

## Reginald Farrer in the Alps 1899-1917

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Reginald Farrer (1880-1920) Plant collector and author

I have followed in Farrer's footsteps in the Alps and enjoyed his writings for many years. In this presentation I want to share my pleasure with you. Here are the main dates of his life:

1880	Born in London
1898-1902	Balliol College, Oxford University
1899	First visit to the Alps
1902-03	Japan, Korea, China
1908	Ceylon (Sri Lanka)
1911	Publication of <i>Among the Hills</i>
1913	Publication of <i>The Dolomites</i>
1914-16	Expedition to China
1917	Last visit to the Alps
1919-20	Expedition to Burma (Myanmar)
1920	Died in Burma

He is best known for his plant-hunting expeditions in China and Burma, and those who have written about him have paid little attention to his visits to the European Alps.

Farrer combined multiple talents with an unconventional personality. Osbert Sitwell, who was his second cousin, gave this description of Farrer in his memoirs:

‘He was an author of talent, both as a novelist and as a writer of books of travel and of gardening, and a great plant collector, so successful that he is sure of immortality in the world of flowers. His manner was bland, but although he possessed the capacity to be extremely considerate, he was impish by nature. He was vain, it must be admitted, in several directions, and liked to air the contents of a well-stored and observant mind’

The word ‘impish’ means mischievous, playful, or malicious, and these qualities are evident in Farrer’s writings, where he uses extravagant language and erudite literary references.

Farrer published 20 books and 130 articles (bibliography compiled by W.T. Stearn in *The Plant Introductions of Reginald Farrer*, 1930). About a quarter of them concern his excursions in the European Alps or the Alpine flora. He also published books and articles on gardening, novels and plays, and an important article on the novels of Jane Austen.

Most of his archives are in Edinburgh (the Farrer Collection in the Archives of the Royal Botanic Garden) but there is also material in London (the E.A. Bowles Archive in the Lindley Library of the Royal Horticultural Society) related to his friendship with the gardener Bowles, and in Bristol I have found letters from him to the botanist Thompson (the H.S. Thompson Collection in the Archives of Bristol University).

Many plants are named after Farrer: 34 species or varieties have the epithets *farreri* or *farreriana* or *reginaldii* (list compiled by W.T. Stearn in *Reginald Farrer, Dalesman, Planthunter, Gardener*, 1991). He introduced many new plants to British gardens, and his ideas on garden design were influential; he has been described by Brent Elliott as ‘virtually the patron saint of rock gardening for much of the twentieth century.’ Most of the plants named after him are ones that that he found in Asia. Here are two examples:



*Buddleja farreri*



*Gentiana farreri*

When Farrer was 9 years old, his father inherited Ingleborough Hall and 14,000 hectares of land at Clapham in Yorkshire. The family moved there, and retained a house in London.



Ingleborough Hall



Farrer began to explore the limestone pavements of Yorkshire, which you see here with the mountain of Ingleborough in the distance.

At the age of 14 he published a note in the *Journal of Botany* on the rare plant *Arenaria gothica* which he found there







In 1898 Farrer went to Balliol College, Oxford University, to study for a degree in Greek and Latin. In 1961 I went to Balliol myself to study for the same degree.

Balliol College c.1900

Here is a map showing the Alpine regions that Farrer visited in 1899-1917



And here is a list of the places that he visited: Berner Oberland (Rosenlauri), Valais (Arolla, Gruben), Engadin (Samedan, Pontresina), Maritime Alps (Valdieri, Boréon, St. Martin Vésubie, San Dalmazzo di Tenda), Graian Alps (Mont Cenis), Cottian Alps (Bobbio Pellice), Garda Alps (Storo, Monte Baldo), Dolomites (Misurina, Bozen, Rosengarten), Hohe Tauern (Heiligenblut), Karawanken (Hochobir), Rhaetian Alps (Daone), Dinaric Alps (Idria, Monte Santo)

It is not clear from Farrer's publications exactly where he went, and when, but in my research, I have established the first comprehensive chronology and topography of his visits to the Alps. I do not have time to describe them all, but I will show you a selection.

It was in 1899 and 1901 that Farrer first visited the Alps: he stayed at Kurhaus, Rosenlauri, in the Berner Oberland with Gerard Collier, a friend from Balliol. From there he sent letters such as this to his mother. You can see on the letter-head the Hotel Kurhaus, the Rosenlauri Falls, and the Wellhorn.



He writes 'My dear Mamma, I have discovered a wonderful Alpine Columbine of the most astounding sapphire blue'



*Aquilegia alpina*

After leaving Oxford, Farrer stayed at St. Martin Vésubie in the Maritime Alps for a week in October 1902. It was a good base for botanising, and he returned to it later. This is the hotel where he stayed. It is still there, and it has not changed much.



Hôtel des Alpes c.1900



Hôtel des Alpes c.2020



This postcard gives a general view of St. Martin in Farrer's time. You can see the Maritime Alps in the background.

Here is a photo taken by Farrer himself in October 1902. He has added the caption 'General view from the bridge over the river looking up towards the Col de la Fenêtre where *Saxifraga florulenta* was first rediscovered'

He particularly wanted to find *Saxifraga florulenta* which is endemic in the neighbouring mountains.







