

# Sowing Beside All Waters

## Chapter I

### Alexandria

THE morning light was brightening the waves of the blue Mediterranean as they rolled into the spacious harbor of Alexandria, bearing on their crests a small flotilla of imperial galleys. They had been seen approaching, and now that the harbor was gained a loud cheer rang from the busy quays. The countless masts were each decorated with a flag, while high above all others—higher than the proud Roman eagles—was hoisted the emperor's new ensign of the cross; for times had greatly changed, and the struggling infant Church of Christ, no longer persecuted, was now patronized by the reigning emperor, Constantine.

The imperial messenger just arrived in the

FLOTILLA: *fleet of small ships*

GALLEYS: *ships propelled by oars*

QUAYS: *docks*

ENSIGN: *flag or emblem*

harbor was the court preacher, Hosius, Bishop of Cordova, and he bore letters from Constantine himself to Alexander, the aged primate or pope—he was the first to assume this title—of Alexandria, for this proud city vied with Rome itself in splendor and importance. There lay her riches in countless heaps, exposed to the rainless air—wheat waiting for shipment to Rome and Byzantium, and bales of merchandise crowding every quay, while in every nook and corner where customers were likely to be found sat a man behind a pile of fruit fresh from the fruit-boats close at hand. “Fresh watermelons! fresh figs!” cried one; while his neighbor sat lazily chewing the papyrus cane, and watching the approach of the splendid galleys.

“Times are changed since our late emperor, Diocletian, resigned the purple!” exclaimed an old man who likewise stood watching the gaily decorated vessels as they drew near.

“Yes, times are changed, thank God! for we can worship Him in peace without being carried before the prefect to have an eye put out or be maimed for life as the penalty.”

“Yes, ye Christian dogs have it all your own way now. I’ve a great mind to turn Christian myself, for it is the only way to get on in the world,” said the old man, with a half-drawn sigh for the good old times now so lately passed away.

RESIGNED THE PURPLE: *stepped down as emperor*

PREFECT: *a high Roman official*

LABARUM: *the banner of Constantine, decorated with Christian symbols*

The next minute there was another shout of welcome from the various quays, and someone exclaimed, "The emperor hath sent some of his new guards with the bishop!"

"New guards, indeed! as if these guards of the labarum could be more honorable than the old pretorians," said another contemptuously.

The news that some of the famous fifty, whose duty it was to guard the sacred ensign of the cross, had been sent on this errand to their patriarch seemed to please many, as adding not only to his but their importance. Their self-congratulations, however, in this respect were soon ended, for their deacon, Athanasius, who had come to represent the aged bishop and receive Hosius with all due honor and courtesy, quietly assured some that only one member of this famous guard had come, and he was on a visit to friends and relatives here in the city.

In spite, however, of this assurance the young man found himself the center of observation when he stepped ashore, for on cuirass and helmet shone this ensign of the cross in purest gold, and the Alexandrians had not yet become so accustomed to this former sign of shame and ignominy as to look upon it altogether unmoved. Never before, perhaps, had a guard of the labarum been seen in the metropolis of Egypt, and so the crowd might be excused for following the long line of ecclesiastics

PRETORIANS: *bodyguards of the Roman emperor*

CUIRASS: *leather breastplate*

IGNOMINY: *great public disgrace*

ECCLESIASTICS: *ministers or priests*

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through the streets to the house of their patriarch, Alexander.

It was several years since the young guard had visited his native city, and as he looked round on the familiar scene—at the splendid esplanade and the Gate of the Moon by which they entered the city—at the Cæsareum and the world-renowned obelisks before it, one of which is still known as Cleopatra’s Needle, and thought of the changes a few years had wrought not only in Alexandria but in all the world, his heart swelled with joy and thankfulness, for surely the Redeemer’s kingdom must prosper, and all would soon bow to His scepter and own His name.

But these reflections were put aside by the bustle and crowd of palanquins, curricles, and laden asses all pushing their way up this, the main street, and frequently stopping the long procession of monks and presbyters who had come out to meet and conduct the emperor’s messenger to their bishop.

When the ceremony of reception was over, and the young guard at liberty to leave and seek his own family, he was joined by his old friend, Athanasius. They had been brought up together under Alexander, but their paths in life had widely diverged since they sat together learning the use of the stylus; but the cause of the Master was still dear to the heart of each, although

ESPLANADE: *a large, level area for walking along the shore*

OBELISKS: *tall stone pillars or towers with pointed tops*

PALANQUINS: *covered litters carried on poles*

CURRICLES: *chariots pulled by two horses*

they could not see eye to eye.

