

# THE GADFLY

*Ethel Lilan Voynick*



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# PART ONE

## Chapter 1

Arthur sat in the library of the *theological seminary* at *Pisa*, looking through a pile of manuscript sermons. It was a hot evening in June, and the windows stood wide open, with the shutters half closed for coolness. The Father Director, Canon Montanelli, paused a moment in his writing to glance lovingly at the black head bent over the papers.

“Can’t you find it, *carino*? Never mind; I must rewrite the passage. Possibly it has got torn up, and I have kept you all this time for nothing.”

Montanelli’s voice was rather low, but full and resonant, with a silvery purity of tone that gave to his speech a peculiar charm. It was the voice of a born orator, rich in possible modulations. When he spoke to Arthur its note was always that of a caress.

“No, Padre, I must find it; I’m sure you put it here. You will never make it the same by rewriting.”

Montanelli went on with his work. A sleepy cockchafer hummed drowsily outside the window, and the long, melancholy call of a fruitseller echoed down the street: “*Fragola! fragola!*”

“‘*On Healing of the Leper*’; here it is.” Arthur came across the room with the velvet tread that always exasperated the good folk at home. He was a slender little creature, more like an Italian in a sixteenth-century portrait than a middle-class English lad of the ’thirties. From the long eyebrows and sensitive mouth to the small hands and feet, everything about him was too much chiselled, overd delicate. Sitting still, he might have been taken for a *very pretty girl masquerading in male at-*

*tire*; but when he moved, his lithe agility suggested a tame panther without the claws.

"Is that really it? What should I do without you, Arthur? I should always be losing my things. No, I am not going to write any more now. Come out into the garden, and I will help you with your work. What is the bit you couldn't understand?"

They went out into the still, shadowy cloister garden. The seminary occupied the buildings of an old *Dominican* monastery, and two hundred years ago the square courtyard had been stiff and trim, and the rosemary and lavender had grown in close-cut bushes between the straight box edgings. Now the white-robed monks who had tended them *were laid away* and forgotten; but the scented herbs flowered still in the gracious midsummer evening, though no man gathered their blossoms *for simples* any more. Tufts of wild parsley and columbine filled the cracks between the flagged footways, and the well in the middle of the courtyard was given up to ferns and matted stone-crop. The roses had run wild, and their straggling suckers trailed across the paths; in the box borders flared great red poppies; tall foxgloves drooped above the tangled grasses; and the old vine, untrained and barren of fruit, swayed from the branches of the neglected medlar-tree, shaking a leafy head with slow and sad persistence.

In one corner stood a huge summer-flowering magnolia, a *tower of dark foliage*, splashed here and there with milkwhite blossoms. A rough wooden bench had been placed against the trunk; and on this Montanelli sat down. Arthur was studying philosophy at the university; and coming to a difficulty with a book, had applied to "the Padre" for an explanation of the point. Montanelli was a universal encyclopaedia to him, though he had never been a pupil of the seminary.

"I had better go now," he said when the passage had been cleared up; "unless you want me for anything."

"I don't want to work any more, but I should like you to stay a bit if you have time."

"Oh, yes!" He leaned back against the tree-trunk and

looked up through the dusky branches at the first faint stars glimmering in a quiet sky. The dreamy, mystical eyes, deep blue under black lashes, were an inheritance from his Cornish mother, and Montanelli turned his head away, that he might not see them.

"You are looking tired, *carino*," he said.

"I can't help it." There was a weary sound in Arthur's voice, and the Padre noticed it at once.

"You should not have gone up to college so soon; you were tired out with sick-nursing and being up at night. I ought to have insisted on your taking a thorough rest before you left Leghorn."

"Oh, Padre, what's the use of that? I couldn't stop in that miserable house after mother died. Julia would have driven me mad!"

Julia was his eldest step-brother's wife, and a thorn in his side.

"I should not have wished you to stay with your relatives," Montanelli answered gently. "I am sure it would have been the worst possible thing for you. But I wish you could have accepted the invitation of your English doctor friend; if you had spent a month in his house you would have been more fit to study."