Here is another photo taken by Farrer, with the caption 'Still looking up towards the Fenestra from the window of my hotel (Des Alpes). It rained unceasingly for 5 days'

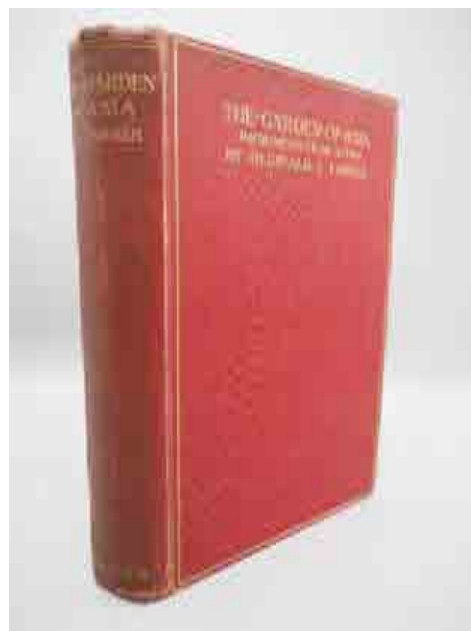
Finally, on the last day, he found *Saxifraga florulenta* with the aid of a guide, and took a 'good number' of specimens.

He writes 'A cycle of myths and legends has gathered around it: described by Moretti in 1824, not found again, considered fabulous, rediscovered in 1840 at Col de la Fenêtre by an unknown English tourist'.

Farrer described the plant as a 'wonderful, tragic personality' (he often attributed personalities to flowers), and he was the first to give it the English name 'Ancient King'



From St Martin Vésubie Farrer travelled to Japan with Aubrey Herbert, another friend from Balliol, and he also visited Korea and China. After eight months he returned to England and related his impressions in the book *The Garden of Asia* (1904). It describes the gardens, landscape, and society of the countries that he visited. In Japan he was attracted by Buddhism – and by a geisha girl.



Farrer stayed at Kurhaus, Rosenlauri, again in 1904, 1905, and 1908



He wrote to his mother 'I have sent two immense boxes containing armfuls of treasures. The Alpine Columbine is in bloom on the Wellhorn' The boxes of plants were sent to his nursery at Ingleborough, where he propagated and marketed alpine plants.



Here are some of the flowers that Farrer found on the way to the Schwarzhorn above Rosenlauri.



*Viola cenisia*



*Anthericum liliastrum*

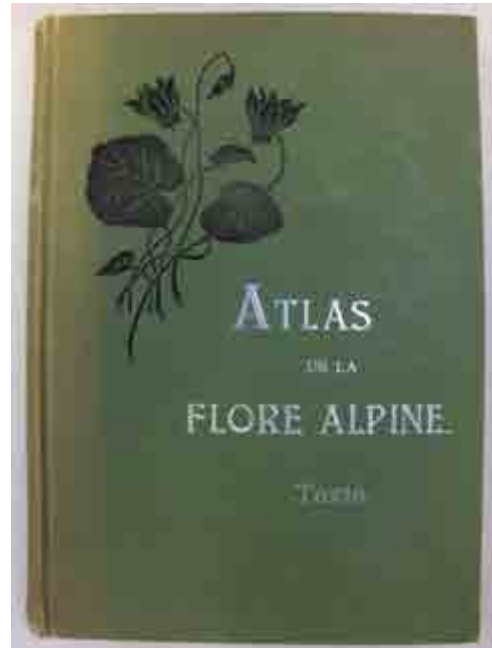
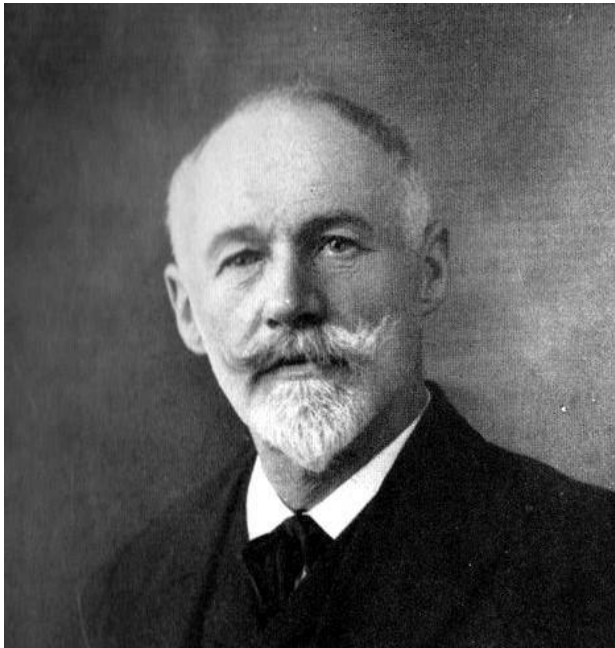


*Primula viscosa*



*Lloydia serotina*

In Switzerland Farrer made the acquaintance of Henry Correvon (1854-1939), who had a nursery in Geneva, was the author of many botanical works, and a promoter of Swiss alpine gardens.



Correvon corresponded with Farrer, and later visited him at Ingleborough. It was on Correvon's advice that he visited Gruben and Arolla in the mountains south of the Rhone.



*Eritrichium nanum*

*Eritrichium nanum* ('King of the Alps') was one of Farrer's favourite plants. He describes how he found it at a place which he calls Meiden Pass, above Gruben: 'One pause, just to make sure of the bliss which is so hard to believe. Yes, this is no delusion, it is *Eritrichium*. A calm glory of destiny fulfilled descends upon me. In another moment I am on my knees'

But Farrer sometimes dissimulated the location of rare plants, and his statement that he found *Eritrichium nanum* at Meiden Pass was false.

In fact, he found it at Augstbord Pass. I found it in the same place more than a hundred years later.



