

A POCKET GUIDE TO BRITISH FERNS

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A Pocket Guide to British Ferns by Marian S. Ridley

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BY
MARIAN S. RIDLEY.



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At end of volume a Set of Labels for the Herbarium.

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PREFATORY REMARKS.

So much has already been written concerning the Ferns of Great Britain, that it may seem presumptuous on my part to add another book on the subject.

In my own personal studies I have met with this difficulty, viz. to gather from the published volumes on Ferns what the *decided special features*, or characters are of each genus and species. For while writers mention many peculiarities in detail, some of greater and others of lesser importance, those alone which precisely mark the distinctions, whatever these may be, are either not sufficiently noted or so mingled with features of a general kind that the mind fails to grasp the essentials.

I have found, moreover, mine to be no solitary case, for many persons have expressed to me their inability to overcome, or clearly appreciate, *that something* distinguishing one Fern, or genus of Ferns, from another.

'Tell me briefly what the peculiarities are to look for, before giving me the entire description of the Fern?' is a question which has been often put to me.

Puzzling myself for a while, I ultimately fell upon the plan of tabulating the characters somewhat in the manner hereafter to be mentioned. I could then easily, and at a glance, carry to the mind's eye what of necessity was to be looked for, without being encumbered with non-essential particulars, however much those might apply in a general way.

I have shown the method to several persons deeply interested in Ferns, and who, like myself, had early met with the difficulties above mentioned, and I have been advised to compile the present small pocket-guide in the hope that it might meet a want,—in spite of the many beautifully illustrated books on our native favourites.

The system, therefore, of tabulating by words without figures such of the features as alone are absolutely necessary to identify a Fern, even if never previously seen, is the sole merit of this little guide-book.

Of necessity I have been much indebted to previous writers, not altogether in following them as in their being beacons guiding towards the course and aim pursued by myself.

From what has been said, it will readily be understood that these pages are intended solely for those commencing the study of Ferns, in so far as the determination of the different species and genera is concerned ; in other words, meant

to give aid to the speedy and easy identification of the British Ferns without figures of reference.

This Pocket Guide is not put forward as a would-be rival to the many excellent books already published, but rather to lead on the uninitiated to a desire for further information.

Without meaning to be invidious, I cannot help expressing how useful I have found Mr. Thomas Moore's *British Ferns*, and *Popular History of British Ferns* (Routledge); also the *Synopsis Filicum* of the late Sir W. J. Hooker and Mr. J. Gilbert Baker (Bogue).

I take the opportunity, likewise, of mentioning that I am indebted for many kindnesses in connection with the compilation of this book, to Mr. Britten of the British Museum, to Mr. Moore of Chelsea, to Mr. Baker of Kew, to Mr. G. B. Wollaston of Chiselhurst, and to Dr. Murie and Mr. West at the Library of the Linnean Society.

I wish here to impress upon all my readers, especially those unacquainted with technical or difficult terms, the necessity of constantly referring to the explanation of each word, not allowing themselves to pass on from a single one the meaning of which they have not thoroughly mastered. To save time in searching for the explanations, I have added an Index at the end of the book which contains all the words that are the least out of the common way, by which easy reference will be found to the page on which the meaning has been given.

Mr. John Smith of Kew, in his preface to *Domestic Botany*, has so well expressed the difficulties of technical terms, that I do not