“Thou art a soldier of the cross, but—”

“Nay, but thou too art a soldier of the cross if I mistake not, Athanasius; only thy weapon is not a sword of steel,” interrupted his friend.

“True, Quadratus, but I would fain live in such peace as our holy hermit, Anthony. Only such men as Arius force us to use the Word of God as a weapon as well as a support and shield;” and the young deacon sighed as he thought of the peace of the desert, where he had spent days and nights in prayer and meditation with Anthony, without the interruption of a human face except that of a fellow-hermit.

“There hath been a sharp contest with this same Arius. I have heard somewhat of it, but would fain hear the whole matter from thee. Is it simply a question of learned disquisition, or is it one of great importance, Athanasius?”

“Great importance?” repeated the deacon, “Thou hast heard very little not to know that the peace, the well-being of the whole Church Catholic is imperiled by this Arianism; for do we not believe above all else that there is one God? and was it not for this denial of there being gods many and lords many that our fathers suffered and died?”

“And Arius, thy deacon, would teach that there is more than one God?” asked Quadratus.

PRESBYTERS: *elders*

FAIN: *gladly*

DISQUISITION: *a formal discussion or analysis*

CATHOLIC: *universal*

“Nay, Arius doth not teach this directly, but his doctrine must lead to this; and, moreover, it denies the divinity of our Lord Christ,” said Athanasius. “But let me not hinder thee with the details of this now, for thou art anxiously expected at home. I saw thy mother yesterday, and she could talk of nothing but her soldier-son.”

“Wilt thou not walk home with me? Thou wilt be welcome, Athanasius, as thou knowest.”

But the deacon shook his head. “There is much sickness in Alexandria just now, and I must see that none lack either the bread that perisheth, or that which is able to save the soul alive. But I will see thee again shortly, and thou shalt tell me the news of the world beyond the great sea. Hasten homeward now, for I can see thou art longing for thy mother’s embrace;” and with a pleasant smile Athanasius turned toward the poorer quarter of the town, while Quadratus took his way past the now half-deserted temple of Neptune toward his home, where his widowed mother was awaiting him.

“My son! my Quadratus!” were the next words addressed to him; and when his mother had kissed his bronzed cheek she pressed her lips reverently upon the golden cross that gleamed on his breast and whispered, “I am blessed above women, for one son is a soldier of the cross and the other a holy monk, and yet—and yet—”

“What is it, my mother; what wouldst thou say?” asked the soldier, seeing the tears in his mother’s eyes.

“Nay, nay, my son; it is but my rebellious woman’s heart longing for a sight of my Orestes once more,” said the lady, trying to force back the tears, and looking up fondly in his face.

He pressed her to his heart more tenderly, and for a moment felt angry with his brother for leaving her. “He should have considered thy widowed state, and that he was the eldest, thy firstborn.”

But to blame Orestes was to touch the widow’s heart more keenly than anything. “Nay, nay, my son,” she said, “he is right in his choice, and it would mar the sacrifice if he allowed any human love to draw him aside from his work of prayer and meditation.”

“But, my mother, if all were to forsake their work in the world and fly to the desert, what would become—”

“Orestes did not forsake his work in the world,” hastily interrupted the lady. “Thou dost forget that in the time of our late emperor there was no room in the world for Christians, and such as would preserve life and keep their faith were compelled to fly to the desert. Ah! blame not my Orestes that he refuseth to look on the face of his mother, for I was weak in those days, and it may be I should forsake my Lord again by trying to hold him back from his service in the desert.”

“Well, I am glad the service I have undertaken calls me to cities rather than deserts, for it seemeth a nobler service to carry the conquering cross among men than—than—” and there

Quadratus paused, for he did not like to say anything disparaging of his eldest brother.

To his mother, however, that hasty pause was eloquent with praise of Orestes. "I know what thou wouldst say, my son—that while thou art bearing the conquering cross our Orestes is fighting the battle for thee on his knees. I, too, will think of this, Quadratus, when tempted to repine at his absence, and the thought will comfort me for both of ye."

Seeing that the thought brought a smile to that weary, careworn face, Quadratus would not contradict what had been said, as he at first felt inclined to do, but looked round the hall in search of his sisters.