Graham Avery and *Eritrichium nanum* (2014)

From Arolla, Farrer went up to Plan de Bertol



He writes ‘My companions [one of whom was Correvon] are eager to scale the Col de Bertol. Having no love for snowfields, I prefer to spend my day in the more placid delights of the Plan de Bertol’

‘All round that amphitheatre is a classical station for *Androsace imbricata*’





Plan de Bertol inspired a remarkable soliloquy on the beauty and silence of the Alps:

‘To be alone in wide, great places is sometimes too terrible a thing for little mundane man. In the high valleys of the Alps, where the silence is so vast that it seems as if a single uttered word would shatter the roof of the world, the nearness of the Gods is either purifying or appalling, according to one’s strength of mood. All the Lords of Life and Death, all Gods and Saints, all Buddhas and Bodhisattas out of the infinite past and the infinite future, they are all there, making part of that immeasurable beauty, chanting in the choir of that eternal silence’

Here Farrer quotes Buddhist ideas and divinities. He had first been attracted to Buddhism during his visit to Japan, and in Ceylon in 1908 he converted to the Buddhist faith – or perhaps it should be described as a philosophy.

In 1908 Farrer visited the Engadin in Switzerland, where he stayed in Samedan and Pontresina. From Samedan he set out to find *Eritrichium nanum* on Piz Padella, but lost his way, and it began to rain, so he collected *Ranunculus parnassifolius* and returned to his hotel.



Piz Padella (above Samedan)



*Ranunculus parnassifolius*

At Pontresina he found *Eritrichium nanum* just below the summit of Piz Languard

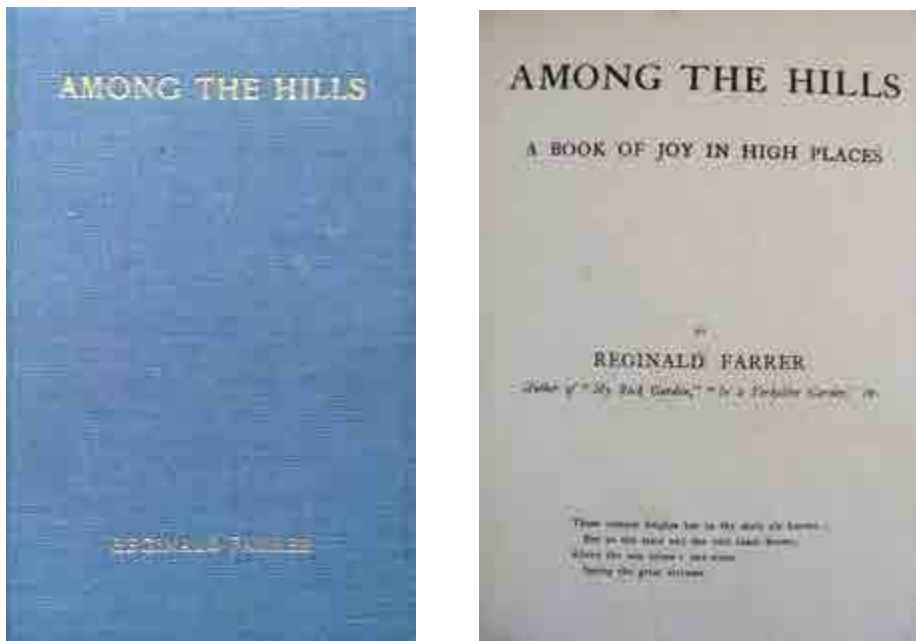


Piz Languard (above Pontresina)

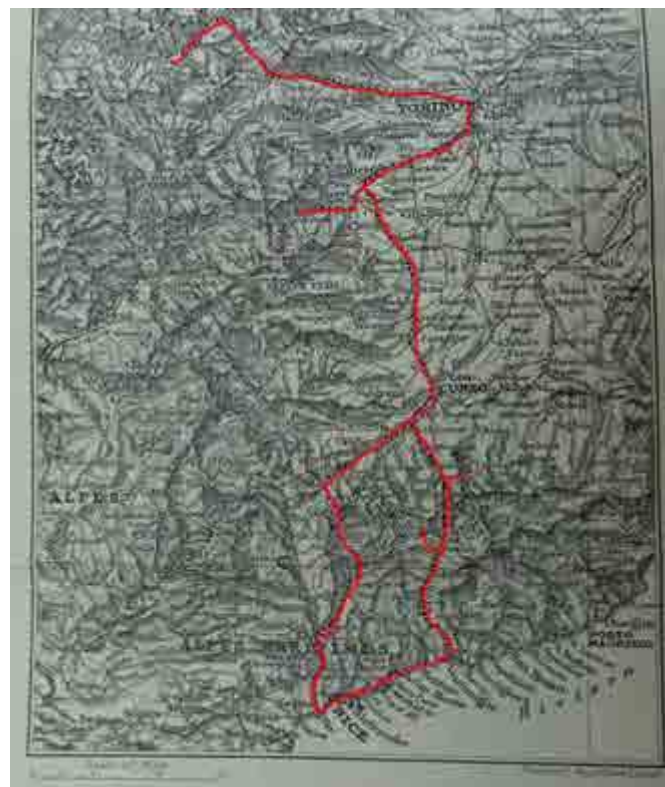


*Eritrichium nanum*

*Among the Hills: A Book of Joy in High Places* (1911)



This book relates Farrer's exploits in the Alps during an eight-week tour made in 1910 in the Graian Alps (Mont Cenis), Cottian Alps (Bobbio Pellice), Maritime Alps (Valdieri, Boréon, St. Martin Vésubie, San Dalmazzo, Limone), Garda Alps (Storo). In it he describes not only the flora that he found (about 120 species), but places that he visited and people that he met. The book was re-published in 1927, and in paperback in 1985.



'My Wanderings in 1910'

This map was included in the book, and I have highlighted in red the line showing his itinerary from Mont Cenis to the Mediterranean, and then back to Mont Cenis.

