. Het Kotschi en achter is de rand der de sa koendoeran.  
De rinde wal is de zoogenoemde "Galangan" en is voor de Javanen  
wat irrigatie voor Europa. Hiermede wordt in hoofdzake de be-  
vloeiing der velden geregeld. Met hij stakel raaien, dan staat hij  
t' dijke door, en alle water loopt af naar de rechte lagen gelegen  
Sawak blok. Heeft hij geraint en is de korral ontkeind en heeft  
wortel geschoten, dan staat hij links een geul in de hoogen ge-  
legen Sawak en in 15 minuten is een "base" bereid. Nuardus  
hoe ald in koendoeran en omstreken een milde natuurs is die de  
Javanen op tijd aan regen helpt daar stijgt t' grond riebbaar

They started things off in Transvaal and I'm eagerly awaiting a first battle in which four Boers and 4,000 Englishmen lose their lives. It will only have to happen a hundred times over to see them taken down a peg or two. O, how I hope with all my heart for a splendid revenge for all the insults we have had to suffer.

So wherever you have a mild climate, as in Koen-doeran and the surrounding area, that provides the Javanese with timely rain, the bread can be seen growing from the ground. During harvest time we can buy 62 kilograms for 2 guilders, that's 1.25 cent for a pound of rice. Is it any wonder then that Java is such a gem? 🌱 It's more expensive in the cities because of the added transport costs. In any case, it's proof that life is truly not so expensive in our bountiful Indies. And let me add that thousands of Sinjos who are married earn just 25 guilders per month. Even so, they employ a *baboe* (nursemaid) and a cook and a boy servant. How they can pull that off is a mystery to many. 🌱 The key is that the *sinjos* (born here, Eurasian youth of mixed race) hold far greater sway over the Javanese than us 'totoks' (native Euro-

pean). They speak Javanese like a coolie and as if it is their 'mother tongue', and know the *adat* (customs) down to the minutest detail. They can get a Javanese for free, while we *Belandas* (fully white Dutchmen), the rich, must pay them more than their share. For them they work for a plate of rice with sambal, but, working for us, they steal half of our belongings and insist on being paid a good wage.

These days everyone is up in arms. The old farthing (a two penny piece was worth eight farthings) has been abolished and now all the Javanese have to exchange the farthings for pennies. Of course the little Javanese has been duped by history again. They can't exchange their counterfeit farthings and it's precisely those false copper discs that represent three quarters of the supply. But the Chinaman knows all too well how to slip those into Javanese hands.

In the evening I went out with Jet to buy toys for Gerard: a sabre, rifle, and a helmet with waving plume. A castle or stronghold with an English flag, which we changed for the flag of Transvaal, sentry

boxes and more of such war paraphernalia. Finally some gardening tools and a train you can pull along on a piece of string. All in all, it was to be a real St Nicholas feast for Gerard. Juultje got a coloured ball.

I've been doing a lot of thinking. Among other things, about the present state of affairs in Transvaal, the unjust rule of our colony and the discrimination against the *sinjos*. I naturally feel for *sinjos* since my own son is one.

Never trust the judgement of those who are newly arrived in the Indies, because it never fails to be wrong. It is only gradually, after we ourselves have become accustomed to all the foreignness, after we ourselves have taken to eating hot peppers and most of the *Belandas* have started drinking whisky soda, etc., that the way we talk about *sinjos* slowly changes. I have since met so many good and just people among them that my judgement is now different from when I still lived with foolish prejudice. The less cosmopolitan a Dutchman is, the longer his judgement remains wrong.

gelijke artikelen bij andere firma's op om af te wegen wie 't goedst  
koopste levert. Ik zie er zaken bij die ik zelf kan namaken en recepten  
voor verschillende dingen.

Ik kan me bezijpen hoe blij ik was met de foto's van de kleintjes, en  
geen wonder. Dat is die Juliette een engel, en ze wordt hoe langer hoe liever  
en maar en  
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Dit is Juliette  
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Lieve meis, kleindochter van  
moeder Julia. 't Keelt volkwert  
niet geveend, maar 't was van  
de verproefing die prachtige, is  
dat sal ik wel bezijpen

Oprecht wil ik haar

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LETTERS from INSULINDIA

Never arrive wrong become we our most soda, change people ferent The his ju

Juultje is an angel, but a naughty angel; a little Lucifer. Let's hope that we won't have to chase her out of paradise or Heaven. Juultje has a sensible face, I'm sure she will grow up to be a pretty girl.

gelijke artikelen bij andere firma's op om af te vragen wie 't goedste  
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Alle geëmployeerde hebben 't jaar geen promotie gemaakt en zoveld ik  
reeds sei, heb ik precies op tijd mijn verhuizing gekregen. Dit zal te wel

Transvaal. This war is the most natural. The millionaires and gold diggers have helped prop up Chamberlain with the sole purpose of annexing the goldfields of Transvaal.

Now that Juultje has a healthy appetite again and has returned to good health, we look forward to the next one with joy. It is true, of course, that if there are a lot of pigs the swill is spread thinly, but if a native Javanese who lives on bread and water blesses his wife for bearing him twelve children, how could we not be happy to have three? And my children, such delightful angels they are. Before children go to school they don't cost any money, so we've decided to save up for those more costly times.

