

## REMARKS ON THE LESSER-KNOWN FOUNDERS OF THE MYTH OF TIBET

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This article presents three writers from the 20th century who are the lesser-known founders of the popular myth of Tibet: Baird T. Spalding (1872–1953), Edwin John Dingle (1881–1972) and Theodore Illion (1898?–1984) who also went by the name of Theodor Burang or Theodor Nolling. They are not as well-known as Helena P. Blavatsky, Alexandra David Nèel and Cyril Henry Hoskin; the latter known as Lobsang Rampa, but their contributions to Tibet as it is today, especially in regard to so called oriental spirituality in popular culture, is significant. They created an imagined Tibet in their works. Spalding knew nothing of India and Tibet and he was wrong in almost every detail mentioned. Dingle did not mention any Tibetan details at all and it is Theodore Illion in his *In Secret Tibet* who seems to be the most authentic of the three. In my article I posit the question whether Spalding and Dingle simply wanted to share with others their interpretations of Christianity dressed up in an Oriental disguise.

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Artykuł przedstawia trzech pisarzy z XX wieku, mniej znanych twórców popularnego mitu o Tybecie: Bairda T. Spaldinga (1872–1953), Edwina Johna Dingle (1881–1972) i Theodora Illiona (1898?–1984), który jest znany również jako Theodor Burang lub Theodor Nolling. Nie są tak popularni, jak Helena P. Bławatska, Alexandra David Nèel i Cyril Henry Hoskin, ostatni znany jako Lobsang Rampa, ale ich wkład w obecny obraz Tybetu, zwłaszcza tak zwanej orientalnej duchowości, w kulturze popularnej jest znaczący. Tworzyli wyobrażony Tybet w swoich dziełach, co więcej: oczywiste jest, że Spalding nie wiedział nic o Indiach i Tybecie i mylił się przy prawie każdym szczególe, o którym pisał, a Dingle w ogóle nie umieszczał żadnych tybetańskich detali. Theodore Illion w swoim *Tajemnym Tybecie* wydaje się być najbardziej bliski rzeczywistości. W moim artykule postawiłem hipotezę, że Spalding i Dingle po prostu chcieli podzielić się z innymi swoimi własnymi interpretacjami chrześcijaństwa, ale w orientalnym przebraniu.

**K e y w o r d s:** Tibet, orientalism, Baird T. Spalding, Edwin John Dingle, Theodore Illion, popular culture, esoteric philosophy.

### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

For a long time, researchers have been studying the image of Tibet in popular Western culture (see, for example, Bishop 1989, Lopez 1999, Dodin and Räther 2001, Bray 2009, BNeuhaus 2012). In this article, however, I focus on 3 characters only who

<sup>1</sup> **Acknowledgements:** I am grateful to the following people: William Fennie of *The Prosperos* for making an audio recording of Thane's 1974 lecture available on the web in answer to my questions and for much

have left their mark on this phenomenon. The aim of this paper is to present three writers whose works have contributed to the development of the myth of Tibet: Baird T. Spalding, Edwin John Dingle, and Theodore Illion.<sup>2</sup>

The works of “Tuesday Lobsang Rampa”, that is Cyril Henry Hoskin (1910–1981), whose debut piece *The Third Eye* (1956) proved to be the first volume of a series, have become so famous that they pushed few earlier cases, with a similar nature, almost into oblivion. Hoskin was an excellent storyteller and it is my belief that Lobsang Rampa (see Lopez 1999) is comparable only to Karl May (1842–1912), the creator of Winnetou and Old Shatterhand (unforgettable heroes to a number of generations. Both Karl May and Lobsang Rampa have done trojan good work in attracting countless readers all over the world to the plight of their heroes. At one time, Lobsang Rampa’s books were available literally everywhere – in the bookstalls of railway stations, bus terminals, airports, markets and shopping arcades and all-purpose stores – and therefore even casual readers could learn about the conquest and occupation of Tibet by China. However, the popularity of his books has overshadowed the works of a similar nature by others and thus this present paper is an attempt to recast anew a light on three such cases.

Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891), the founder of modern Theosophy, was probably the first person who claimed to have visited Tibet and studied under the guidance of the Mahatmas. Blavatsky’s *opus magnum*, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), claims to be a commentary on the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, described as the world’s oldest book<sup>3</sup>. A sample of the alleged original given by Blavatsky is full of words that are Tibetan or seem to be Tibetan (*Secret Doctrine* I 1971, 87). Blavatsky’s trip to Tibet has been questioned by scholars, though it seems probable she did visit Ladakh, known as “Little Tibet” at that time.

No such question marks are attached to the travels and works of Alexandra David Néel (1868–1969), whose numerous books in French leave no doubt that she did live in Tibet and knew the Tibetan language very well. Her book *Mystiques et Magiciens du Tibet* from 1929 (The English title is *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*) is of particular importance and worthy of further consideration.

additional information received by e-mail; Ms. Leslie Alexander for a gift copy of Dingle’s *Borderlands of Eternity*; my friend from Darjeeling for the gift of a much-thumbed copy of Illion’s *In Secret Tibet* and to Todd H., the creator of the best Spalding page available on the web (see below), for important information received by e-mail.

<sup>2</sup> One of the best sources on the myths of subterranean cities of Central Asia see: Bernbaum 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Helena Blavatsky’s *The Secret Doctrine, the Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* written in 6 volumes is a work known by many but read by few. This is the fundamental work of modern Theosophy. Her first work: *Isis Unveiled, a Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern science and Theology* (vol. I *Science*, vol. II *Theology. Quest Books*) (Blavatsky. Ed. Boris de Zirkoff. 1994 new edition. Illinois and Chennai-Madras) remains, in many ways, even more interesting than *The Secret Doctrine*. Its stated aim is the defense of the ancient Hermetic philosophy in both its scientific and theological aspects (vol. I, vii), and it proves the author was well-read in the field.

Whatever else can be said about Madame Blavatsky, of no doubt is the fact that she made Indian philosophy interesting to the so-called “common man” and not only to a small group of Sanskrit scholars and philosophers. Madame Blavatsky’s work was a blueprint for other writers in spiritual matters to follow. This paper discusses three such followers: Baird T. Spalding (1872–1953), Edwin John Dingle (1881–1972) and Theodore Illion (1898?–1984).

#### BAIRD SPALDING



Baird T. Spalding 1872–1953<sup>4</sup>

Baird Spalding, real name Bayard Thomas Spaulding<sup>5</sup>, claimed to have been born in England in 1857, but it is now known that he was born in North Cohocton (New York state) in 1872. Spalding was an engineer specializing in mining who spent some years searching for gold in the Yukon; he also worked as an engineer in Alaska, California and the American West. He claimed at times that he was born in India, that his grandfather was from India, and that he had studied in Heidelberg, Germany, for some years. There are many stories about him in circulation but none have been substantiated.

<sup>4</sup> Promo Picture circa 1920? <https://www.librarything.com/author/spaldingbairdt>. Access: 05.10.2017.

<sup>5</sup> See: [www.bairdtsalding.org](http://www.bairdtsalding.org). Access: 10.11.2016.

Spalding catapulted to fame almost overnight in 1924 with a book entitled *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East* (Spalding 2002), which eventually spawned a six-volume series (vol. 2, 1926; vol. 3, 1935; vol. 4, 1950; vol. 5, 1955? and vol. 6, 1996?). Precise dates for the last two volumes are uncertain, but what is known is that they were published posthumously. Post 1924, Spalding devoted the rest of his life to writing and lecturing, travelling to India in 1935, his only documented trip to that country. He died of heart attack in 1953.

Spalding claimed that he was a member of a secret scientific expedition to India and Tibet in 1894, in which 11 scientists participated. The aim of the expedition was to meet the Oriental masters of esoteric sciences, document their existence and activities, and learn as much as possible of their wisdom. In India, Spalding became acquainted with a man whom he called Emil, who turned out to be a Master. It is not known why Spalding decided to refer to him as Emil but maybe some clue may be gleaned by the fact that the name “Emil” derives from the Latin *aemulus* which means “rival, rivaling” and that *Aemilius* was the name of one of the oldest and most important noble houses of ancient Rome.