As I have said, Farrer dissimulated the location of rare plants, and here he announces his intention to do so in this book:

‘I am going to take you to see some extremely rare and precious plants; I have no intention of making this book so plain a guide that unscrupulous depredators, nurserymen and others may be able to go out and exterminate the species of which I talk. When I come to anything particularly precious, I may shroud its habitat in mystery. Nor shall I tell you when I am doing this’

In this way he created a series of puzzles, which I have solved, and I will share my results with you.



Harold Stuart Thompson

Thompson was a botanist, alpinist, and author of *Alpine Plants of Europe* (1911), *Sub-alpine Plants* (1912), *Flowering plants of the Riviera* (1913). In 1910 he wrote ‘Mont Cenis is ‘a wonderful hunting ground’ where ‘I spent three weeks in moderate comfort at the Hotel de la Poste, whose proprietor, Signor Favre, takes an intelligent interest in the botany of the district’.

In 1910 Farrer wrote to Thompson asking for his advice on where to go in the Alps, explaining that ‘Every year it is necessary for me to collect rare alpines in bulk’. On Thompson’s advice, Farrer began his tour at Mont Cenis. He took a train from Paris to Modane, then a motor to Mont Cenis, and stayed at the Hotel de la Poste.





Map of Mont Cenis c.1925

On this map I have shown the Hotel de la Poste in red: below it is the Lac du Mont Cenis, and above it is the frontier between France and Italy.

In Farrer's time Mont Cenis was in Italy, but in 1947 it was transferred to France. The lake has been enlarged, and much of the plateau has been submerged.

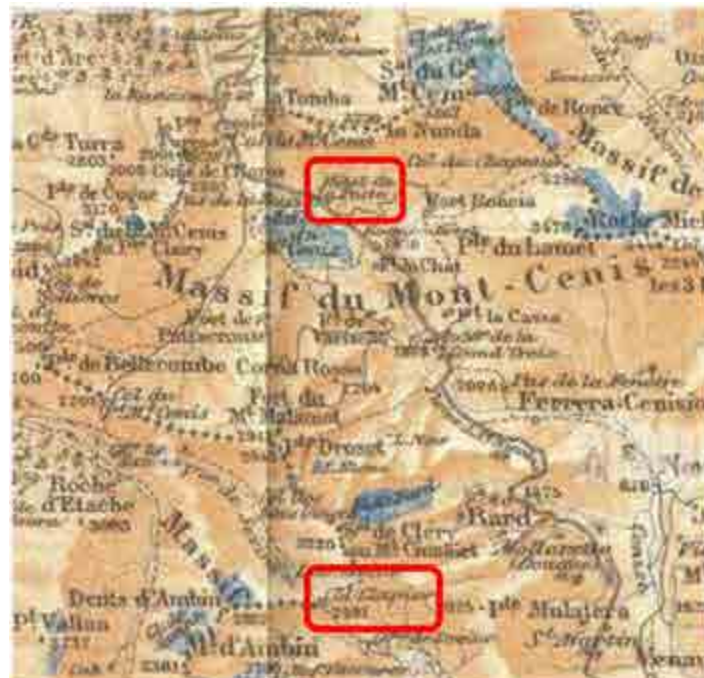


From the hotel Farrer collects many alpine plants. He writes 'For wealth of gorgeousness I have never yet seen anything to equal the display'



He finds *Eritrichium nanum* near Kirschenjoch. Where is 'Kirschenjoch'?

It is Col de Clapier, which you see here in relation to Mont Cenis.



Since Thompson had refused to tell him the location of *Eritrichium*, Farrer appealed for help to Corveon, who told him that it was at Col de Clapier, where he duly found it on a boulder.





### Col de Clapier ('Kirschenjoch')

Farrer invented the name 'Kirschenjoch', which means 'Cherry Pass' in German, on the analogy of 'Col de Cerise' which he visited later in the tour.

Next, Farrer travelled via Torino to Bobbio Pellice, to look for *Saxifraga valdensis*. He found it at a place whose location he dissimulates, but which I deduce to be Col de Manzol.



On the map I have indicated in red the route of Farrer's excursion to Col de Manzol. On the left is the frontier between Italy and France, and on it is Colle della Croce, where the plant was found by Augustin Pyramus de Candolle, the first to describe *Saxifraga valdensis* in 1815.





Col de Manzol ('Bocca Lorina')

*Saxifraga valdensis*

Farrer borrowed the name 'Bocca Lorina' from a pass which he visited later in the tour. The plant is named 'valdensis' after the Valdesi, a group of persecuted Protestants who found refuge in these mountains. In English they are known as Waldensians.

Next, Farrer travelled to Valdieri in the Maritime Alps, and then walked to Boréon and St Martin Vésubie.

At Valdieri Farrer was joined by Clarence Elliott, who owned a nursery in England specialising in Alpine plants. They climbed to Col de Cerise (Passo di Ciriegia), where to their delight they found *Saxifraga florulenta*.



Col de Cerise

Farrer writes 'As we began to descend, I saw *Saxifraga florulenta*, and hailed it with a loud cry. After this, time ceased'