Juultje, your granddaughter is one year old. She is already trying to walk and is starting to misbehave, which is to say, she knows how to get her way by pouting, crying and yelling. However, as such a little doll fears neither God nor man and cannot tell right from wrong yet, I guess it's alright to give in to her now and then. By the way, whatever such a

'swell girl' asks or whines for she has a great need of: usually her bottle with milk or other drink. If only Chamberlain were satisfied as quickly and reasonably, then we would have peace in Transvaal.

Javanese New Year: a few damp fire-crackers have livened things up, but otherwise it's been quiet, even quieter than usual. I haven't observed anything out of the ordinary, although much goes on in the hearts of the Javanese at end of the great fast. Still, this year's coming harvest has partly failed and many Javanese will face hunger again. Basically, the problem is that the start of the rainy season was a bit unpredictable.

Juultje is growing like a 'savoy cabbage' and is as fat as bacon. Gerard is as mischievous as an Amsterdam street urchin.

We still have no evidence that the nonbelievers are right. One thing is certain: the churches are mainly filled with annoyingly conventional good burghers, and of the more civilised folk the only ones who

attend are those who stand to benefit from going to church or worshipping God.

And the devout Netherlands? What has this honest Holland done for the Javanese and the Sinjos? Are there enough schools and can they prepare themselves for the hard knocks that life delivers in an economic and good and thorough way? Are there any schools for agriculture and technology? Haha, this Holland is a priceless parish. No, instead it is rather like the pastor with his bulging belly who exhorts the hungry to pray. Didn't I recently read about that socialist Van Kol – who is most likely damned to all eternity – accusing the Netherlands of having stolen 800 million guilders from the Dutch East Indies? 🍌 He hit the nail right on the head. But Holland rubs its chin and strokes its belly, perhaps raising its eyes to heaven, enraptured at hearing these figures. Well, those 800 million are but a fraction of what has actually been stolen.

Now about our dear children again. I will start with Juultje who has an extraordinarily stubborn char-

acter. Of course, I mustn't neglect to bend the little twig before she grows into a tree, and then do so skilfully so as to smoothe out her brittle nature without harming what's charming. I feel it is safe to say that this sister will give her brother some hard times later in their lives.

Our friends in Africa are giving half the world anxious moments. The tidings make our freedom-loving hearts sad. Yet despite everything, I cannot believe in the subjugation of so many brave warriors. I still cling to the hope that they will surprise the enemy even in Bloemfontein or blow up their whole headquarters.

Yesterday morning, a man came to visit me at my home. He was a cobbler, Dutchman and had served in the military. He had seen action in the Lombok War and could tell me all kinds of details about it that you couldn't find in books anywhere and whose importance often outstrips that of knowledge gleaned from books. 🍃 I can confirm that his heroic acts were far from alluring, but one has to experi-

ence war first-hand before one can pass judgement about barbaric behaviour. Yet I consider myself incapable of chopping off somebody's finger even in the heat of battle in order to steal his ring or of torturing a Chinese for six hours before hanging him. 🌿 Another thing I heard was that 500 prisoners were scheduled for transport to Surabaya by steamship, and that the steamship had returned within two hours, having simply drowned the 500 chaps at sea. Those poor sods must have formed a high opinion of our conduct of war now that they have experienced themselves what they promised to do to our men.

I finally received the telegram yesterday morning. Well, mother, that will be the third angel. Isn't Heaven getting populated nicely? 🌿 Jet says that Truusje has blue eyes. It may seem strange that black and brown can yield blue, but with Mother Nature everything is possible.

Now it's time for some news again, dear mother! What has been hanging over our heads like the

sword of Damocles has now fallen: we will have to say a heartfelt goodbye to my dear *Desa Koendoeran* (Kundurán village). I had been counting on moving to Rembang or Lasem, but now I will head in the other direction, which is Gundih, a kind of railway junction where three railway and tramway companies meet. I have now climbed one more rank. 🌱 Now I will have to gain my spurs before I will be eligible to become a first-class employee on the new stations further ahead.

Gundih is to Java a bit like Utrecht is to Holland, as far as the railways are concerned. Not many people live there, but as a station it's of some importance because of the freight services. We will get our own house there, a well-kept building for which we must pay 10% of my contract as rent. I have some reason to feel pleased and only hope that by working hard at photography I will be able to save up a decent sum. We will need close to four or five train carriages to transport our furniture. It's just that I think about all the things I'm leaving behind here. I have felt so happy in this house.

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Hij zou nog eens van Kas meijer, Reidel, tenniskool, en der Socia



We are now going to decorate our house and my 'fancy room' is lovely and truly agreeable. That's where I have my colourful bookcase and fine photo equipment, the display cabinet with Jet's pretty luxury articles, the piano on top of which lie my violin and good flute, an oak table with a big marble top and six beautiful chairs, an Oriental carpet on the cement floor and your table cloth. In a word: it's truly a nice place to sit, with a Dutch atmosphere.



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### LETTERS from INSULINDIA

Dawn approaches at 6 o'clock. The indigenuous Javanese shamble to the *pasar* (market), carts bump along with their lanterns still glowing. At home the work is already starting. The gardener has gone to get water and the boy is sweeping the floor and dusting. The *baboe* comes in with Truusje and Juultje. Jet and Gerard are usually still asleep. After a great deal of effort, Jet finally had her way and got an extra servant. In order to balance the accounts, all my clothes and Jet's are being washed and ironed at home. So we both got our way in terms of running an economical and comfortable house.