Spalding does not recount where exactly he encountered Emil, but he hints it was a city in Southern India. Emil seems to have had prior knowledge of both Spalding as a man and the purpose of the expedition, and he helped the group to travel to Northern India, and eventually to Tibet and Persia. In Tibet, Emil guided the expedition to some secret temples where the Masters live (as they are immortal). There the expedition met Jesus Christ in person and listened to his teachings and were also afforded the opportunity to meet the Buddha, who accompanied Christ. This fills the first three volumes of the work and forms a continuous narrative. Volume IV is a series of teaching texts, each supplemented with advice to the teacher. Volumes V and VI – compiled by his editors after Spalding’s death – present a collection of short papers on various topics, each concluding with *Questions and Answers*. Vol. VI also contains several photographs.

Spalding was very careful never to say clearly where they had actually been and most of the places he mentioned by name do not appear on any maps. In a number of places, the legendary kingdom of Shambala is mentioned, indicating Spalding was familiar with Madame Blavatsky’s writings. She referred to the name several times and in the second volume of *The Secret Doctrine* and located it in the Gobi Desert.

The teachings presented by Spalding echo the American New Thought Movement<sup>6</sup> that began with Phineas Quimby (1802–1866), and is probably best reflected in the doctrines of the *Christian Science Church* founded by Mary Baker Eddy (1821–1910)<sup>7</sup>. Their main teachings were the divine character of man; the primacy of the mind; the necessity of faith in God and oneself; the unlimited potential of man once he realizes

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.britannica.com/event/New-Thought>. Access: 05.10.2017.

<sup>7</sup> See: <https://www.christianscience.com/>. Access: 05.10.2017.

his/her mind's limitations can be overcome; the possibility of direct contact between man and God; the essential goodness of man; the power of will and positive thinking, faith in progress towards a better and more just world, and the approaching new epoch in which man will rise again to spiritual heights under the guidance of the Masters<sup>8</sup>.

Spalding's work bears no comparison with the work of Nicolai Notovitch (1858–1916?) *La vie inconnue de Jesus Christ* (1894)<sup>9</sup> or Levi (Leo T. Dowling, 1844–1911) *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* (1908)<sup>10</sup>. Only in vol. 6 (Spalding 2003, 75) he mentioned Jesus, in answer to a question about the “missing years of Jesus”. Did Spalding say that Jesus had spent the last 9 years of his life in India. This makes him closer to the Ahmadiyya<sup>11</sup> teachings on Jesus than to the Notovitch and Levi traditions (see: Ghulam Ahmad and E.C. Prophet<sup>12</sup>)<sup>13</sup>.

The American mystic teacher known as Thane of Hawaii, the founder of the spiritual group called The Prosperos, lived circa 1900–1989, stated in one of his lectures in 1974<sup>14</sup> that he was a member of the group that went with Spalding to India in 1935, and that he was the ghost-writer of some of Spalding's later books (as this would be in reference to the period post 1935 this would mean volumes IV, V, and VI of Spalding's work).

Spalding has at least one commonality with Karl May as both writers visited the countries in which their books were set only after they found fame, almost as if to prove that they had really been there. Karl May visited the United States in 1908, four years before his death. Spalding made his only documented trip to India in 1935, eleven years after the publication of his first volume in 1924. Spalding's teachings focus so much on the Christ of New Thought Movement that the Tibetan aspect of his books takes a back seat, unlike the following two people.

<sup>8</sup> Quotations from Spalding's books are not included as they are readily available to anyone wishing to become acquainted with them.

<sup>9</sup> [https://bibliothèque-russe-et-slave.com/Livres/Notovitch\\_-\\_La\\_Vie\\_inconnue\\_de\\_Jesus-Christ.pdf](https://bibliothèque-russe-et-slave.com/Livres/Notovitch_-_La_Vie_inconnue_de_Jesus-Christ.pdf). Access: 05.10.2017.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.sonpikap.com/the-aquarian-gospel-of-jesus-the-christ.pdf>. Access: 05.10.2017.

<sup>11</sup> Ghulam Ahmed Hadhrat Mirza of Qadian (1835–1908) wrote in 1908 in Urdu *Jesus in India. Jesus' Deliverance from the Cross and Journey to India* (English edition 2003. London). In this book the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement claimed that Jesus had survived the crucifixion and spent the last years of his life in India.