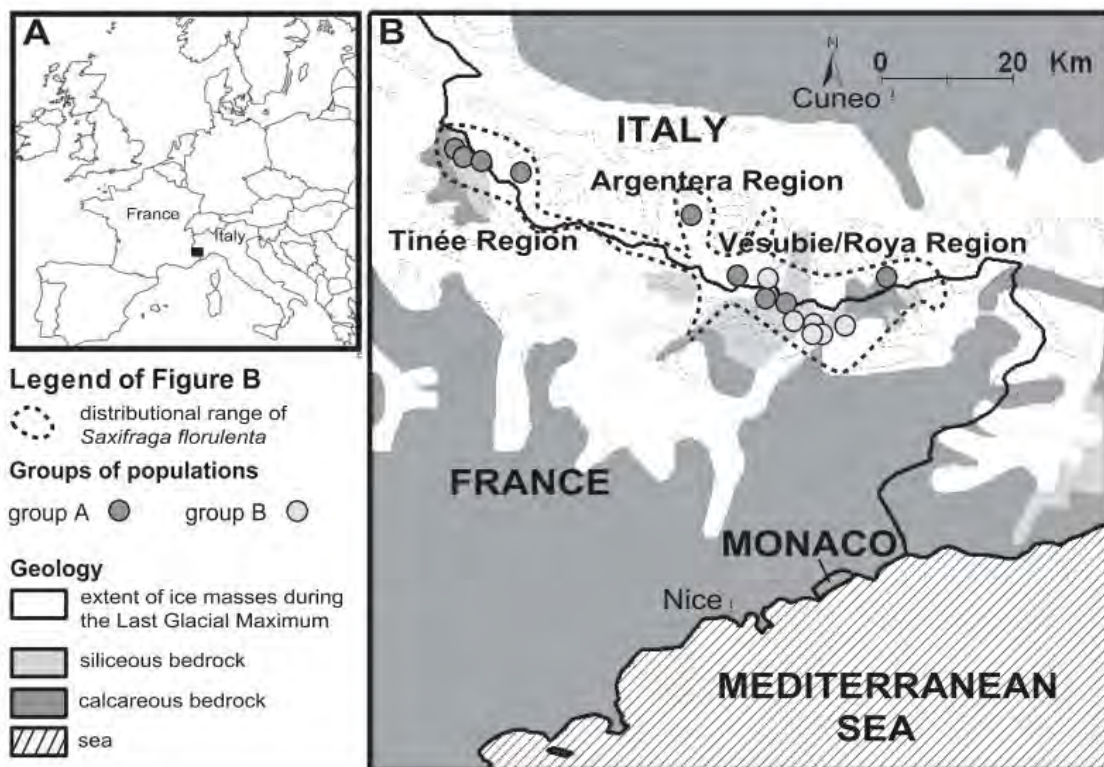
Clarence Bicknell (c. 1900)



Graham Avery (2013)

Here are two images of this remarkable plant. Clarence Bicknell was a botanist whom Farrer met later in the tour. I have never seen it in flower, but I did find this rosette.

*Saxifraga florulenta* is found on both sides of the frontier between France and Italy. It is a relic of the Ice Age, and like *Saxifraga valdensis*, it survives in a remote mountain region.





You can see from the following quotations that Farrer believed that *Saxifraga florulenta* was on the way to extinction. But according to Italian and French authorities, its status is now relatively stable, despite the depredations perpetrated in the past by collectors like Farrer.

'*Saxifraga florulenta* is a very ancient species, now dwindling rapidly towards extinction. This strange, lonely plant, making its last stand against time and evolution, lingers high up under a few rocks in the Maritime Alps'. Reginald Farrer *My Rock-Garden* (1907)

'In forte espansione e le popolazioni presentano un gran numero di piante giovani, nella fase di attecchimento'. *Agenzia Nazionale per la Protezione dell'Ambiente* (2001)

'Du fait de son écologie particulière (ses stations sont généralement difficiles d'accès), cette espèce n'est globalement pas menacée. Elle a néanmoins subi un certain déclin, notamment à la fin du XIXe siècle, consécutif à sa cueillette par les collectionneurs et les amateurs de rocailles alpines'. *Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris* (2002)



Lac de Trécolpas & Pas des Ladres

Here at the head of the Boréon valley, which he describes as the 'metropolis' of *S. florulenta*, Farrer finds it again, and collects three giant plants and a seven-rosette specimen. He does not name the location, but I identify it as this lake and this pass. My identification is supported by the fact that members of the *Société botanique de France* found it here a week later.

Next, Farrer and Elliott walk down to St. Martin Vésubie and explore the flora. Then they travel via Nice to San Dalmazzo di Tenda.

Farrer was particularly interested in Saxifrages and Primulas, and at San Dalmazzo he found *Primula allionii*, a local endemic named after the Italian botanist Carlo Allioni. 'The especial deity of this district is *Primula allionii*, rarest and most precious of its race. Not a thousand miles from Tenda you will see it. I will lead you to a place I will not name'







*Primula marginata*

In his book of 1911, Farrer described his meeting with Clarence Bicknell as ‘frosty’, but in a publication of 1918 (quoted above) he gave a better account of Bicknell’s hospitality.



Signatures of Elliott & Farrer in the Book of Guests of Casa Fontanalba, 19 July 1910



‘Above San Dalmazzo, *P. Marginata* exists in the most rampant profusion and the most riotous and lovely degree of variation... The valley of Casterino is occupied by a famous English botanist, one Mr Bicknell, who has there a house and spends long summers, in the course of which he asks nothing better than to show the treasures of his hills to all such fellow-collectors as desire to see them’



Casa Fontanalba, Bicknell’s summer home in Val Casterino

Two weeks later Bicknell welcomed at Casa Fontanalba the French botanists who had recently found *Saxifraga florulenta* in the same place as Farrer:

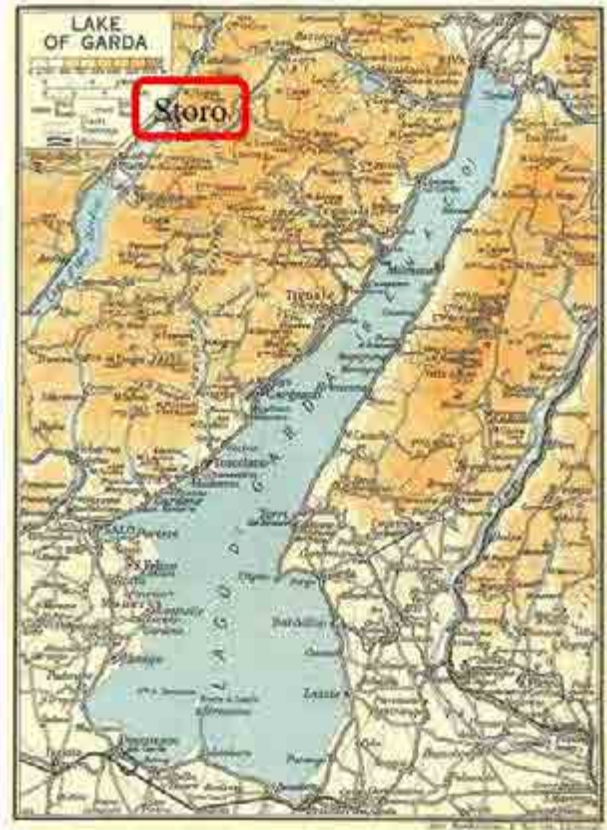
‘Nous avons salués, dans son chalet, le vénérable philanthrope et botaniste, M. Clarence Bicknell, qui nous reçut avec sa coutumière affabilité. Il avait cueilli à notre intention quelques espèces rarissimes que nous n’aurions pu trouver avec le peu de temps dont nous disposions’ (*Société botanique de France*, le 5 août 1910)

The title of the last chapter of *Among the Hills* is ‘Rocca Longa’. The chapter is particularly puzzling since all the place-names are fictitious. Farrer described it later as a ‘purely fantastic and delusive itinerary’

Farrer and Elliott stay in the village of Storo (disguised as ‘Castellar’) which they leave at 5 in the morning to climb ‘Rocca Longa’. Elliott commented later that the excursion took 16 hours.

Where is ‘Rocca Longa’?

It is Cima Tombea, where they found the rare plant *Daphne rupestris*. The name ‘Rocca Longa’ was adapted by Farrer from the mountain in the Dolomites known in Italian as Sasso Lungo and in German as Langkofel.



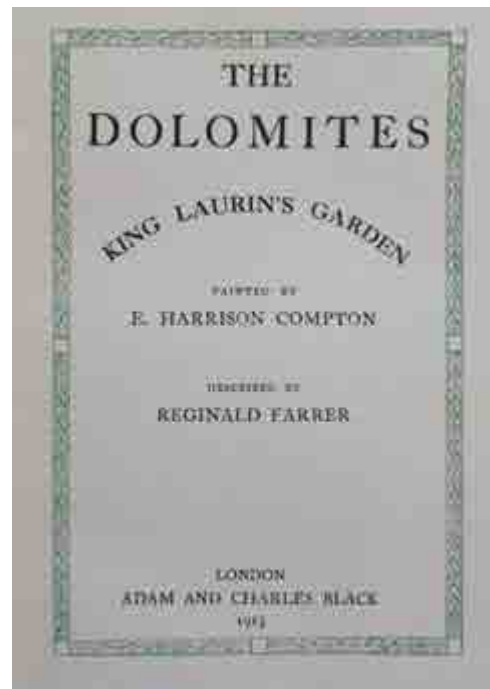
Cima Tombea (‘Rocca Longa’)



*Daphne rupestris*



*The Dolomites: King Laurin's Garden (1913)*



In this book, which mentions about 80 species, Farrer recommends a tour of the Dolomites, based on his excursions there in 1908-12. The suggested tour includes Toblach (Dobbiaco), Misurina, Canazei, Predazzo, Paneveggio, and Bozen (Bolzano). In his time most of the Dolomites was in the Austrian Tirol, which is why he uses the German names Toblach and Bozen. The cover depicts the mountains of the Rosengarten, which inspired the legend of King Laurin's Garden. It was a popular book, and was re-published in paperback in 1985.

Map showing the national frontiers and the languages spoken





On the map I have added in blue the route suggested by Farrer, and in black the main places where he stayed. Farrer's itinerary was almost entirely in Austria; it crossed the frontier into Italy only briefly at Misurina. In 1918 the frontier moved to the south when part of the Austrian Tirol was transferred to Italy.

Much of Farrer's itinerary follows the Dolomitenstrasse, the motor road which had been constructed to encourage tourism. The Pordoi Pass is the highest point on the road, and it was the last section to be completed in 1909. On this postcard you see the monument commemorating its completion, and a post-bus of the kind used by Farrer.



Pordoi Pass c.1910

From this pass Farrer explored the Bindelweg, a level path where he found many flowers including *Eritrichium nanum*.



Bindelweg



*Eritrichium nanum*

Here are other flowers that Farrer found in other parts of the Dolomites



*Ranunculus seguier* (Monzonithal)



*Campanula morettiana* (Passo Rolle)

Farrer loved Bozen 'with a singular and enduring passion. At the Hotel Greif you can 'sit at meals outside in the public square beneath wide trees, and overhead is the velvet sky'



In this postcard of Hotel Greif you can see the tables in the square where Farrer ate. In 1932 the head waiter at the hotel reminisced to a group of botanists that Farrer enjoyed a good meal here after frugal days in the mountains.

Rosengarten ‘A land of magic, enclosed by peaks like frozen flames’



This group of mountains takes its name from the Alpenglow, the phenomenon which makes mountains appear red at sunset. According to legend, Laurin was the king of a race of dwarves who lived here, and he had a rose garden at the entrance to his subterranean castle.



This is a map of Farrer’s excursion in the Rosengarten. With his brother Sidney he travelled from Bozen and stayed in the Schlernhäuser Hut on the Schlern plateau. On the next day they stayed in the Grasleiten Hut, and then went over the Antermoja Pass to Campitello.



