

GLEANINGS IN BUDDHA-FIELDS



LAFCADIO HEARN

Gleanings in Buddha-Fields

Lafcadio Hearn

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BUDDHISM

The religion held by the followers of the Buddha, and covering a large area in India and east and central Asia.

Essential Doctrines.—We are fortunate in having preserved for us the official report of the Buddha's discourse, in which he expounded what he considered the main features of his system to the five men he first tried to win over to his new-found faith. There is no reason to doubt its substantial accuracy, not as to words, but as to purport. In any case it is what the compilers of the oldest extant documents believed their teacher to have regarded as the most important points in his teaching. Such a summary must be better than any that could now be made. It is incorporated into two divisions of their sacred books, first among the *suttas* containing the doctrine, and again in the rules of the society or order he founded (*Samyutta*, v. 421 = *Vinaya*, i. 10). The gist of it, omitting a few repetitions, is as follows:

"There are two aims which he who has given up the world ought not to follow after—devotion, on the one hand, to those things whose attractions depend upon the passions, a low and pagan ideal, fit only for the worldly-minded, ignoble, unprofitable, and the practice on the other hand of asceticism, which is painful, ignoble, unprofitable. There is a Middle Path

discovered by the Tathāgata—a path which opens the eyes, and bestows understanding, which leads to peace, to insight, to the higher wisdom, to Nirvāṇa. Verily! it is this Noble Eightfold Path; that is to say, Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Mode of Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Rapture.

"Now this is the Noble Truth as to suffering. Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful, painful is separation from the pleasant; and any craving unsatisfied, that too is painful. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging (that is, the conditions of individuality) are painful.

"Now this is the Noble Truth as to the origin of suffering. Verily! it is the craving thirst that causes the renewal of becomings, that is accompanied by sensual delights, and seeks satisfaction now here, now there—that is to say, the craving for the gratification of the senses, or the craving for a future life, or the craving for prosperity.

"Now this is the Noble Truth as to the passing away of pain. Verily! it is the passing away so that no passion remains, the giving up, the getting rid of, the being emancipated from, the harbouring no longer of this craving thirst.

"Now this is the Noble Truth as to the way that leads to the passing away of pain. Verily! it is this Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say, Right Views, Right Aspirations, Right speech, conduct and mode of livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Rapture."

A few words follow as to the threefold way in which the speaker claimed to have grasped each of these Four Truths. That is all. There is not a word about God or the soul, not a word about the Buddha or Buddhism. It seems simple, almost jejune; so thin and weak that one wonders how it can have formed the foundation for a system so mighty in its historical results. But the simple words are pregnant with meaning. Their implications were clear enough to the hearers to whom they were addressed. They were not intended, however, to answer the questionings of a 20th-century European questioner, and are liable now to be misunderstood. Fortunately each word, each clause, each idea in the discourse is repeated, commented on, enlarged upon, almost *ad nauseam*, in the *suttas*, and a short comment in the light of those explanations may bring out the meaning that was meant.

The passing away of pain or suffering is said to depend on an emancipation. And the Buddha is elsewhere (*Vinaya* ii. 239) made to declare: "Just as the great ocean has one taste only, the taste of salt, just so have this doctrine and discipline but one flavour only, the flavour of emancipation"; and again, "When a brother has, by himself, known and realized, and continues to abide, here in this visible world, in that emancipation of mind, in that emancipation of heart, which is Arahatsip; that is a condition higher still and sweeter still, for the sake of which the brethren lead the religious life under me." The emancipation is found in a habit of mind, in the being free from a specified sort of craving that is said to be the origin of certain specified sorts of pain. In some European books this is completely spoiled by being represented as the doctrine that existence is misery, and that desire is to be suppressed. Nothing of the kind is said in the text. The description of suffering or pain is, in fact, a string of