"No, Padre, I shouldn't indeed! The Warrens are very good and kind, but they don't understand; and then they are sorry for me—I can see it in all their faces—and they would try to console me, and talk about mother. Gemma wouldn't, of course; she always knew what not to say, even when we were babies; but the others would. And it isn't only that——"

"What is it then, my son?"

Arthur pulled off some blossoms from a drooping foxglove stem and crushed them nervously in his hand.

"I can't bear the town," he began after a moment's pause.

"There are the shops where she used to buy me toys when I was a little thing, and the walk along the shore where I used to take her until she got too ill. Wherever I go it's the same thing; every market-girl comes up to me with bunches of flowers—as if

I wanted them now! And there's the churchyard—I had to get away; it made me sick to see the place——”

He broke off and sat tearing the foxglove bells to pieces. The silence was so long and deep that he looked up, wondering why the Padre did not speak. It was growing dark under the branches of the magnolia, and everything seemed dim and indistinct; but there was light enough to show the ghastly paleness of Montanelli's face. He was bending his head down, his right hand tightly clenched upon the edge of the bench. Arthur looked away with a sense of awe struck wonder. It was as though he had stepped unwittingly on to holy ground.

“My God!” he thought; “how small and selfish I am beside him! If my trouble were his own he couldn't feel it more.”

Presently Montanelli raised his head and looked round.

“I won't press you to go back there; at all events, just now,” he said in his most caressing tone; “but you must promise me to take a thorough rest when your vacation begins this summer. I think you had better get a holiday right away from the neighbourhood of Leghorn. I can't have you breaking down in health.”

“Where shall you go when the seminary closes, Padre?”

“I shall have to take the pupils into the hills, as usual, and see them settled there. But by the middle of August the sub-director will be back from his holiday. I shall try to get up into the Alps for a little change. Will you come with me? I could take you for some long mountain rambles, and you would like to study the Alpine mosses and lichens. But perhaps it would be rather dull for you alone with me?”

“Padre!” Arthur clasped his hands in what Julia called his ‘demonstrative foreign way’. “I would give anything on earth to go away with you. Only—I am not sure——” He stopped.

“You don't think Mr. Burton would allow it?”

“He wouldn't like it, of course, but he could hardly interfere. I am eighteen now and can do what I choose. After all, he's only my step-brother; I don't see that I owe him obedience. He was always unkind to mother.”



"But if he seriously objects, I think you had better not defy his wishes; you may find your position at home made much harder if——"

"Not a bit harder!" Arthur broke in passionately. "They always did hate me and always will—it doesn't matter what I do. Besides, how can James seriously object to my going away with you—with my father confessor?"

"He is a Protestant, remember. However, you had better write to him, and we will wait to hear what he thinks. But you must not be impatient, my son; it matters just as much what you do, whether people hate you or love you".

The rebuke was so gently given that Arthur hardly coloured under it. "Yes, I know," he answered, sighing; "but it is so difficult——"

"I was sorry you could not come to me on Tuesday evening," Montanellisaid, abruptly introducing a new subject. "The Bishop of Arezzo was here, and I should have liked you to meet him."

"I had promised one of the students to go to a meeting at his lodgings, and they would have been expecting me."

"What sort of meeting?"

Arthur seemed embarrassed by the question. "It—it was n-not a r-regular meeting," he said with a nervous little stammer. "A student had come from Genoa, and he made a speech to us—a-a sort of—lecture."

"What did he lecture about?"

Arthur hesitated. "You won't ask me his name, Padre will you? Because I promised——"

"I will ask you no questions at all, and if you have promised secrecy of course you must not tell me; but I think you can almost trust me by this time."

"Padre, of course I can. He spoke about—us and our duty to the people—and to—our own selves; and about what we might do to help——"

"To help whom?"

"The contadini—and——"

"And?"

"Italy."

There was a long silence.

"Tell me, Arthur," said Montanelli, turning to him and speaking very gravely, "how long have you been thinking about this?"

"Since—last winter."

"Before your mother's death? And did she know of it?"