<sup>12</sup> E.C. Prophet's *The Lost Years of Jesus* (1984. Livingstone, MT) is a one-volume edition of the four existing accounts of the alleged Tibetan book describing the life and studies of Jesus in India prior to his Palestine period. These accounts – by Nicolai Notovitch (1858–1916?), Swami Abhedananda (1886–1939), Nicholas Roerich (1874–1947), and Elizabeth Caspari (1899–2002) – are given in full and with a detailed introduction.

<sup>13</sup> The Polish translation of Spalding's book, published in two parts (vols. 1–5 and vol. 6, 2002) contains some passages not to be found in the English text available on the web in pdf. format, such as the opening paragraph of the second chapter of vol. 1 in which Spalding mentions Emil's help in Southern India prior to the expedition's trip to Tibet.

<sup>14</sup> It is available in audio on the web ([www.theprosperos.com/open-meeting](http://www.theprosperos.com/open-meeting); access 10.11.2016).

## EDWIN JOHN DINGLE

Edwin John Dingle 1881–1972<sup>15</sup>

Our second protagonist presents a very different case. Dingle was born in Cornwall in 1881 and at the age of nine he became an orphan. Not much is known about his early years until 1900, when he crops up in the Straits Settlements (present day Singapore) as a journalist. He became fascinated with the Chinese language and culture, learnt Chinese, and spent much time travelling in the country. One of his best known books is *Across China on Foot* (1911). His special interest was Chinese cartography and his *New Map of China* (1916) is sometimes described as the first bilingual map of its kind. In addition, his *The New Atlas and Commercial Gazetteer of China* (1917) has been the basic textbook of its kind for several decades.

In 1911, he claimed to have spent several months in a Tibetan monastery where he learnt yoga, breathing exercises, meditation and some other psychic arts. His book on this, *My Life in Tibet*, was published in 1939. In 1927, he began lecturing on what he called *the science of mentalphysics*, a combination of the psychic arts he claimed to have learnt in Tibet. In 1933, he set up the Institute of Mentalphysics in Joshua Tree, California, spending the later years of his life teaching mentalphysics. He often used the Chinese version of his name, Ding Le Mei and wrote many books on China, Far

<sup>15</sup> <https://archive.org/services/img/acrosschinaonfoot13420gut>. Access: 05.10.2017.

Eastern commerce, mentalphysics, health and a balanced diet (he was a strict vegetarian). He died in 1972 but The Institute of Mentalphysics continues to exist and can be found on the web.

A more detailed analysis of his book entitled *My Life in Tibet* raises a number of questions. The first concerns the year of publication, 1939, 28 years after the events described. Why did he wait so long to publish it? The first page of the text begins with the title and subtitle *Written After 30 Years*, but no explanation is given for this long delay. The one-volume edition of *Across China on Foot* and *My Life in Tibet* includes numerous photographs from China but none from Tibet; there is only a picture of a group of prayer mills set against the landscape that looks more Chinese than Tibetan, and another one of an unidentified “Well-to-do Tibetan Woman”. The books are written by a famous cartographer of China, but however contain no maps.

In some places in the book Dingle mentioned that Burma was not far away, so from this nugget of information one might deduce that he visited some monasteries on the China-Tibet border in Yunnan or Sichuan. To an average Westerner today – and most probably also in 1939 – going to Tibet really meant going to Lhasa, but Tibet was a very large country with many towns and villages. Whoever crossed the Tibetan frontier could rightly say he was in Tibet.

On one occasion (Dingle 1939, 90) he refers to a group of children listening to their teacher who was speaking in a language unknown to him – Tibetan – and adds “and I knew no Tibetan at that time”. This seems to indicate that he learnt it later, but not a word in Tibetan is quoted throughout the books save *om mani padme hum* (Dingle 1939, 123) and the Tibetan name of Tibet *Bodyul* (Dingle 1939, 55). Dingle wrote that he met his Master in Tibet and learnt a lot of wisdom from him. He did not say anything about the Master save that he was wise and eloquent. The question naturally arises what language they used. Dingle knew Chinese, so probably they spoke Chinese until Dingle learnt Tibetan (if he did). This guess is supported by the fact that when Dingle mentioned distances – in Tibet – he used the Chinese measure “li” (Dingle 1939, 125). The teachings given by the Master were couched in biblical English and contained items one cannot really imagine being taught in a Tibetan (usually meaning Buddhist) monastery. As Dingle’s books do not seem to be as readily available as Spalding’s, a number of quotations will be offered:

“Order and beauty come from Him, My Son. Thy creation is established in Him. His soul; is thy Soul. Harken unto Him. Ponder the path of thy feet ere thou goes forward” (Dingle 1939, 47).