truisms, quite plain and indisputable until the last clause. That clause declares that the *Upādāna Skandhas*, the five groups of the constituent parts of every individual, involve pain. Put into modern language this is that the conditions necessary to make an individual are also the conditions that necessarily give rise to sorrow. No sooner has an individual become separate, become an individual, than disease and decay begin to act upon it. Individuality involves limitation, limitation in its turn involves ignorance, and ignorance is the source of sorrow. Union with the unpleasant, separation from the pleasant, unsatisfied craving, are each a result of individuality. This is a deeper generalization than that which says, "A man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." But it is put forward as a mere statement of fact. And the previous history of religious belief in India would tend to show that emphasis was laid on the fact, less as an explanation of the origin of evil, than as a protest against a then current pessimistic idea that salvation could not be reached on earth, and must therefore be sought for in a rebirth in heaven, in the *Brahmaloka*. For if the fact—the fact that the conditions of individuality are the conditions, also, of pain—were admitted, then the individual there would still not have escaped from sorrow. If the five ascetics to whom the words were addressed once admitted this implication, logic would drive them also to admit all that followed.

The threefold division of craving at the end of the second truth might be rendered "the lust of the flesh, the lust of life and the love of this present world." The two last are said elsewhere to be directed against two sets of thinkers called the Eternalists and the Annihilationists, who held respectively the everlasting-life-heresy and the let-us-eat-and-drink-for-tomorrow-we-die-heresy. This may be so, but in any case the division of craving would have appealed to the five hearers as correct.

The word translated "noble" in Noble Path, Noble Truth, is *ariya*, which also means Aryan. The negative, un-Aryan, is used of each of the two low aims. It is possible that this rendering should have been introduced into the translation; but the ethical meaning, though still associated with the tribal meaning, had probably already become predominant in the language of the time.

The details of the Path include several terms whose meaning and implication are by no means apparent at first sight. Right Views, for instance, means mainly right views as to the Four Truths and the Three Signs. Of the latter, one is identical, or nearly so, with the First Truth. The others are Impermanence and Non-soul (the absence of a soul)—both declared to be "signs" of every individual, whether god, animal or man. Of these two again the Impermanence has become an Indian rather than a Buddhist idea, and we are to a certain extent familiar with it also in the West. There is no Being, there is only a Becoming. The state of every individual is unstable, temporary, sure to pass away. Even in the lowest class of things, we find, in each individual, form and material qualities. In the higher classes there is a continually rising series of mental qualities also. It is the union of these that makes the individual. Every person, or thing, or god, is therefore a putting together, a compound; and in each individual, without any exception, the relation of its component parts is ever changing, is never the same for two consecutive moments. It follows that no sooner has separateness, individuality, begun, than dissolution, disintegration, also begins. There can be no individuality without a putting together: there can be no putting together without a becoming: there can be no becoming without a becoming different: and there can be no

becoming different without a dissolution, a passing away, which sooner or later will inevitably be complete.

Heracleitus, who was a generation or two later than the Buddha, had very similar ideas; and similar ideas are found in post-Buddhistic Indian works. But in neither case are they worked out in the same uncompromising way. Both in Europe, and in all Indian thought except the Buddhist, souls, and the gods who are made in imitation of souls, are considered as exceptions. To these spirits is attributed a Being without Becoming, an individuality without change, a beginning without an end. To hold any such view would, according to the doctrine of the Noble (or Aryan) Path, be erroneous, and the error would block the way against the very entrance on the Path.

So important is this position in Buddhism that it is put in the forefront of Buddhist expositions of Buddhism. The Buddha himself is stated in the books to have devoted to it the very first discourse he addressed to the first converts. The first in the collection of the *Dialogues of Gotama* discusses, and completely, categorically, and systematically rejects, all the current theories about "souls." Later books follow these precedents. Thus the *Kathā Vatthu*, the latest book included in the canon, discusses points of disagreement that had arisen in the community. It places this question of "soul" at the head of all the points it deals with, and devotes to it an amount of space quite overshadowing all the rest. So also in the earliest Buddhist book later than the canon—the very interesting and suggestive series of conversations between the Greek king Menander and the Buddhist teacher Nāgasena. It is precisely this question of the "soul" that the unknown author takes up first, describing how Nāgasena convinces the king that there is no such thing as the "soul" in the

ordinary sense, and he returns to the subject again and again.