"N-no. I—I didn't care about it then."

"And now you—care about it?"

Arthur pulled another handful of bells off the foxglove.

"It was this way, Padre," he began, with his eyes on the ground. "When I was preparing for the entrance examination last autumn, I got to know a good many of the students; you remember? Well, some of them began to talk to me about—all these things, and lent me books. But I didn't care much about it; I always wanted to get home quick to mother. You see, she was quite alone among them all in that dungeon of a house; and Julia's tongue was enough to kill her. Then, in the winter, when she got so ill, I forgot all about the students and their books; and then, you know, I left off coming to Pisa altogether. I should have talked to mother if I had thought of it; but it went right out of my head. Then I found out that she was going to die—You know, I was almost constantly with her towards the end; often I would sit up the night, and Gemma Warren would come in the day to let me get to sleep. Well, it was in those long nights; I got thinking about the books and about what the students had said—and wondering—whether they were right and—what—our Lord would have said about it all."

"Did you ask Him?" Montanelli's voice was not quite steady.

"Often, Padre. Sometimes I have prayed to Him to tell me what I must do, or to let me die with mother. But I couldn't find any answer."

"And you never said a word to me. Arthur, I hoped you could have trusted me."

“Padre, you know I trust you! But there are some things you can’t talk about to anyone. I—it seemed to me that no one could help me—not even you or mother; I must have my own answer straight from God. You see, it is for all my life and all my soul.”

Montanelli turned away and stared into the dusky gloom of the magnolia branches. The twilight was so dim that his figure had a shadowy look, like a dark ghost among the darker boughs.

“And then?” he asked slowly.

“And then—she died. You know, I had been up the last three nights with her——”

He broke off and paused a moment, but Montanelli did not move.

“All those two days before they buried her,” Arthur went on in a lower voice, “I couldn’t think about anything. Then, after the funeral, I was ill; you remember, I couldn’t come to confession.”

“Yes; I remember.”

“Well, in the night I got up and went into mother’s room. It was all empty; there was only the great crucifix in the alcove. And I thought perhaps God would help me. I knelt down and waited—all night. And in the morning when I came to my senses—Padre, it isn’t any use; I can’t explain. I can’t tell you what I saw—I hardly know myself. But I know that God has answered me, and that I dare not disobey Him.”

For a moment they sat quite silent in the darkness. Then Montanelli turned and laid his hand on Arthur’s shoulder.

“My son,” he said, “God forbid that I should say He has not spoken to your soul. But remember your condition when this thing happened, and do not take the fancies of grief or illness for His solemn call. And if, indeed, it has been His will to answer you out of the shadow of death, be sure that you put no false construction on His word. What is this thing you have it in your heart to do?”

Arthur stood up and answered slowly, as though repeating

a catechism.

"To give up my life to Italy, to help in freeing her from all this slavery and wretchedness, and in driving out the Austrians, that she may be a free republic, with no king but Christ."

"Arthur, think a moment what you are saying! You are not even an Italian."

"That makes no difference; I am myself. I have seen this thing, and I belong to it."

There was silence again.

"You spoke just now of what Christ would have said——"  
Montanelli began slowly; but Arthur interrupted him;

"Christ said: 'He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.'"

Montanelli leaned his arm against a branch, and shaded his eyes with one hand.

"Sit down a moment, my son," he said at last.

Arthur sat down, and the Padre took both his hands in a strong and steady clasp.

"I cannot argue with you tonight," he said; "this has come upon me so suddenly—I had not thought—I must have time to think it over. Later on we will talk more definitely. But, for just now, I want you to remember one thing. If you get into trouble over this, if you—die, you will break my heart."

"Padre——"

"No; let me finish what I have to say. I told you once that I have no one in the world but you. I think you do not fully understand what that means. It is difficult when one is so young; at your age I should not have understood. Arthur, you are as my—as my—own son to me. Do you see? You are the light of my eyes and the desire of my heart. I would die to keep you from making a false step and ruining your life. But there is nothing I can do. I don't ask you to make any promises to me; I only ask you to remember this, and to be careful. Think well before you take an irrevocable step, for my sake, if not for the sake of your mother in heaven."

