

THE
FERNS OF GREAT BRITAIN,

AND

THEIR ALLIES

THE CLUB-MOSSES, PEPPERWORTS, AND HORSETAILS.

BY ANNE PRATT,

AUTHOR OF "OUR NATIVE SONGSTERS," "WILD FLOWERS," ETC.

PUBLISHED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF
THE COMMITTEE OF GENERAL LITERATURE AND EDUCATION, APPOINTED BY
THE SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE;

SOLD AT THE DEPOSITORY,

GREAT QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS;

4, ROYAL EXCHANGE; 16, HANOVER STREET, HANOVER SQUARE;

AND BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

19. OPHIOGLÓSSUM (Adder's-tongue).

1. *O. vulgátum* (Common Adder's-tongue).—*Barren frond* egg-shaped, blunt; *fertile frond* club-shaped. This is a common plant, abundant in many parts of England, and easily known from any other fern. One who was not a botanist would describe its full-grown frond as being a green leaf, sending up from its base a stalk bearing a spike. If we look for this plant in May, we may find the bud underground: this was formed in the previous autumn, and on being opened, it may be seen to enclose not only the leaf and spike for the next year, but also the rudiment of the leaf for the year after. The plant, when seen in the middle of the month of June, at which time it is fully developed, is erect, with a long smooth succulent stem, of a pale green colour, a leaf of a deeper green tint, not with forked veins like most ferns, but with veins forming a net-work, while from the inner part of the leaf rises the stalk, which varies from about an inch to three inches in length. The spike on this stalk tapers towards the summit, and is formed of two lines of crowded capsules imbedded in its substance, and occupying its two opposite sides. The capsules, which are globose, are filled with a fine dust, like the pollen of flowers. When fully ripened they discharge their contents, and if the soil is moist the plant becomes so plentiful in the pastures in the course of a few summers as to injure it greatly. Though local in distribution, yet in parks and clayey pastures we might sometimes gather a basket full of plants in the course of a few hours. It is no marvel that our fore-

fathers called it Adder's-tongue, or Adder's-spear, for, like the reptile after which it was named, it was believed to have great power for evil, and not only to destroy the grass among which it grew, but to injure the cattle which fed upon it. The plant was, however, prized as a remedial agent by the old herbalists. Gerarde said of it, that it would, when boiled in olive oil, afford "a most excellent greene oyle, or rather a balsam for greene wounds, comparable to oyle of St. John's wort, if it doth not far surpasse it; whose beauty is such that very many artists thought the same to be mixed with verdigrease." No doubt many of the vegetable remedies for wounds were rendered serviceable by the oil with which the juices were so frequently mingled. A preparation, called the "green oil of Charity," is in some counties still deemed a panacea; and Adder's-spear ointment, made of our fern, mingled with plantain and other herbs, is in much use in villages, and its green leaves are yet laid on wounds to heal them, serving doubtless to cool the inflammation, and also to unite the edges of a wound inflicted by a sharp instrument. Culpepper praises the juice of the leaves mingled with the distilled water of Horse-tail, as a "singular remedy" for internal wounds. Large quantities of the plant are gathered in some villages of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey, and prepared according to the old prescriptions. The barren frond of the Adder's-tongue is often forked, or even deeply lobed at the extremity, and sometimes two or three spikes of fructification may be seen on one plant; but, excepting in luxuriance of growth, the fern exhibits little variation. The French call the plant

Langue de serpent; the Germans term it *Natterzünglein*; and it is also the *Adderstong* of the Dutch; the *Lingua serpentina* of the Italians; and the *Läketunga* of the Swedes.

2. *O. lusitánicum* (Lesser Adder's-tongue).—*Barren frond* linear, or linear-lanceolate; *fertile frond* club-shaped. This is a little plant very much resembling the Common Adder's-tongue in miniature, having the spike produced from among its bright green tiny leaves in the same manner, but not exceeding altogether two or three inches in height. It has long been known to botanists as a native of Southern Europe, but it was only discovered recently to be wild in Guernsey. Mr. George Wolsey found it among the short herbage of some rocks not far from Petit Bot Bay, on the south coast of the island. It has since been found in Guernsey growing wild in meadows, its fronds being in perfection in the latter part of January.

ORDER II.—LYCOPODIACEÆ. CLUB-MOSSES.

1. LYCOPÓDIUM (Club-moss).

1. *L. clavátum* (Common Club-moss, Stag's-horn-moss, Fox-tail, Wolf's-claw).—*Leaves* scattered, linear, curved inwards, hair pointed; *spikes* stalked, two or three together; *scales* egg-shaped, somewhat triangular, serrated. This Club-moss is the commonest of all the