After Right Views come Right Aspirations. It is evil desires, low ideals, useless cravings, idle excitements, that are to be suppressed by the cultivation of the opposite—of right desires, lofty aspirations. In one of the Dialogues instances are given—the desire for emancipation from sensuality, aspirations towards the attainment of love to others, the wish not to injure any living thing, the desire for the eradication of wrong and for the promotion of right dispositions in one's own heart, and so on. This portion of the Path is indeed quite simple, and would require no commentary were it not for the still constantly repeated blunder that Buddhism teaches the suppression of all desire.

Of the remaining stages of the Path it is only necessary to mention two. The one is Right Effort. A constant intellectual alertness is required. This is not only insisted upon elsewhere in countless passages, but of the three cardinal sins in Buddhism (*rāga*, *dosa*, *moha*) the last and worst is stupidity or dullness, the others being sensuality and ill-will. Right Effort is closely connected with the seventh stage, Right Mindfulness. Two of the dialogues are devoted to this subject, and it is constantly referred to elsewhere. The disciple, whatsoever he does—whether going forth or coming back, standing or walking, speaking or silent, eating or drinking—is to keep clearly in mind all that it means, the temporary character of the act, its ethical significance, and above all that behind the act there is no actor (goer, seer, eater, speaker) that is an eternally persistent unity. It is the Buddhist analogue to the Christian precept: "Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Under the head of Right Conduct the two most important points are Love and Joy. Love is in Pāli *Mettā*, and the *Metta Sutta* says (no doubt with reference to the Right Mindfulness just described): "As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son, so let him cultivate love without measure towards all beings. Let him cultivate towards the whole world—above, below, around—a heart of love unstinted, unmixed with the sense of differing or opposing interests. Let a man maintain this mindfulness all the while he is awake, whether he be standing, walking, sitting or lying down. This state of heart is the best in the world."

Often elsewhere four such states are described, the Brahma Vihāras or Sublime Conditions. They are Love, Sorrow at the sorrows of others, Joy in the joys of others, and Equanimity as regards one's own joys and sorrows. Each of these feelings was to be deliberately practised, beginning with a single object, and gradually increasing till the whole world was suffused with the feeling. "Our mind shall not waver. No evil speech will we utter. Tender and compassionate will we abide, loving in heart, void of malice within. And we will be ever suffusing such a one with the rays of our loving thought. And with that feeling as a basis we will ever be suffusing the whole wide world with thought of love far-reaching, grown great, beyond measure, void of anger or ill-will."

The relative importance of love, as compared with other habits, is thus described. "All the means that can be used as bases for doing right are not worth the sixteenth part of the emancipation of the heart through love. That takes all those up into itself, outshining them in radiance and glory. Just as whatsoever stars there be, their radiance avails not the sixteenth part of the radiance of the moon. That takes all those up into itself, outshining them in radiance and

glory—just as in the last month of the rains, at harvest time, the sun, mounting up on high into the clear and cloudless sky, overwhelms all darkness in the realms of space, and shines forth in radiance and glory—just as in the night, when the dawn is breaking, the morning star shines out in radiance and glory—just so all the means that can be used as helps towards doing right avail not the sixteenth part of the emancipation of the heart through love."

The above is the positive side; the qualities (*dhammā*) that have to be acquired. The negative side, the qualities that have to be suppressed by the cultivation of the opposite virtues, are the Ten Bonds (*Samyojanas*), the Four Intoxications (*Āsavā*) and the Five Hindrances (*Nīvaranas*).

The Ten Bonds are: (1) Delusion about the soul; (2) Doubt; (3) Dependence on good works; (4) Sensuality; (5) Hatred, ill-feeling; (6) Love of life on earth; (7) Desire for life in heaven; (8) Pride; (9) Self-righteousness; (10) Ignorance. The Four Intoxications are the mental intoxication arising respectively from (1) Bodily passions, (2) Becoming, (3) Delusion, (4) Ignorance. The Five Hindrances are (1) Hankering after worldly advantages, (2) The corruption arising out of the wish to injure, (3) Torpor of mind, (4) Fretfulness and worry, (5) Wavering of mind. "When these five hindrances have been cut away from within him, he looks upon himself as freed from debt, rid of disease, out of jail, a free man and secure. And gladness springs up within him on his realizing that, and joy arises to him thus gladdened, and so rejoicing all his frame becomes at ease, and being thus at ease he is filled with a sense of peace, and in that peace his heart is stayed."