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Hij was nog eens van Kas meijer, Reidel, Kennenool, en der Socie

I've been busy. Trains have been constantly arriving from all directions, bringing freight to Gundih to be forwarded by our Company, and reams of paper-work are being filled in.

Yesterday afternoon we took the railway truck eight kilometres towards Semarang. I had promised to take a big group picture and it was well worth the trouble. The railway runs through charming valleys and past villages with decrepit huts and grand scenery. Rustic bridges and the rapid-flowing Serang River popping up beside us every now and then. The bridge itself is a fine piece of iron and rock.

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LETTERS from INSULINDIA

Sometimes I go out on the tram to breathe the early morning air. I then ride along as far as Toroh and then head back home by bicycle. The road has many a vantage point and in the forests the monkeys cry out amazed and excited. The pigeons coo and I always enjoy the sense of peace of the landscape and in my own heart. In these conditions, work can be described as a great pleasure, I should think. Often, when I return in such high spirits, I think about Holland where one plods and slaves away.

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☆ Houtaankappen van Busch

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LETTERS from INSULINDIA

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Yesterday I read in the 'union journal' the opinions of many 'full-bloods' about the Dutch East Indies and its population. Anyone who heads to the Indies is said to be tired of life and the Indies are also called a 'bagnio'. There is a stench hanging over the Indies, 'Lord save us'. 🌿 It's rich how Holland taps its belly so contentedly, has the Javanese plant coffee and rice, has boozed itself to bursting point from the coffee and clove yields, has enriched its children, has constructed railways with Javanese sweat that causes a 'stench' and now those stinkers (they stink of the money they earned here or had others earn for them) claim that Java or the Indies is a prison, a place for crooks or bandits, a 'bagnio'. 🌿 It's only right that people are wondering here if it isn't time for us to separate ourselves from Holland, first using legal measures, then, if necessary, by force. For believe me, mother, that is when the Indies will be best-matched against the Dutch scum that the fatherland has sent here as its defenders. A bagnio is what this wretched fellow calls his cash cow, the cash cow of Holland. Because it's with money from Java that they operate their railways there, it's with

money from Java that they dig canals for the benefit of greater *Mokum* (Amsterdam), and without Java Holland would be the Jewish quarter of Germany.

People forget that Holland would go bankrupt without Java, because how many thousands make a living from the exports going our way? Java is being plied with cart grease, but we can make our own grease here. They force us to buy all sorts of things here that we don't need. The domestic and home-woven clothes are falling out of fashion, and the Javanese have taken to wearing cottons from Europe that are whorish and of mediocre quality.

The trade in bicycles is wearing thin. Money is dear these days and I don't do business on credit.

It's easy for people to talk about things in Holland. Over there everything is smooth sailing, but here things are measured according to a different scale. For example, you ask sincerely if I couldn't just ride my bicycle to Surabaya. The distance is about as far from Amsterdam to Paris.

You should tuck into *mangga* (mango) and not judge the food by its 'first' flavour. This is true for other things too. When I first disembarked in Sumatra in the Indies at the Emmahaven, most of the people who were familiar with the region made a beeline for a *waroeng* (food stall) without going by first impressions, they just tucked into the food. I myself didn't know quite what to find more upsetting. There was a stench, dirty hands, dirty chairs, unsightly stall keepers; nauseating to look at and smell. They are typical affairs in the Indies, which, in due course, we all end up learning to understand and appreciate. 🌿 Take 'trassi' (shrimp paste) for example. *Trassi* is a product that I put on a par with truffles. It's a delicate flavour enhancer and is mixed in with many a 'sauce' or 'sambal', etc. The colour resembles a bad ulcer and so does its mucky consistency. When the product is fresh it reeks of all variations of stench. 🌿 We eat this concoction daily, in large or small quantities – the *Belandas* who are in charge only after more considerable time – and after a while we rate any dishes that do without it as 'insipid and bland'.



LETTERS from INSULINDIA

Truusje has already worn your earrings. They look so beautiful on her because she is so translucently white. Juultje is a lighter brown, and blue looks better on her. Up to now, Gerard is browner than Juul, and Juul in turn is browner than Truus. People say that Truusje will remain a *Belanda* (fully white person), but Juultje will carry the mark of Java. The three of them are absolutely adorable. Our bedroom looks like a boarding school with all those beds.

You should tuck into *mangga* (mango) and not judge the food by its 'first' flavour. This is true for other things too. When I first disembarked in Sumatra in the Indies at the Emmahaven, most of the people who were familiar with the region made a beeline for a *waroeng* (food stall) without going by

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#### LETTERS from INSULINDIA

I could just devour Juultje. The things she sings are hilarious: *I, youngling, I son of daddy, I air kelapa* (drink coconut water), *I taki kuda* (eat horse dung) and *play in the sawah*. She also sings something like: *Clap your hands, nobody is at home, only little Juultje is guarding daddy's... HOME!* She sings the last bit so loud and in a hundred different ways: 'hoom', 'howm', 'hewm', 'hoam' at the top of her lungs. She expels that word from her throat in such a comical way that I am helpless with laughter.







