

## XVIII

### SOLO : THE CITY OF THE SUSUNHAN



AS the two native states of Middle Java, the *Vorstenlanden*, or "Lands of the Princes," were last to be brought under Dutch rule, Djokjakarta and Soerakarta are the capitals and head centers of native supremacy, where most of Javanese life remains unchanged. The Sultan of Djokja, and the so-called emperor, or *susunhan*, of Solo, were last to yield to oversea usurpers, and, as tributary princes enjoying a "protected and controlled independence," accept an "advisory elder brother," in the person of a Dutch resident, to sit at their sovereign elbows and by "suggestions" rule their territories for the greater good of the natives and the Holland exchequer. All the region around Djokja and Solo is classic ground, and the oldest Javanese myths and legends, the earliest traditions of native life, have their locale hereabout. These people are the Javanese, and show plainly their Hindu descent and their higher civilization, which distinguish them from the Sundanese of West Java; yet the Sundanese call themselves the "sons of the soil," and the

Javanese "the stranger people." The glories of the Hindu empire are declared by the magnificent ruins so lately uncovered, but the splendor of the Mohammedian empire barely survives in name in the strangely interesting city of the susunhan set in the midst of the plain of Solo—a plain which M. Désiré de Charnay described as "a paradise which nothing on earth can equal, and neither pen, brush, nor photography can faithfully reproduce."

At this Solo, second city of the island in size, one truly reaches the heart of native Java—the Java of the Javanese—more nearly than elsewhere; but Islam's old empire is there narrowed down to a kraton, or palace inclosure, a mile square, where the present susunhan, or object of adoration, lives as a restrained pensioner of the Dutch government, the mere shadow of those splendid potentates, his ancestors.

The old susunhans were descended from the Moormen or Arab pirates who harried the coast for a century before they destroyed the splendid Hindu capital of Majapahit, near the modern Soerabaya. They followed that act of vandalism with the conquest of Pajajaran, the western empire, or Sundanese end of the island; and religious conversion always went with conquest by the followers of the prophet. There was perpetual domestic war in the Mohammedan empire, which by no means held the unresisting allegiance of the Javanese at any time, and the Hindu princes of Middle Java were never really conquered by them or the Dutch. The Java war of the last century between the Mohammedan emperor, the Dutch, and the rebellious native prince, Manko Boeni, lasted for thirteen

years; and in this century the same sort of a revolt cost the Dutch as imperial allies more than four millions of florins, and made the British rejoice that their statesmen had wisely handed back such a troublesome and expensive possession as Java proved to be. The great Mataram war of the last century, however, established the family of the present susunhan on the throne, after dividing his empire with a rebellious younger brother, who then became Sultan of Djokjakarta, and a new capital was built on the broad plain cut by the Bengawan or Solo River, which is the largest river of the island. At the death of the susunhan, Pakoe Bewono II ("Nail of the Universe"), in 1749, his will bequeathed his empire to the Dutch East India Company, and at last gave Holland control of the whole island. Certain lands were retained for the imperial family, and its present head, merely nominal, figurehead susunhan that he is, receives an annuity of one hundred thousand florins—a sum equal to the salary of the governor-general of Netherlands India.

The present susunhan of Solo is not the son of the last emperor, but a collateral descendant of the old emperors, who claims descent from both Mohammedan and Hindu rulers, the monkey flag of Arjuna and the double-bladed sword of the Arab conquerors alike his heirlooms and insignia. His portraits show a gentle, refined face of the best Javanese type, and he wears a European military coat, with the native sarong and Arab fez, a court sword at the front of his belt, and a Solo kris at the back. Despite his trappings and his sovereign title, he is as much a puppet and a prisoner as any of the lesser princes, sultans, and regents



THE SUSUNHAN.



whom the Dutch, having deposed and pensioned, allow to masquerade in sham authority. He maintains all the state and splendor of the old imperialism within his kraton, which is confronted and overlooked by a Dutch fort, whose guns, always trained upon the kraton, could sweep and level the whole imperial establishment at a moment's notice. The susunhan may have ten thousand people living within his kraton walls; he may have nine hundred and ninety-nine wives and one hundred and fifty carriages, as reported; but he may not drive beyond his own gates without informing the Dutch resident where he is going or has been, with his guard of honor of Dutch soldiers, and he has hardly the liberty of a tourist with a *toelatings-kaart*. He may amuse himself with a little body-guard of Javanese soldiers; but there is a petty sultan of Solo, an ancient vassal, whose military ambitions are encouraged by the Dutch to the extent of allowing him to drill and command a private army of a thousand men that the Dutch believe would never by any chance take arms against them, as allies of the susunhan's fancy guard. Wherever they have allowed any empty show of sovereignty to a native ruler, the Dutch have taken care to equip a military rival, with the lasting grudge of an inherited family feud, and establish him in the same town. But little diplomacy is required to keep such jealousies alive and aflame, and the Dutch are always an apparent check, and pacific mediators between such rivals as the susunhan and the sultan at Solo, and the sultan and Prince Pakoe Alam at Djokja.