To have realized the Truths, and traversed the Path; to have broken the Bonds, put an end to the Intoxications, and got rid of the Hindrances, is to have attained the ideal, the

Fruit, as it is called, of Arahatsip. One might fill columns with the praises, many of them among the most beautiful passages in Pāli poetry and prose, lavished on this condition of mind, the state of the man made perfect according to the Buddhist faith. Many are the pet names, the poetic epithets bestowed upon it—the harbour of refuge, the cool cave, the island amidst the floods, the place of bliss, emancipation, liberation, safety, the supreme, the transcendent, the uncreated, the tranquil, the home of peace, the calm, the end of suffering, the medicine for all evil, the unshaken, the ambrosia, the immaterial, the imperishable, the abiding, the farther shore, the unending, the bliss of effort, the supreme joy, the ineffable, the detachment, the holy city, and many others. Perhaps the most frequent in the Buddhist text is Arahatsip, "the state of him who is worthy"; and the one exclusively used in Europe is Nirvāna, the "dying out"; that is, the dying out in the heart of the fell fire of the three cardinal sins—sensuality, ill-will and stupidity.

The choice of this term by European writers, a choice made long before any of the Buddhist canonical texts had been published or translated, has had a most unfortunate result. Those writers did not share, could not be expected to share, the exuberant optimism of the early Buddhists. Themselves giving up this world as hopeless, and looking for salvation in the next, they naturally thought the Buddhists must do the same, and in the absence of any authentic scriptures, to correct the mistake, they interpreted Nirvāna, in terms of their own belief, as a state to be reached after death. As such they supposed the "dying out" must mean the dying out of a "soul"; and endless were the discussions as to whether this meant eternal trance, or absolute annihilation, of the "soul." It is now thirty years since the right interpretation, founded on the canonical texts, has been given, but outside the ranks

of Pāli scholars the old blunder is still often repeated. It should be added that the belief in salvation in this world, in this life, has appealed so strongly to Indian sympathies that from the time of the rise of Buddhism down to the present day it has been adopted as a part of general Indian belief, and *Jīvanmukti*, salvation during this life, has become a commonplace in the religious language of India.

Adopted Doctrines.—The above are the essential doctrines of the original Buddhism. They are at the same time its distinctive doctrines; that is to say, the doctrines that distinguish it from all previous teaching in India. But the Buddha, while rejecting the sacrifices and the ritualistic magic of the brahmin schools, the animistic superstitions of the people, the asceticism and soul-theory of the Jains, and the pantheistic speculations of the poets of the pre-Buddhistic *Upanishads*, still retained the belief in transmigration. This belief—the transmigration of the soul, after the death of the body, into other bodies, either of men, beasts or gods—is part of the animistic creed so widely found throughout the world that it was probably universal. In India it had already, before the rise of Buddhism, been raised into an ethical conception by the associated doctrine of *Karma*, according to which a man's social position in life and his physical advantages, or the reverse, were the result of his actions in a previous birth. The doctrine thus afforded an explanation, quite complete to those who believed it, of the apparent anomalies and wrongs in the distribution here of happiness or woe. A man, for instance, is blind. This is owing to his lust of the eye in a previous birth. But he has also unusual powers of hearing. This is because he loved, in a previous birth, to listen to the preaching of the law. The explanation could always be exact, for it was scarcely more than a repetition of the point to be explained. It fits the facts because it is derived

from them. And it cannot be disproved, for it lies in a sphere beyond the reach of human inquiry.

It was because it thus provided a moral cause that it was retained in Buddhism. But as the Buddha did not acknowledge a soul, the link of connexion between one life and the next had to be found somewhere else. The Buddha found it (as Plato also found it) in the influence exercised upon one life by a desire felt in the previous life. When two thinkers of such eminence (probably the two greatest ethical thinkers of antiquity) have arrived independently at this strange conclusion, have agreed in ascribing to cravings, felt in this life, so great, and to us so inconceivable, a power over the future life, we may well hesitate before we condemn the idea as intrinsically absurd, and we may take note of the important fact that, given similar conditions, similar stages in the development of religious belief, men's thoughts, even in spite of the most unquestioned individual originality, tend though they may never produce exactly the same results, to work in similar ways.