Javanese New Year has passed again and I believe I've had a good day. The Regent of Purwodadi held his customary reception and wrote to me ahead of time asking if I could come and take a photo of the *kumpulan* (gathering). I took two shots, one of which I enclose one here. It stands to reason that I will sell a lot of these. How well-defined are all those folk and how peculiar is the character of all those native Javanese. Their clothes, particularly, at official occasions like these. 🌟 There was but a limited display of fireworks. There is unprecedented poverty, or rather: a recurrent poverty which only allows them to buy the bare necessities. Rice, or some other remedy against hunger, that's their main worry. They didn't forgo new outfits, but these will probably end up at the pawnbroker's later today.

The group in the middle are the top brass. The Regent Rhaden Mas Adipati himself is seated next to the Assistant Resident Hoeke who is flaunting his smart uniform. The inspectors are also smartly dressed and in love with themselves. The gentleman in black is the president of the Landraad

(court of law for native Javanese), and beside him the retired infantry major, Smidhamer. They're all good acquaintances and I've earned money from all of them. Otherwise, they're private persons from Purwodadi and Gundih. The bald one is the schoolmaster, and the gentleman with the black uniform and black coat is a missionary. Then there are four indigenous bureaucrats in order of merit and a few local foresters. Noteworthy is the lieutenant of the Chinese in official uniform. ☞ The four youngsters, native Javanese, in the second row are carrying sabres, a *kris*. These are both the Regent's children and grandchildren. The reason is that he has many wives and marries again from time to time. He also smokes opium, so he's a rather worn-out old Lord. He is very friendly, by the way, and, so far, has paid me better than his colleague from Blora. ☞ I usually sell the large photos for 2.50 each. When the people can spare the money, it makes for a nice supplement. The Regent starts with a dozen for 25 guilders and 3 frames; one for the Resident, one for the Assistant Resident and one for himself. I don't care much for those upper-class Javanese because they

are grand but poor. The friendly Regent of Blora is still 25 guilders in my debt and I've decided to write it off because he'll probably never pay me. 🍃 It wouldn't hurt to be a bit careful around those big-wigs. This would have an additional advantage, namely that I get to talk to those influential people and they would want to do me a reciprocal service.

Everything in Europe points towards dramatic changes. The strikes and the granting of the people's demands give them confidence again. For so long, they have laboured under the moneyed classes and under religion. This feels like a spark of holy fire for freedom and the right to be happy. The people will have their steak, said the good Multatuli and he meant well by it. 🍃 Well now, the people will finally take their steak and those who are vegetarians (this is slowly but surely catching on) will take a head of lettuce and endive.

It's been *banjiring* (pouring down) a lot these past days. The railways can't be operated here and there because the rising water extinguishes the fire. Some

don't receive their bread and meat, others wait for their ice or other foodstuffs. The mail bags are returned and a hundred such inconveniences. In these conditions, the trains are usually run with two engines, one pushing forwards from the back of the train. If the fire of the pulling engine is extinguished, the pushing one can be used at once to pull the train and bring it back. 🌿 Subsidence and diversions come at a big cost to the company. The force of the high water is so great that it flattens entire dykes and leaves the rails hanging in the air.

I see how the missionaries trick our poor native Javanese and promise them paradise, but the poor sods don't benefit much from it. You can see in the New Year's Day photo a couple of these gentlemen who offer God for sale. A Javanese certainly doesn't outrank them in terms of civilisation, but he does in terms of sincerity. It's best not to believe in all this missionary work. The Javanese will just say 'yes' and hope that will end all the claptrap. He will become Catholic or Protestant or Muslim for tuppence. Hunger is a relentless taskmaster.



At the moment I am working on a large photo of the Lusi bridge. I have earmarked it for the reception room of our head office in Semarang. The bosses will take it for what I intend it to be, a decoration of the reception room and evidence of my capability. We are living in times of advertising, and to reach my goal

LETTERS from INSULINDIA

You should know that a kilometre from here a colossal embankment was built, on top of which lies the new tram line. To this end the infamous Monggot bridge was engineered and after that follows excavation work for which we all tremble. The embankment is shifting and sinking and devouring thousands of guilders in coolie wages for repairs, a bit like the Hondsbossche Seawall. It was constructed the wrong way, they started it wrong. And the embankment is sinking, sinking, sinking and the ballast is being delivered day and night. Still, all the work looks formidable and everything has been constructed in a grand style. They spared no expense.

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De uitgraving  
Sangrahan  
des Eeuwigs Soerabaya  
Hoortraan.

Dit zijn mislukte  
afdrukken, maar  
onveranderlijke

At the moment I am working on a large photo of the Lusi bridge. I have earmarked it for the reception room of our head office in Semarang. The bosses will take it for what I intend it to be, a decoration of the reception room and evidence of my capability. We are living in times of advertising, and to reach my goal people must talk about me. I have used all available means to that end and this is part of the programme that I managed to implement. Now all I need is a gratuity, a reward, which may be handed out according to our Regulations to those who propose measures that will result in the promotion of transport.