The Grasleiten Hütte (Rifugio Bergamo) is in a spectacular position



In Farrer's time it belonged to the *Deutscher und Österreichischer Alpenverein*. It now belongs to the *Club Alpino Italiano* and is known as Rifugio Bergamo. I have stayed there myself, and it is a great place to stay.



Farrer was inspired to write:

‘Nowhere does one feel more free from the pettiness of man than amid the lonely and annihilating splendours of that place. So enormous is the barrenness and glory of that stony cauldron that it takes time to notice that even here there is a sign of life. For over the shingle everywhere lie the lilac tufts of *Thlaspi rotundifolium*’

Here again he expresses his love of the mountains, whose ‘lonely and annihilating splendours’ liberate him from the triviality of human existence.



Above Grasleiten Hütte



*Thlaspi rotundifolium*



Antermoja Pass (my photo)

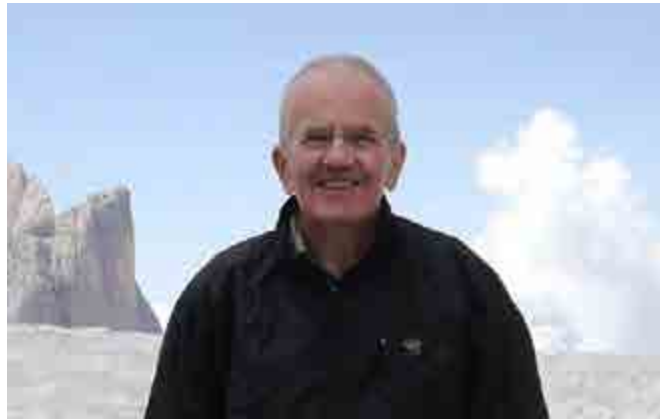
This place inspired Farrer to write another remarkable soliloquy:

‘It is almost impossible to speak up there, so wonderful and awful is that enormous calm in the core of the Dolomites. Each soul can render only to itself alone the particular mystery and sacrament it gathers from such a scene; for myself, I know no place where one can draw deeper breaths of enlargement and purification than among the crowded presences, the vibrating breathless emptiness of the Antermoja, so full of awe, so unimpeding to the winged expansion of the spirit’

Here Farrer invokes the ‘enormous calm’ and ‘great stillness’ of the mountains, and the ‘mystery and sacrament’ which facilitate ‘the winged expansion of the spirit’ These ideas, influenced by Buddhism, are central to his mountain philosophy.

The Antermoja Pass was the high point of Farrer’s tour of the Dolomites and, in my opinion, it was the high point of his writing on the Alps.

Graham Avery at Antermoja Pass (2012)



As you can see, I was happy to be there myself... and I took with me Farrer's book, from which I read aloud the passage that you have just seen.



In 1912 Farrer went to Idria in the Dinaric Alps. to look for *Primula carniolica*.

Idria



*Primula a rnioli a*



He found the plant on the summit of one of these hills. The epithet *carniolica* refers to the Austrian Duchy of Krain, known in Italian as Carniola. In his time, it was in Austria, and now it is in Slovenia.



Farrer's attitude to plant-collecting was ambiguous. In this quotation, which you have already seen, he says that his motive for dissimulating locations was to deter unscrupulous collectors:

'I have no intention of making this book so plain a guide that unscrupulous depredators, nurserymen and others may exterminate species. I am going to take you to some extremely rare plants. When I come to anything particularly precious I may shroud its habitat in mystery' *Among the Hills* (1910)

But he himself collected masses of plants to send to his nursery in Yorkshire:

'Every year it is necessary for me to collect rare alpiners in bulk' *Letter to H.S. Thompson* (1910)

From the Alps Farrer sent to his nursery in Yorkshire 'immense' boxes of plants, including *Saxifraga florulenta*, *Eritrichium nanum*, *Saxifraga valdensis*, and *Daphne rupestris*. It is true that in those days botanists often picked specimens for their herbarium, or for botanical exchange. But Farrer collected plants in commercial quantities. In fact, he was hypocritical.

In the following passage he defends himself with typical exaggeration.

'On a given range a given species dwells. But that range is many miles long, incalculably vast and high, and the populating species can be calculated by the million and the many, many million. What a mighty void shall I leave if I pluck a hundred plants? The misconception of alarmists is based on the inability of the public to realise the vastness of the mountains. In the Alps I hug myself in derision when I see notices saying 'Schutz der Edelweiss'. We might just as well start a league for the protection of the Dandelion'

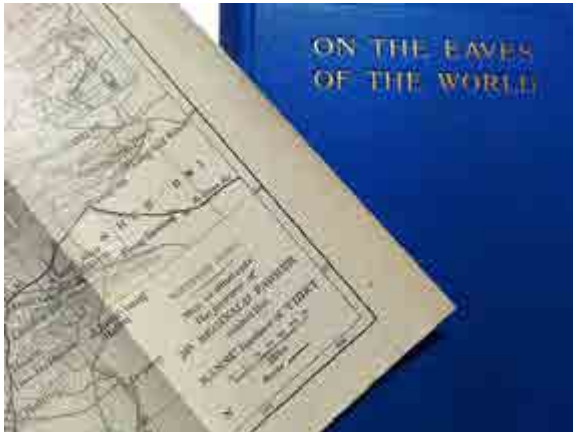
In view of his friendship with Correvon, who was a leading advocate of plant protection, it is surprising that he took such an extreme position. His ideas were contested at the time, and have long since been overtaken.

I cannot resist showing you the next quotation in which Farrer mocks *Leontopodium alpinum* (Edelweiss). It is another example of his attributing personality to a plant.