In India, before Buddhism, conflicting and contradictory views prevailed as to the precise mode of action of *Karma*; and we find this confusion reflected in Buddhist theory. The prevailing views are tacked on, as it were, to the essential doctrines of Buddhism, without being thoroughly assimilated to them, or logically incorporated with them. Thus in the story of the good layman Citta, it is an aspiration expressed on the deathbed; in the dialogue on the subject, it is a thought dwelt on during life, in the numerous stories in the *Peta* and *Vimāna Vatthus* it is usually some isolated act, in the discussions in the *Dhamma Sangani* it is some mental disposition, which is the *Karma* (doing or action) in the one life determining the position of the individual in the next. These are really conflicting

propositions. They are only alike in the fact that in each case a moral cause is given for the position in which the individual finds himself now; and the moral cause is his own act.

In the popular belief, followed also in the brahmin theology, the bridge between the two lives was a minute and subtle entity called the soul, which left the one body at death, through a hole at the top of the head, and entered into the new body. The new body happened to be there, ready, with no soul in it. The soul did not make the body. In the Buddhist adaptation of this theory no soul, no consciousness, no memory, goes over from one body to the other. It is the grasping, the craving, still existing at the death of the one body that causes the new set of *Skandhas*, that is, the new body with its mental tendencies and capacities, to arise. How this takes place is nowhere explained.

The Indian theory of *Karma* has been worked out with many points of great beauty and ethical value. And the Buddhist adaptation of it, avoiding some of the difficulties common to it and to the allied European theories of fate and predestination, tries to explain the weight of the universe in its action on the individual, the heavy hand of the immeasurable past we cannot escape, the close connexion between all forms of life, and the mysteries of inherited character. Incidentally it held out the hope, to those who believed in it, of a mode of escape from the miseries of transmigration. For as the Arahāt had conquered the cravings that were supposed to produce the new body, his actions were no longer *Karma*, but only *Kiriya*, that led to no rebirth.

Another point of Buddhist teaching adopted from previous belief was the practice of ecstatic meditation. In the very

earliest times of the most remote animism we find the belief that a person, rapt from all sense of the outside world, possessed by a spirit, acquired from that state a degree of sanctity, was supposed to have a degree of insight, denied to ordinary mortals. In India from the soma frenzy in the *Vedas*, through the mystic reveries of the *Upanishads*, and the hypnotic trances of the ancient Yoga, allied beliefs and practices had never lost their importance and their charm. It is clear from the *Dialogues*, and other of the most ancient Buddhist records, that the belief was in full force when Buddhism arose, and that the practice was followed by the Buddha's teachers. It was quite impossible for him to ignore the question; and the practice was admitted as a part of the training of the Buddhist Bhikshu. But it was not the highest or the most important part, and might be omitted altogether. The states of Rapture are called Conditions of Bliss, and they are regarded as useful for the help they give towards the removal of the mental obstacles to the attainment of Arahatsip. Of the thirty-seven constituent parts of Arahatsip they enter into one group of four. To seek for Arahatsip in the practice of the ecstasy alone is considered a deadly heresy. So these practices are both pleasant in themselves, and useful as one of the means to the end proposed. But they are not the end, and the end can be reached without them. The most ancient form these exercises took is recorded in the often recurring paragraphs translated in Rhys Davids' *Dialogues of the Buddha* (i. 84-92). More modern, and much more elaborate, forms are given in the *Yogāvacaras Manual of Indian Mysticism as practised by Buddhists*, edited by Rhys Davids from a unique MS. for the Pāli Text Society in 1896. In the Introduction to this last work the various phases of the question are discussed at length.