Yesterday I was visited by my old *sobat* (friend) Tjokro Ngoro, Regent of Blora. He was so happy and paid his old debt. Everybody was watching and wondered how I got to move in such 'high' circles. What's more, he yelled his 'sobat' so loudly and had me walk arm in arm with him that half Gundih crouched down in fear. The engineer invited us for dinner, but I thought that was too much. I also thought it would be more modest not to overdo it at this one instance. 🍀 I was pleased that, after having

enjoyed his meal, he came to my house where we looked at the camera lenses and photos again. He was blown away by it again: 'It's as if everything's alive, my friend!'

Truusje hasn't been well the past few evenings. Her front and back teeth have been coming through at the same time, and the pain and itch appear to have been unbearable. Jet and myself and the old baboe, we watched over her for two hours. I felt so *kassian* (sad) for the darling, but it didn't do her any good, unfortunately. At times like this, you appreciate a good Javanese *baboe* who soothes and sings and hovers around tirelessly, for hours on end. Truusje didn't even want to join Jet that night. It's still the same baboe who looked after Gerard for a year, and Juul for a year, and is now looking after Truus for a year. She sleeps on a mat in front of the bed and takes care of all three of them at night when they're thirsty or want to go for a pee. She really is a good *baboe*, although old. A photo of Jet, enjoying her new dress.



Prijs.	RICHTING.	Serie en Begin- nummer van trein No. I.	SERIE EN EINDNO			
			<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>	<i>IV</i>
f 0.10	Poerwodadi — Goendih.	1517				

GEZIEN TREIN No. II.

De Stations  
Halte Chef  
en  
Hoofdconductor,

*Beauf*

GEZIEN TREIN No. IV.

De Stations  
Halte Chef  
en  
Hoofdconductor,

*Beauf*

## RECAPIT

	AANTAL	OMBRENGST.
	Verkochte 1 <sup>ste</sup> Klasse	
» 2 <sup>de</sup> »		
» 2 <sup>de</sup> » Inlanders		
» Bagage		
TOTAAL		

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of bamboo stalks and leaves in a light green color. The pattern is vertical and covers the entire page. A white rectangular area is positioned on the left side, containing text.

LETTERS from INSULINDIA

The Javanese are hungry, and have little work. They prefer walking to travelling by tram. They can't afford the 17.5 cent fare to Purwodadi. We wouldn't find a Harlem - Amsterdam trip so expensive, but it's enough to feed a Javanese and his wife for two days.

Prijs.	RICHTING.	Serie en Begin- nummer van trein No. I.	SERIE EN EINDNO			
			<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>	<i>IV</i>
f 0.10	Poerwodadi — Goendih.	<i>1517</i>				

GEZIEN TREIN No. II.

De Stations Chef *C*  
~~Halte~~  
 en  
 Hoofdconductor,

Verkochte 1<sup>ste</sup> Kl» 2<sup>de</sup>» 3<sup>de</sup>

» Bagage

*Dere eigenaardige deijer  
 moet te roer of achterin  
 plaatse, als te roer  
 restal inbin*







LETTERS from INSULINDIA

MAY

1901

~

AUGUST

1901



Mus zijn ze alle 4.

          
Graw locht Of Commaude e, heelt i' slonk<sup>o</sup>  
i' gewelde/; van Magan i' z'n arm.

Juul kreeg n' Staupe i' raw laar geschaand  
kleeren. 't licht wel " Mignon".

Truus met de slevb van Miller.

Miller, zooveel te ziet al n' flinke Schreevers

Dan de meid i' n' nieuwe Radijem.



I also taught my children to treat the servants in just as friendly a manner as I do. Where most people 'order' a Javanese around, in my home we say 'please'; we make requests. I know from my own experience that this can spoil a servant, but this is not the big deal it is usually made out to be. Anyone who doesn't respond to my requests, anyone who tries to ignore this 'veiled order' out of laziness, will soon fall out of favour and knows that beyond the *pagger* (fence) lies the 'public road', and will be sent away.

In the meantime I have had two days of leave to visit Semarang. The 108 kilometres to Semarang can be travelled in two hours. The feeling of being free for two days after almost three years of uninterrupted service is indescribable. The bell rings to announce departure, and in this case it is the signal that I can head out myself, my first ride on a Dutch Indies train to see something different. 🌿 The carriages are pleasantly fitted. At first the landscape is familiar, later less so and past the rustic Serang bridge everything is new to me. Our first stopping place is Karang Sono. I feel good seeing the neat switches

and the clean platform, which can sometimes leave much to be desired at my company. 🌿 We ride through newly planted *djati* (teak) forests that waft with coolness. Pretty and well-thought-out masterpieces that divert little *kalis* (rivers) and allow the water to pass through have already given me much joy. I enjoy these things because I know about and have witnessed the effort involved in creating these feats of engineering. Lovely places where you would gladly live and die pass in front of our eyes by the dozens. 🌿 Then we pass by the fast train to Solo. A couple of old-fashioned locomotives draw my attention. Very old shunting engines with little speed but a lot of power. The sun is burning hot. Dust is starting to settle awkwardly and, mixed with sweat, our hands and faces get that uncomfortable feeling of being covered in wet sand. Many travelers have joined us who speak Chinese amongst each other, pig dealers and Arabs who sell fabrics. The train makes the dust rise high, we eat powdered sand and close the windows for a moment. Still, I lean out on the observation platform to see the train fly through the arches. It's such a royal sight,

those couple of hundred axles spinning at lightning speed. We stand in awe of this steam-powered horse and its strong mechanism.