'You will never find this base impostor from Siberia among the real mountain aristocracy of the peaks and high moraines. It is much happier lower down, where it can germinate among plebeian plants and pretend to be patrician, an assumption in which it is helped by the stupid legend which asserts its rarity, so that silly people fall off cliffs in pursuit of it' *The Population of the Alps* (1909)



In April 1914, just before the outbreak of the War, Farrer went to China, accompanied by Bill Purdom, to search for plants near the frontier with Tibet. Later he published two books about their exploits.



*On the Eaves of the World* (1917)



*The Rainbow Bridge* (1921)

### THE VOID OF WAR

*Letters from Three Fronts*

BY  
REGINALD FARRER



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
The Spenser Press Cambridge  
1918

In May 1916 he returned to London, and being unfit for military service, he joined the Foreign Office.

The head of its Department of Information was the novelist John Buchan, who in 1917 sent Farrer to Belgium, France, and Italy as a war correspondent.

He described his experiences in the book *The Void of War: Letters from Three Fronts* (1918). It was published in the United States, the main target of British propaganda at the time.

On the way through Italy by train in 1917 he saw Monte Baldo and Cima Tombea:

‘I look at them with a heavy feeling of being shut out of paradise’

From Italian military headquarters at Udine he visited areas of Austria which had been captured by Italy.

Here is a map of the Italian front. The black line shows the maximum advance of Italian troops. I have marked in red the city of Udine, from where Farrer visited the front line.



One of the places that he visited was Monte Santo in the province of Gorizia, to the east of Udine



Monte Santo di Gorizia (Sveta Gora) 681m.

This postcard dated October 1917 shows how it had been devastated by the war. Farrer wrote:

‘The vast pyramid of Monte Santo, once a wooded peak, is now a white ruination of shell-shattered limestone. There is not the smallest trace of life, except the lovely marbled leaves of cyclamen, peering heroically to life under a rock’





On the summit of Monte Santo Farrer collected *Cyclamen europaeum*.

It ‘clamoured to me irresistibly. What Englishman ever before has collected cyclamen on Monte Santo among shell-fire? So I went to work, regardless of the humming and the drumming of the shells’

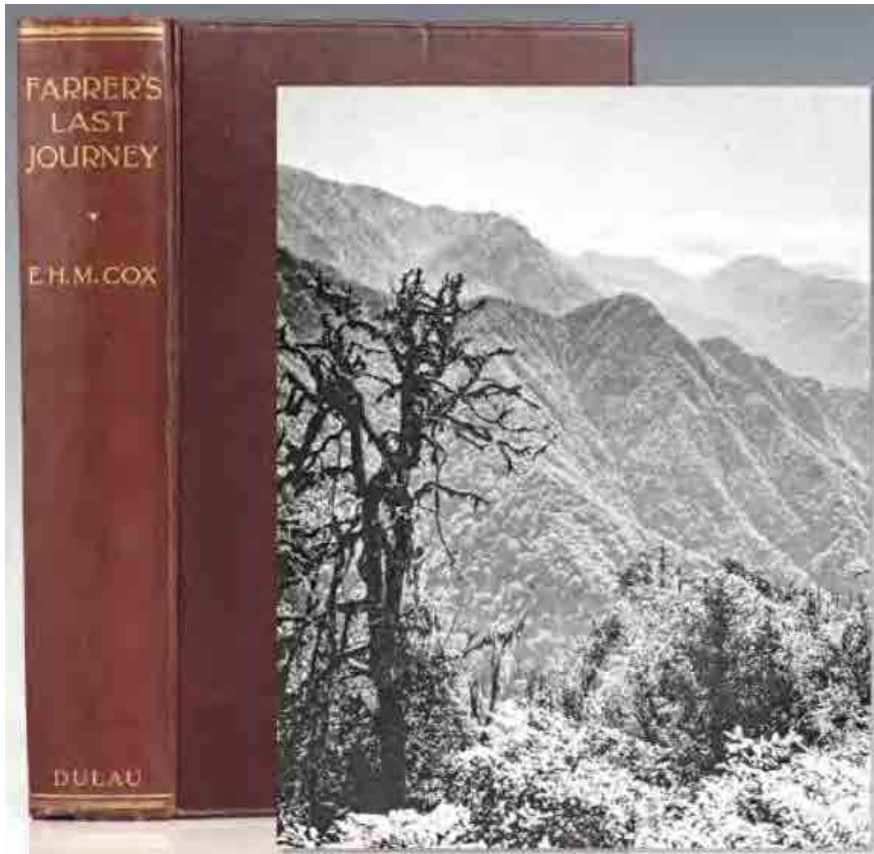
Farrer left Italy on 29 October 1917 in a train from Torino. He left just in time, for Udine was captured by Austrian troops on the same day.



From the train leaving Torino he saw an ‘indestructible vision’:

‘Halfway up the sky, the perfect peak of the Viso hovered more beautiful than any picture in a dream. Below there were veils of haze filling everything; the peak soared quite detached. It was one of the most completely beautiful things I have ever seen’

This ‘indestructible vision’ of Monviso was his last sight of the Alps.



Soon after the War ended, Farrer went in January 1919 to search for plants in Burma, accompanied by Euan Cox. He died there in the mountains, probably from diphtheria, in October 1920 at the age of 40, and is buried at Konglu near the frontier with China. Their expedition was described by Cox in the book *Farrer's Last Journey* (1926).

I conclude with the following quotations, which show how much Farrer enjoyed writing about the Alps and their flora:

‘I know few pleasures keener than that of offering people the chance of sharing mine. Many have followed in my tracks among the hills, and found there the same peace and ecstasy as I’ (*The Dolomites*, page 7)

‘To write of things one loves for the benefit of those who love them too, is a pleasure beyond most other pleasures. Short of being among the hills themselves, there is no joy keener than to be taken back to them by memory’ (*The Dolomites*, page 203)

For my part, I have enjoyed following him, both in the Alps and in his writings, and I encourage you to do the same.