



A Rage for Rock Gardening: The Story of Reginald Farrer, Gardener, Writer & Plant Collector

Nicola Shulman

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A hundred years ago there was a pronounced change in the direction of British gardening. The garden was transformed from a plaything for the rich to a democratic exercise: a hobby for the millions. Few figures were more central to and prominent in this transition than eccentric Reginald Farrer, whose passion for alpine plants would put a rockery in the backyards of countless enthusiasts and whose adventures in Tibet and China collecting elusive and exotic specimens: the wild tree peony, a new buddleia, and even an entire new genus called *Farreriana*, were the stuff of legends. But Farrer was a strange man, a tortured soul. Tormented by physical disabilities (he had a hare lip, a "pygmy body," and a cleft palate) he developed a personality to match: defensive, restless, yet productive and endlessly energetic.

Although "born to endless night," within his realm of horticultural exploration and exploitation, he was a giant, parlaying his disadvantages into advantages, becoming one of the great plant hunters of his age, repeatedly travelling to Japan and Tibet to collect new species and, through the influence of his extraordinary series of books, changing forever the art and practice of Western gardening.

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