The newly born is now washed by the midwife and I can see instantly that our Willem is 'born little'. His head is round and his hair like black silk. I expect it will become brown, as it did with Juultje. Juultje calls her brother 'stoat', she means the stork that she heard mentioned during labour.

Gundih Station has been a robbers den for so many years. People have been misappropriating merchants' goods terribly. There was complete anarchy amongst the coolies, *mandoers* (indigenous foremen), ticket inspectors, stationmasters. Everything was rooted deeply in evil, a kind of inheritance from one stationmaster to the next. Incidents were treated with indifference. Horrible laziness guaranteed countless mistakes and gave the station, along with the company, a reputation that was far from respectable. People mumble things when in fact they should be crying out, but such is the Javanese state of affairs.

die wissel nog iek militairis denk ik. Maant is een gaoies  
rent dat is rekes. Ie Lelo van mis niemus werk al een en ander  
vertelt mi iek van de mensche. Ie hebben er van, allenlei slag in  
Justus van Maurik zeggen. Daar eij, Kwasi deffige, gienige lui  
brani en hani mi iek a een wet keke. Ie t. Ie ant

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en te oude P. G.



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those couple of hundred axles spinning at lightning speed. We stand in awe of this steam-powered horse and its strong mechanism.

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#### LETTERS from INSULINDIA

Gundih

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Gundih used to be a forgotten place. With the construction of the Gundih-Surabaya Steam Tram life and industry were introduced. There came a period when Gundih thrived. There was a school and a clubhouse, parties and festivities. Gradually, Gundih declined again. Of the fifty Europeans, around eight will remain. The number will drop further when our company's connection is completed. No wonder I want to leave here. No people, no photographs, no full deposit book. I'm already hoping for a transfer.

die wissel nog iek militairis denk ik. Maar t is een goeie  
rent dat is zeker. De Lelo van mij nieuw werk al een en ander  
vertelt nu iek van de mensche. De hebben er van, allen lei Slag in  
Justus van Maurik zeggen. Daar eijn Kwasi deffige, gienige lui  
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kleine, Schuiver, nu alles nog of hem. t is verkeer aangelagd  
, men is verkeer begonnen, t is dwaasheid, stom, onhandig  
er is geen duim goed eur eur, maar geen van hem heeft  
nog een middel bedacht of een bysken orangee over om t te  
verbetere, of de Schuiver die vast te houden. En de  
dijk

In my next letter I hope to send you photos of the children again. There's also plenty of news about the railway company. We are busy constructing and testing bridges.

My sister would turn up her nose many times here in the Indies. And people soon forgive this kind of behaviour, knowing that all 'totoks' are like this when they are newly arrived. Later they will also eat '*pedis*' (spicy food) and '*peteh*' (stink beans), '*rawit*' (bird's eye chilli) and '*trassi*' (shrimp paste). I sometimes look on amazed when those fine ladies are in the kitchen or in the living room and babble in Malay with the kitchen servant about the market prices. Some of them cannot conquer their repulsion and stay Dutch, get homesick or die of sadness or soon return. These are rare cases, however. The lion's share by far look for a wife or husband, start a new family and reconcile themselves to the heat and the cook's dirty fingers, eat with relish everything the Javanese brings to the table, finally think of Java as a good place after all where they can live a decent life and enjoy the country's bounty.

Since I came to Gundih, I have done so many good and sensible things that I have drawn attention to myself and hope to keep it there. Because of my proposals relating to goods transport and the promotion of fair service, one of the locomotives will carry my name – a great achievement. It's a shame that one can only receive such an honour after one's death. This next letter will explain things better: *'Dear Sir van Vloten, Salatiga, I can report that the transshipments from and to the Vorstenlanden (Princely Lands) and elsewhere are being done under my supervision and that only I have been made answerable and responsible for the right procedure. Owing to the telephone connection to all stations situated near the sugar factories, I am more capable than anyone else to represent your interests here. Etc. etc.'* 🌱 Meanwhile I am applying for a permit for our 'Cat' and I have reserved some extra wagons for the transport of 'bibit'. By the way, by *bibit* seed I mean sugar cane cuttings. If I were to tell you that my 'colleague' at the competing Dutch East Indies Railway Company wants to put the proceeds of my work into his own pocket, you will understand that he'll have to get up

earlier to catch me napping. Because we now transfer goods transported from Semarang at Gundih, our company is enjoying great benefits. The wagons that now arrive here loaded can be sent back loaded, whereas they used to be returned mostly empty. This is a real European idea of mine, which I note in my Daily Report with great satisfaction. You must understand that everything here moves so slowly that I can only excel.