"I will think—and—Padre, Pray for me, and for Italy."

He knelt down in silence, and in silence Montanelli laid his hand on the bent head. A moment later Arthur rose, kissed the hand, and went softly away across the dewy grass. Montanelli sat alone under the magnolia tree, looking straight before him into the blackness.

“It is the vengeance of God that has fallen upon me,” he thought, “as it fell upon David. I, that have defiled his sanctuary, and taken the Body of the Lord into polluted hands—he has been very patient with me, and now it has come. ‘For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun; the child that is born unto thee shall surely die.’”

## Chapter 2

Mr. James Burton did not at all like the idea of his young step-brother “careering about Switzerland” with Montanelli. But positively to forbid a harmless botanizing tour with an elderly professor of theology would seem to Arthur, who knew nothing of the reason for the prohibition, absurdly tyrannical. He would immediately attribute it to religious or racial prejudice ; and the Burtons prided themselves on their enlightened tolerance. The whole family had been staunch Protestants and Conservatives ever since Burton & Sons, shipowners, of London and Ieghorn, had first set up in business, more than a century back. But they held that English gentlemen must deal fairly, even with Papists, and when the head of the house, finding it dull to remain a widower, had married the pretty Catholic governess of his younger children, the two elder sons, James and Thomas, much as they resented the presence of a step-mother hardly older than themselves, had submitted with sulky resignation to the will of Providence. Since the father’s death the eldest brother’s marriage had further complicated an already difficult position; but both brothers had honestly tried to protect Glad-

ys, as long as she lived, from Julia's merciless tongue, and to do their duty, as they understood it, by Arthur. They did not even pretend to like the lad, and their generosity towards him showed itself chiefly in providing him with lavish supplies of pocket money and allowing him to go his own way.

In answer to his letter, accordingly, Arthur received a cheque to cover his expenses and a cold permission to do as he pleased about his holidays. He expended half his spare cash on botanical books and pressing-cases, and started off with the Padre for his first Alpine ramble.

Montanelli was in lighter spirits than Arthur had seen him in for a long while. After the first shock of the conversation in the garden he had gradually recovered his mental balance, and now looked upon the case more calmly. Arthur was very young and inexperienced; his decision could hardly be, as yet irrevocable. Surely there was still time to win him back by gentle persuasion and reasoning from the dangerous path upon which he had barely entered.

They had intended to stay a few days at Geneva; but at the first sight of the glaring white streets and dusty, tourist-crammed promenades, a little frown appeared on Arthur's face. Montanelli watched him with quiet amusement.

"You don't like carino?"

"I hardly know. It's so different from what I expected. Yes, the lake is beautiful, and I like the shape of those hills." They were standing on Rousseau's Island, and he pointed to the long, severe outlines of the Savoy side "But the town looks so stiff and tidy, somehow—so Protestant; it has a selfsatisfied air. No, I don't like it, it reminds me of Julia."

Montanelli laughed. "Poor boy, what a misfortune! Well, we are here for our own amusement, so there is no reason why we should stop. Suppose we take a sail on the lake today, and go up into the mountains tomorrow morning?"

"But, Padre, you wanted to stay here?"

"My dear boy, I have seen all these places a dozen times. My holiday is to see your pleasure. Where would you like to

go?"

"If it is really the same to you, I should like to follow the river back to its source."

"The Rhone?"

"No, the Arve; it runs so fast."

"Then we will go to Chamonix"

They spent the afternoon drifting about in a little sailing boat. The beautiful lake produced far less impression upon Arthur than the gray and muddy Arve. He had grown up beside the Mediterranean, and was accustomed to blue ripples; but he had a positive passion for swiftly moving water, and the hurried rushing of the glacier stream delighted him beyond measure. "It is so much in earnest," he said.