Buddhist Texts. The Canonical Books.—It is necessary to remember that the Buddha, like other Indian teachers of

his period, taught by conversation only. A highly-educated man (according to the education current at the time), speaking constantly to men of similar education, he followed the literary habit of his day by embodying his doctrines in set phrases (*sūtras*), on which he enlarged, on different occasions, in different ways. Writing was then widely known. But the lack of suitable writing materials made any lengthy books impossible. Such *sūtras* were therefore the recognized form of preserving and communicating opinion. They were catchwords, as it were, *memoria technica*, which could easily be remembered, and would recall the fuller expositions that had been based upon them. Shortly after the Buddha's time the Brahmins had their *sūtras* in Sanskrit, already a dead language. He purposely put his into the ordinary conversational idiom of the day, that is to say, into Pāli. When the Buddha died these sayings were collected together by his disciples into what they call the Four Nikāyas, or "collections." These cannot have reached their final form till about fifty or sixty years afterwards. Other sayings and verses, most of them ascribed, not to the Buddha, but to the disciples themselves, were put into a supplementary Nikāya. We know of slight additions made to this Nikāya as late as the time of Asoka, 3rd century B.C. And the developed doctrine, found in certain portions of it, shows that these are later than the four old Nikāyas. For a generation or two the books so put together were handed down by memory, though probably written memoranda were also used. And they were doubtless accompanied from the first, as they were being taught, by a running commentary. About one hundred years after the Buddha's death there was a schism in the community. Each of the two schools kept an arrangement of the canon—still in Pāli, or some allied dialect. Sanskrit was not used for any Buddhist works till long afterwards, and never used at all, so far as is known, for the canonical books. Each of these two schools broke up

in the following centuries, into others. Several of them had their different arrangements of the canonical books, differing also in minor details. These books remained the only authorities for about five centuries, but they all, except only our extant Pāli Nikāyas, have been lost in India. These then are our authorities for the earliest period of Buddhism. Now what are these books?

We talk necessarily of Pāli *books*. They are not books in the modern sense. They are memorial sentences or verses intended to be learnt by heart. And the whole style and method of arrangement is entirely subordinated to this primary necessity. Each sūtra (Pāli, *sutta*) is very short; usually occupying only a page, or perhaps two, and containing a single proposition. When several of these, almost always those that contain propositions of a similar kind, are collected together in the framework of one dialogue, it is called a *sullanta*. The usual length of such a *suttanta* is about a dozen pages; only a few of them are longer, and a collection of such *suttantas* might be called a book. But it is as yet neither narrative nor essay. It is at most a string of passages, drawn up in similar form to assist the memory, and intended, not to be read, but to be learnt by heart. The first of the four Nikāyas is a collection of the longest of these *suttantas*, and it is called accordingly the *Dīgha Nikāya*, that is "the Collection of Long Ones" (*sci.* *Suttantas*). The next is the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the "Collection of the *suttantas* of Medium Length"—medium, that is, as being shorter than the *suttantas* in the *Dīgha*, and longer than the ordinary *suttas* preserved in the two following collections. Between them these first two collections contain 186 dialogues, in which the Buddha, or in a few cases one of his leading disciples, is represented as engaged in conversation on some one of the religious, or philosophic, or ethical points in that system which we now call Buddhism. In depth of philosophic

insight, in the method of Socratic questioning often adopted, in the earnest and elevated tone of the whole, in the evidence they afford of the most cultured thought of the day, these dialogues constantly remind the reader of the dialogues of Plato. But not in style. They have indeed a style of their own; always dignified, and occasionally rising into eloquence. But for the reasons already given, it is entirely different from the style of Western writings which are always intended to be read. Historical scholars will, however, revere this collection of dialogues as one of the most priceless of the treasures of antiquity still preserved to us. It is to it, above all, that we shall always have to go for our knowledge of the most ancient Buddhism. Of the 186, 175 had by 1907 been edited for the Pāli Text Society, and the remainder were either in the press or in preparation.

A disadvantage of the arrangement in dialogues, more especially as they follow one another according to length and not according to subject, is that it is not easy to find the statement of doctrine on any particular point which is interesting one at the moment. It is very likely just this consideration which led to the compilation of the two following Nikāyas. In the first of these, called the *Anguttara Nikāya*, all those points of Buddhist doctrine capable of expression in classes are set out in order. This practically includes most of the psychology and ethics of Buddhism. For it is a distinguishing mark of the dialogues themselves that the results arrived at are arranged in carefully systematized groups. We are familiar enough in the West with similar classifications, summed up in such expressions as the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, the Thirty-nine Articles, the Four Cardinal Virtues, the Seven Sacraments and a host of others. These numbered lists (it is true) are going out of fashion. The aid which they afford to memory is no longer required in an age in which books