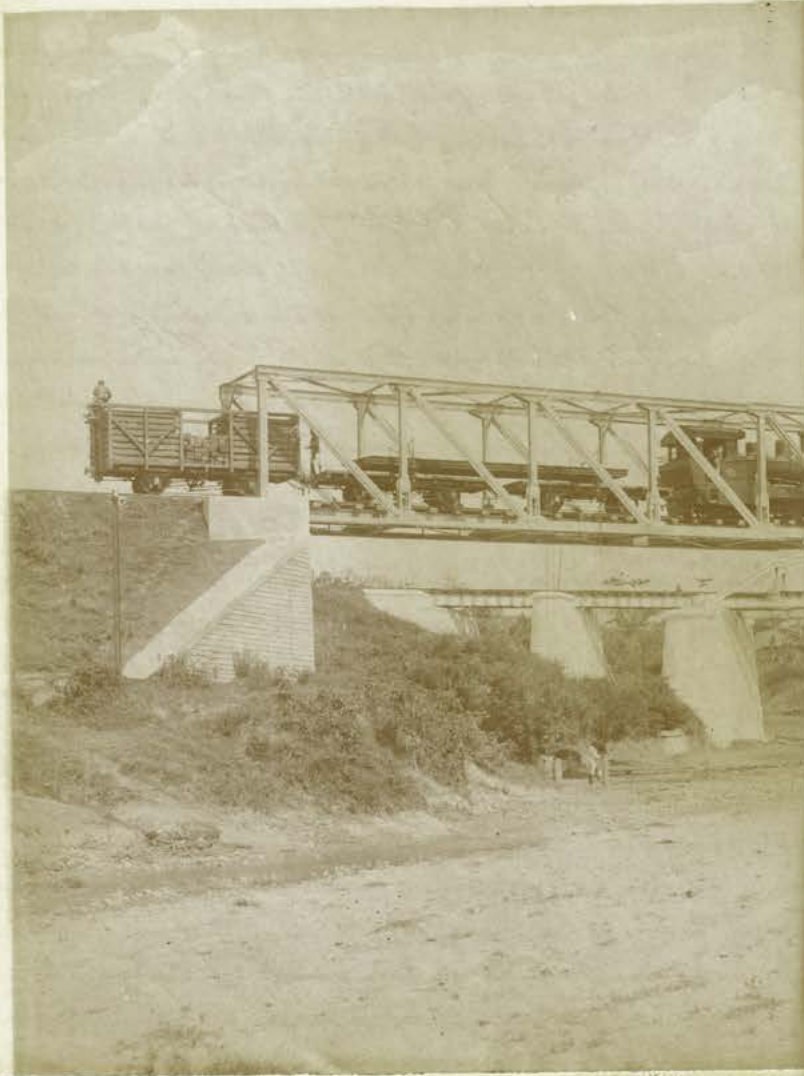
This year has been a limited success compared to other years. The company's yields went down by one quarter and as a consequence our premiums also went down by a third. The trouble is not that any division is yielding less, but the new route expansion cost a lot and yields but little. Nevertheless, the company was forced to construct those sections because otherwise the competition would have done so. 🌱 What's more, there is great poverty in the areas which our lines cross so that the volume of goods transport has decreased. All the same, we will all receive 9.5% of our salary based on so many millions, still a handsome profit. Passenger transport

has increased by almost 30%. At the NIS (the Dutch East Indies Railway Company), our competitor, it has gone down by 36%. This is because we lowered our rates for the Javanese.

In general we can state that Java is declining in wealth. The question of the Indo-European society is also at the forefront of everyone's minds. The young people who are born here have a low grade of development and live in great poverty. Of course, the Netherlands, which has sapped *Insulindia* of its strength for over a hundred years without revitalising the spent body, gets most of the blame and to a great extent deserves it too. The writer Multatuli has predicted this all so masterfully that I do not doubt his prophecy.

I took a nice photo a couple of days ago. The Mong-got Bridge was inspected by the commission. For these occasions the railway bridge is loaded with locomotives to test how much it sags. I captured that moment and sold many copies. Unfortunately, my earnings have to be relayed to the doctor so to speak, but I'm still pleased we haven't been set back.

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wat 16<sup>e</sup>

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de de manier of de laktheid van de Sings' waer ik niet.

de Ik hou en lees dat 't nog n' staartje ras hebben en dat 't Gouverne  
tj mont onder rook heeft gelast. En bestaan daer misbruiken. Nu daar  
ha over laten. Wees harte lijk gekuot door de leme kleine en leme klein.

de deren smuul al elhadjeft en G. Aug<sup>e</sup> 22<sup>e</sup>



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LETTERS from INSULINDIA

This is Clown 'Juultje', the family's clown. Only she can pull funny faces like this. Here she is a pointsman, and she's able to pull a hundred funny, stately, silly, foolish and other kinds of faces in one minute.

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LETTERS from INSULINDIA

I am waiting in suspense. In about a month, I will know whether I will be transferred or not. We only hear about these transfers shortly before departure, so there is no time to lodge a protest. Perhaps it is precisely for this reason that they notify us at the eleventh hour. All in all, I should be content. We are all healthy, the children are shooting up, and my salary raise has been granted. We are slowly getting ahead.