"Where are Placidia and Melissa?" he asked.

"Placidia leaves not her chamber, but will see thee before thou dost leave Alexandria," said his mother, a faint color stealing into her cheeks as she spoke.

"My sister is ill—Athanasius told me there was much sickness in Alexandria."

But the lady shook her head. "Nay, our Placidia is quite well; but she, too, would fain leave the city to dwell in the desert, and so—"

"She has become a nun," interrupted Quadratus. It was evident he had very little sympathy with the choice of either brother or sister, and he asked in a half-angry tone, "Hath Melissa forsaken thee, too?"

"Thou dost forget Melissa hath gone to be the light of another home," replied his mother, "or

DISPARAGING: *expressing a low opinion*

REPINE: *fret*

did our letters never reach thee?"

For a letter to miscarry was nothing very unusual in those days, and so Quadratus had heard nothing of his sister's marriage, or of his mother's fear that her husband was little more than half a Christian; but he heard it now, and in listening to these particulars he forgot his vexation concerning Placidia and Orestes, until the slaves summoned them to the repast that had been ordered to be prepared in readiness for the coming of Quadratus, but which had been forgotten in the joy of meeting.

To see his mother sitting there with none but slaves to attend upon and care for her in her old age again raised the anger of the young soldier as he reflected upon the lonely life she must lead when he was away; and before the meal was over, he asked if he could not see Placidia at once.

"Thou art still my impatient Quadratus!" said his mother, smiling faintly, as the slaves brought a basket of fresh fruit and placed it in the middle of the table.

"My mother, doth not that basket remind thee of the old days when I used to lift Placidia in my arms, that she might see all the fruit from a distance, and choose which fig she would have?" hastily interrupted Quadratus.

The lady smiled faintly. "Shall I ever forget those old days!" she said with a sigh. "Shall I ever forget the night when my husband was taken from me, to be brought back days after a sightless cripple! O,

Quadratus, I was weak in those days, but it was the thought of you, my children, who needed all my care, that made me shrink from a like punishment more than the pain itself.”

“And the Lord Christ knoweth how strong the temptation was, and He who forgave Peter his denial will forgive thine, my mother,” said the young soldier tenderly.

“I can never forgive myself, and when I hear our patriarch preaching on the Lord’s great power and majesty, I feel half-afraid lest my sin is beyond His forgiveness.”

“Nay, nay, but the power and majesty is all on the sinner’s side; for great as these are, His love and compassion are greater. Fear not, my mother, thou hast confessed thy sin to Him, and He hath taken away the iniquity of thy sin. But tell me now, cannot I see Placidia at once? As thou sayest, I am impatient to see my sister once more, even though she be a nun.”

“I will ask her to see thee, but I greatly fear she will refuse,” said the lady, rising from her seat to go at once upon her errand.

“Nay, but tell her I will not be refused,” said Quadratus. “Tell her I come as a messenger from the emperor, and his will is law in the Church as in the State now.” This was said as a playful jest; but there was a truth underlying it which Quadratus had already begun dimly to see, and he wondered whether his friend Athanasius had seen it too.

Whether she took this message to Placidia or not he never heard; but a few minutes afterward a

slave entered, saying he might ascend to the tower-chamber, and the next minute he was in his sister's presence.

But the calm, grave girl in the somber dress, not unlike a philosopher's robe, was very different from the gay, laughing Placidia he had pictured in his dreams, and as he looked at the still, pale, unmoved face he slowly uttered, "Is it my sister?"

"I am Placidia," she replied; but she did not draw a step nearer, and though a faint color stole into her face, she made no attempt to greet him, nor to show any emotion at his coming.

After a long and painful silence the soldier said, "I come to thee, Placidia, on behalf of our mother. If I could leave the service of the emperor I would come home at once to cheer her declining days, but thou, my sister, hast no other duty, and—"

"Hush!" interrupted the young nun; "I, too, have a service I cannot forsake—a duty higher than all others. For my mother's sake I have promised to abide here instead of retiring to the desert, but—"

"And thou dost think a life in a palm-leaf hut more noble and pure than helping men and women in the world—more pleasing to God than serving thy mother, who needeth the care of her children now in her days of weakness?" Quadratus spoke angrily, almost fiercely, but Placidia was quite unmoved.

"I have prepared myself for such temptations," she said calmly, and her mother seeing Quadratus was about to retort with another angry speech hurried him from the room.