The young susunhan maintains his empty honors

with great dignity and serenity, observing all the European forms and etiquette at his entertainments, and delighting Solo's august society with frequent court balls and fêtes. Town gossip dilates on his marble-floored ball-room, the fantastic devices in electric lights employed in illuminating the palace and its maze of gardens on such occasions, and on the blaze of heirloom jewels worn by the imperial ladies and princesses at such functions. The susunhan sometimes grants audiences to distinguished strangers, and one French visitor has told of some magnificent Japanese bronzes and Chinese porcelains in the kraton, which were gifts from the Dutch in the early time when the Japanese and Javanese trade were both Holland monopolies. No prostrations or Oriental salaams are required of European visitors at court, although the old susunhans obliged even the crown prince and prime minister to assume the dodok, and sidle about like any cup-bearer in his presence. The princes and petty chiefs were so precisely graded in rank in those days that, while the highest might kiss the sovereign's hand, and those of a lower rank the imperial knee, there were those of lesser pretensions who adoringly kissed the instep, and, last of all, those who might only presume to kiss the sole, of the susunhan's foot. The susunhan is always accompanied on his walks in the palace grounds, and on drives abroad, by a bearer with a gold pajong, or state umbrella, spreading from a jeweled golden staff. The array of pajongs carried behind the members of his family and court officials present all the colors of the rainbow, and all the variegations a fancy umbrella is capable of showing—each

striped, banded, bordered, and vandyked in a different way, that would puzzle the brain of any but a Solo courtier, to whom they speak as plainly as a door-plate.

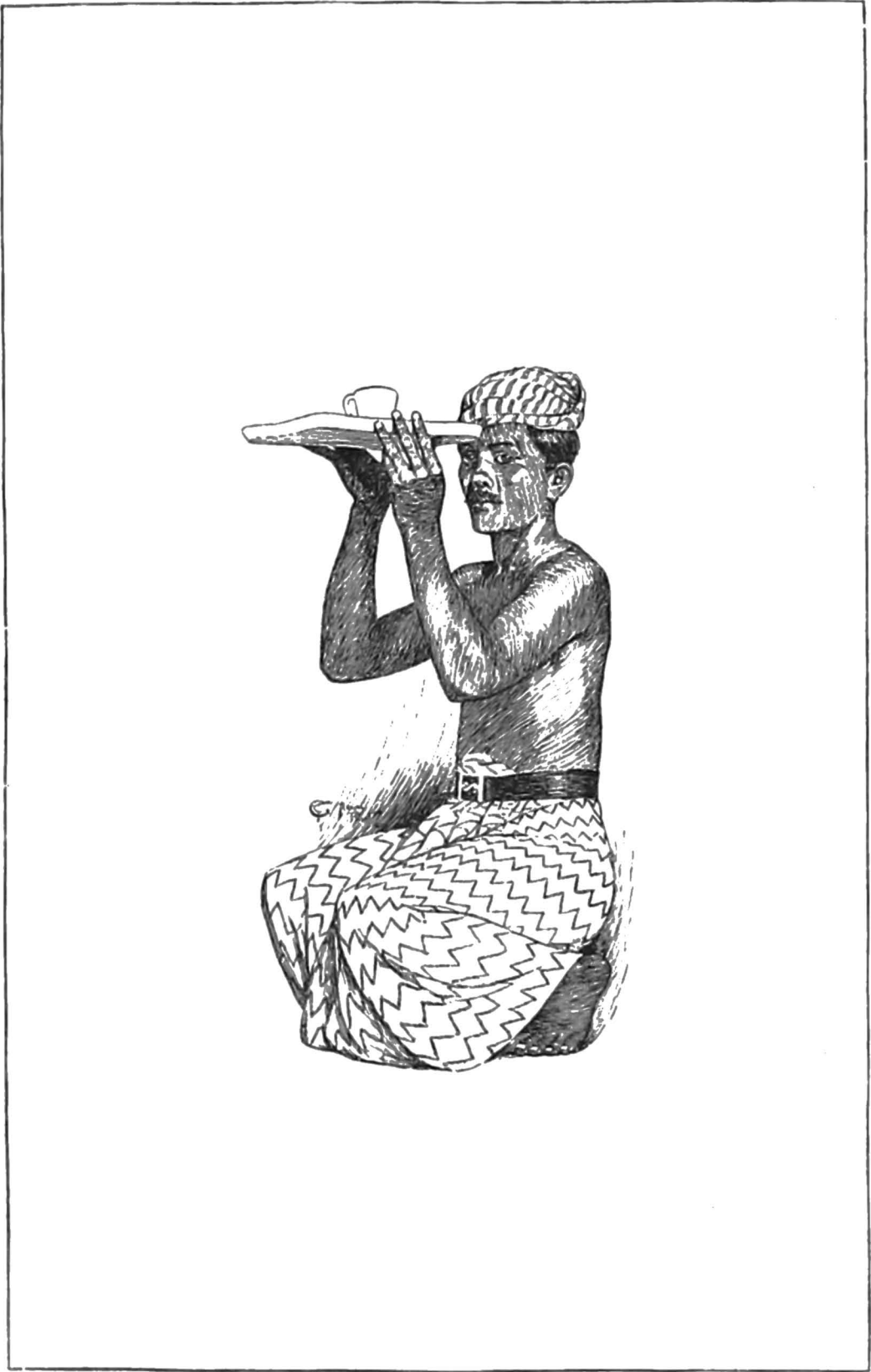
Solo has the same broad streets and magnificent shade-trees as the other towns of Java, and some of the streets have deep ditches or moats on either side of the drive, with separate little bridges crossing to each house-front, which give those thoroughfares a certain feudal quaintness and character of their own. At the late afternoon hour of our arrival we only stopped for a moment to deposit the luggage at the enormously porticoed Hotel Sleier, and then drove on through and about the imperial city. The streets were full of other carriages,—enormous barouches, “m-lords,” and family carryalls, drawn by big Walers,—with which we finally drew up in line around the park, where a military band was playing. We had seen bewildering lines of palace and fort and barrack walls, marching troops, and soldiers lounging about off duty, until it was easy to see that Solo was a vast garrison, more camp than court. Later, when we had returned to the hotel portico, to swing at ease in great broad-armed rocking-chairs,—exactly the Shaker piazza-chairs of American summer life,—there was still sound of military music off beyond the dense waringen shade, and the fanfare of bugles to right and to left.