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Nieuwe griet

van

Frans Jorissen

Zus Net " / Weduwe  
nu los. /:

Konni Amalia "

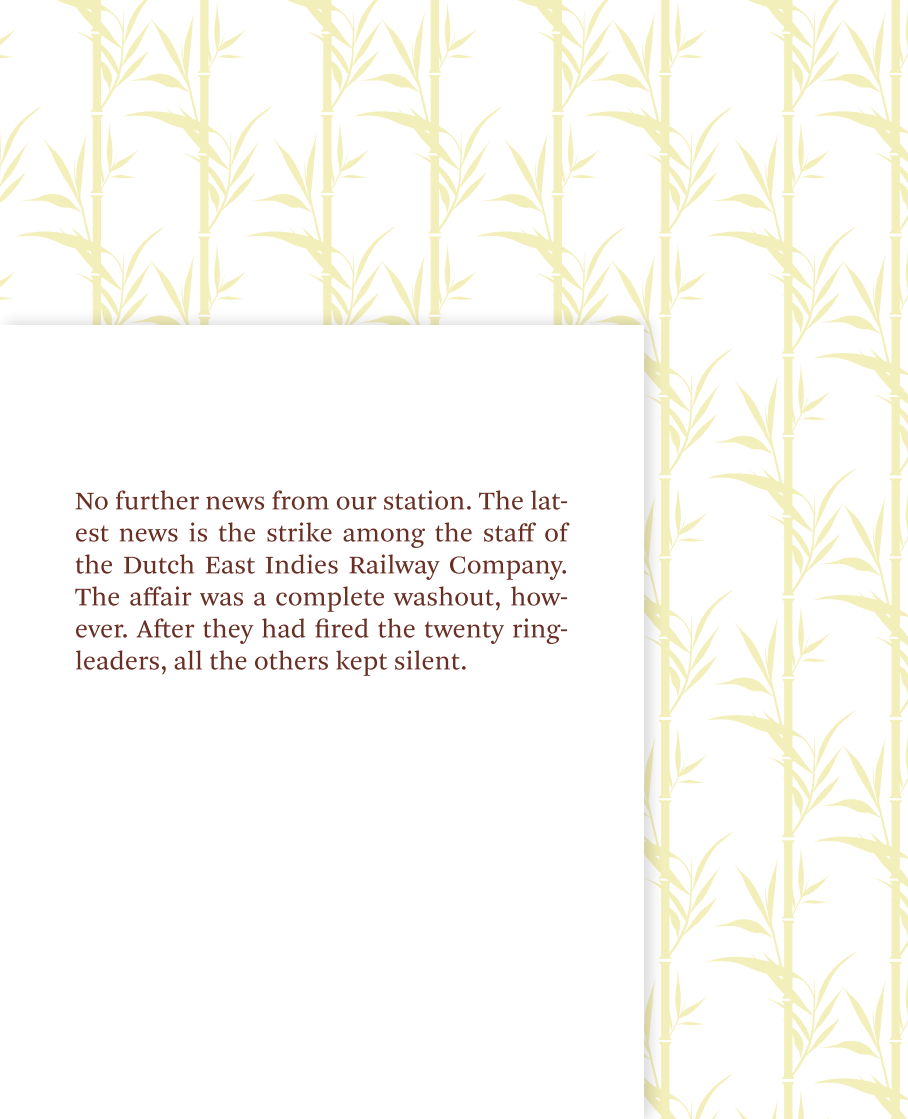
Junkie Aroek beeneer  
maeuer Donkel / Sprekend

Gerard Aroek Jr

Trunje "

Moederly. Aroek Donkel

Junkie heh wat bewoyle maar is  
zoo echt, zoos zonder rust alsof ze zegt  
"Krokodil? jij moet Gerard Speker"  
"pas op hoor!! mama van ik"

The background of the page is a repeating pattern of stylized bamboo stalks and leaves in a light yellow color. The pattern is consistent across the entire page, including the area behind the text box.

No further news from our station. The latest news is the strike among the staff of the Dutch East Indies Railway Company. The affair was a complete washout, however. After they had fired the twenty ring-leaders, all the others kept silent.

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**adat**, system of traditions,  
common law  
**baboe**, indigenous nursemaid  
or servant  
**banjir**, flood caused by  
heavy rain  
**Belanda**, Dutchman of fully  
white parentage  
**bibit**, seedling  
**desa**, rural village with  
surrounding fields  
**djati**, Indonesian teak  
**kakeh**, old man  
**kali**, brook, river  
**kassian**, expression of  
compassion  
**kebon**, indigenous gardener  
**koempoelan**, gathering  
**kokkie**, indigenous  
kitchen maid  
**kris**, indigenous dagger,  
possibly with mystical powers  
**mandoer**, indigenous foreman  
**mangga**, mango

**NIS**, Dutch East Indies Railway  
Company  
**orang ketjil**, 'common people',  
hoi polloi  
**paddy**, a flooded field where rice  
is grown  
**pagger**, fence  
**pasar**, market  
**pedis**, spicy, hot  
**peteh**, stink beans, bitter beans  
**Rhaden**, a title of nobility  
**rawit**, bird's eye chilli  
**sappi**, water buffalo  
**sawa**, paddy field  
**sinjo**, Eurasian boy of  
mixed race  
**sobat**, pal, friend  
**soedah**, expression of  
resignation: 'so be it!'  
**totok**, native European in the  
Dutch East Indies  
**trassi**, fermented shrimp paste  
**waroeng**, food stall or  
roadside shop

Gerrit Adolfs, railway employee and self-taught photographer in Central Java,  
sent letters to his family in Amsterdam around 1900:  
a critical colonial's Facebook *avant la lettre*.