Early on the following morning they started for Chamonix. Arthur was in very high spirits while driving through the fertile valley country; but when they entered upon the winding road near Cluses, and the great, jagged hills closed in around them, he became serious and silent. From St. Martin they walked slowly up the valley, stopping to sleep at wayside chalets or tiny mountain villages, and wandering on again as their fancy directed. Arthur was peculiarly sensitive to the influence of scenery, and the first waterfall that they passed threw him into an ecstasy which was delightful to see; but as they drew nearer to the snowpeaks he passed out of this rapturous mood into one of dreamy exaltation that Montanelli had not seen before. There seemed to be a kind of mystical relationship between him and the mountains. He would lie for hours motionless in the dark, secret, echoing pine forests, looking out between the straight, tall trunks into the sunlit outer world of flashing peaks and barren cliffs. Montanelli watched him with a kind of sad envy.

"I wish you could show me what you see, carino," he said one day as he looked up from his book, and saw Arthur stretched beside him on the moss in the same attitude as an hour before, gazing out with wide, dilated eyes into the glittering expanse of blue and white. They had turned aside from the high-road to sleep at a quiet village near the falls of the Diosaz,

and, the sun being already low in a cloudless sky, had mounted a point of pine-clad rock to wait for the Alpine glow over the dome and needles of the Mont Blanc chain. Arthur raised his head with eyes full of wonder and mystery.

"What I see, Padre? I see a great, white being in a blue void that has no beginning and no end. I see it waiting age after age, for the coming of the Spirit of God. I see it through a glass darkly."

Montanelli sighed.

"I used to see those things once."

"Do you never see them now?"

"Never. I shall not see them any more. They are there, I know; but I have not the eyes to see them. I see quite other things."

"What do you see?"

"I, carino? I see a blue sky and a snow-mountain—that is all when I look up into the heights. But down there it is different."

He pointed to the valley below them. Arthur knelt down and bent over the sheer edge of the precipice. The great pine trees, dusky in the gathering shades of evening, stood like sentinels along the narrow banks confining the river. Presently the sun, red as a glowing coal, dipped behind a jagged mountain peak, and all the life and light deserted the face of nature. Straightway there came upon the valley something dark and threatening—sullen, terrible, full of spectral weapons. The perpendicular cliffs of the barren western mountains seemed like the teeth of a monster lurking to snatch a victim and drag him down into the maw of the deep valley, black with its moaning forests. The pine trees were rows of knife-blades whispering: "Fall upon us!" and in the gathering darkness the torrent roared and howled, beating against its rocky prison walls with the frenzy of an everlasting despair.

"Padre!" Arthur rose, shuddering, and drew back from the precipice. "It is like hell."

"No, my son." Montanelli answered softly, "it is only like a



human soul."

"The souls of them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death?"

"The souls of them that pass you day by day in the street."

Arthur shivered, looking down into the shadows. A dim white mist was hovering among the pine trees, clinging faintly about the desperate agony of the torrent, like a miserable ghost that had no consolation to give.

"Look!" Arthur said suddenly. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light."

Eastwards the snow-peaks burned in the after-glow. When the red light had faded from the summits Montanelli turned and roused Arthur with a touch on the shoulder.

"Come in, carino; all the light is gone. We shall lose our way in the dark if we stay any longer."

"It is like a corpse," Arthur said as he turned away from the spectral face of the great snow-peak glimmering through the twilight.

They descended cautiously among the black trees to the chalet where they were to sleep.

As Montanelli entered the room where Arthur was waiting for him at the supper table, he saw that the lad seemed to have shaken off ghostly fancies of the dark, and to have changed into quite another creature.

"Oh, Padre, do come and look at this absurd dog! It can dance on its hind legs."

He was as much absorbed in the dog and its accomplishments as he had been in the after-glow. The woman of the chalet, red-faced and white-aproned, with sturdy arms akimbo, stood by, smiling while he put the animal through its tricks. "One can see there's not much on his mind if he can carry on that way," she said in patois to her daughter. "And what a handsome lad!"

Arthur coloured like a schoolgirl, and the woman, seeing that he had understood, went away laughing at his confusion. At supper he talked of nothing but plans for excursions, moun-