Solo's hotel, with its comforts, offered more material inducements for us to make a long stay, than any hotel we had yet encountered in Java; and the clear-headed, courteous landlady was a hostess in the most kindly sense. The usual colonial table d'hôte assembled at nine o'clock in the vast inner hall or pavilion,



looking on a garden; and in this small world, where every one knows every one, his habitat and all his affairs, the new-comers were given a silent, earnest attention that would have checked any appetites save those engendered by our archæological afternoon at Brambanam. When beefsteak was served with a sauce of pineapple mashed with potato, and the succeeding beet salad was followed by fried fish, and that by a sweet pudding flooded with a mixture of melted chocolate and freshly ground cocoanut, we were oblivious to all stares and whispers and open comments in Dutch, which these colonials take it for granted no alien understands or can even have clue to through its likeness to German. While we rocked on the great white portico we could see and hear that Solo's lizards were as gruesome and plentiful as those of other towns. While tiny fragilities flashed across white columns and walls, and arrested themselves as instantaneous traceries and ornaments, a legion of toads came up from the garden, and hopped over the floor in a silence that made us realize how much pleasanter companions were the croaking and bemoaning geckos, who keep their ugliness out of sight.

At sunrise we set out in the company of an American temporarily in exile at Solo, and drove past the resident's great garden of palms and statues and flowerbeds, into the outer courts of the emperor's and the sultan's palaces, watching in the latter the guard-mount and drill of a fine picked body of his troops. The palace of one of the younger princes of the imperial house was accessible through kind favor, as the owner is pleased to let uitlanders enjoy the many for-



THE DODOK.



eign features of these pleasure-grounds. This foreign garden did not, however, make us really homesick by any appealing similarity to the grounds of citizens or presidents on the American side of the globe; for the progressive prince has arranged his demesne quite after the style of the gardens of the *cafés chantants* of the lower *Élysée* in Paris—colored-glass globes and all, marble-rimmed flower-beds, and a cascade to be turned on at will and let flow down over a marble staircase set with colored electric bulbs. Colored globes and bulbs hang in festoons and arches about the bizarre garden, simulate fruits and flowers on the trees and bushes, glow in dark pools and fountain basins, and play every old fantastic trick of *al-fresco cafés* in Europe. A good collection of rare beasts and birds is disposed in cages in the grounds, and there are countless kiosks and pavilions inviting one to rest. In one such summer-house, with stained-glass walls, the attendants showed photographs of the prince, his father and family, the solemn old faces and the costumes of these elders almost the only purely Javanese things to be seen in this fantastic garden, since even the *recha*, gray old images from Boro Boedor and Brambanam, have been brightened with red, white, and blue paint and made to look cheerful and decorative—have been restored, improved, brought down to modern times, and made to accord better with their *café-chantant* surroundings.

Quite unexpectedly, we saw the princely personage himself receive his early cup of coffee—attracted first to the ceremony by noticing a man carrying a gold salver and cup, and followed by an umbrella-bearer

and two other attendants, enter an angle of the court in whose shady arcade we were for the moment resting. Suddenly all four men dropped to their heels in the *dodok*, and, crouching, sidled and hopped along for a hundred feet to the steps of a pavilion. The cup-bearer insinuated himself up those four steps, still squatting on his heels, and at the same time balancing his burden on his two extended hands, and proffered the gold salver to a shadowy figure half reclining in a long chair. We stood motionless, unseen in our dark arcade, and watched this precious bit of court comedy through, and saw the cup-bearer retire backward down the steps, across the court, to the spot where he might rise from his ignoble attitude and walk like a human being again. While exacting this much of the old etiquette, this prince of European education and tastes has the finest ball-room in Solo—a vast white-marble-floored *pringitan*, or open-sided audience-hall, which is lighted with hundreds of electric lights, and on whose shining surface great cotillions are danced, and rich favors distributed to companies blazing with diamonds.