When Dingle told the Master that he desired a strong body through which to act, the Master answered:

“Thinkest, then, that thou canst build one? Thou thyself has alone brought this evil of thy mind upon thyself. Thinkest thou canst build again a perfect body, for thy spirit to shine through in absolute perfection once again?” (Dingle 1939, 84–85).



Dingle was reading a Book of Wisdom given him by the Master and learned the “seven eternal chapters of Great Life Itself”:

“FIRST: AND FOR EVER, THERE IS ‘GOD’, beginningless, endless – the True One, the Great One... Alone is God. All but God is changing day by day. God’s Word said, ‘we make man in Our Own Image.’ SECOND: THERE IS LOVE, the first quality. God is Love, and Love is everything... THIRD: THERE IS LIGHT – God’s moving life in thee... FOURTH: THERE IS HOLY TRUTH – the essentiality of Life. Truth is established in God’s established LAW... FIFTH: THERE IS WISDOM – the silent director of the energy of The Law, abides ever and is found else wither never than in Truth... SIXTH: THERE IS ENERGY – that which is universal and unchangeable, that is Life’s only motivating principle... SEVENTH: THERE IS MANIFESTATION – which is the culmination of the world of God, visible and invisible... THAT MAN IS GOD IN HUMAN FORM!” (Dingle 1939, 113–115).

Some pages later Dingle received the teachings on the Creator:

“The Creator is within me, looking out on the Universe THROUGH MY EYES; The Creator is within me, listening to the sounds of the Universe THROUGH MY EARS; The Creator is within me, thinking the thought of the Universe THROUGH MY MIND; The Creator is within me, issuing the sounds of the Universe THROUGH MY THROAT – purify Thou my throat; The Creator is within me, doing the work of the Universe THROUGH MY HANDS; The Creator is within me EXPRESSING THROUGH ME... Whatever the Creator is, I am... I am perfect as He, as It, that which I feel within me, is perfect... I am perfect Mind in a Perfect Body... I AM THAT I AM THAT I FEEL THAT I AM”.

The conclusion of this teaching goes: “That, My Son, is for thee alone. Do it daily in remembrance of me” (Dingle 1939, 124–125).

These teachings bring to mind the *THAT ART THOU* passages from the *Chhandogya Upanishad* and the spirit of the *Bhagavad Gita*, while the Christian conclusion is too obvious. They also may remind readers of the New Thought Movement (as in the case of Spalding) and of Guy Ballard’s *I AM* Movement<sup>16</sup> that flourished in the US at that time.

Dingle (1939, 53) explained why he did not reveal any details concerning his journey, but his explanation is unconvincing. Would he not have found it too difficult to succumb to the temptation of including a map of Tibet, even a sketch one, knowing how limited such maps were available in 1939?

I shall not quote the Master’s teachings on the glory of the human body (Dingle 1939, 131) and on the *Seven Kingdoms of the Universe* (147–148) as these are long and would be needed to be quoted in their entirety for their full impact to be felt. The next question which arises is whether such teachings could come from a Tibetan monastery. Dingle never said that his Master was a Tibetan monk; the Master quotes from Laotse and Confucius, and gives the *Seven Kingdoms* teaching in Chinese, so this points to him being probably Chinese. Dingle once quoted from the text he identified as *Light On*

<sup>16</sup> See: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/I-AM-movement>. Access: 05.10.2017.



*The Path* (81–82), but this is not Atisha's *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*<sup>17</sup>, at least not the Tibetan text of it; it may well be Dingle's own translation from the Chinese. Much space is given by Dingle to the art of breathing, which we know to be one of the key points of his Mentalphysics.

From all this, what can be said is that Dingle is no Spalding – he knows China, he knows Chinese, he can document his walk across China with photographs (though not with maps), so he *seems* undoubtedly more trustworthy than Spalding. Maybe he really did stay in a monastery on the China-Tibet border, but the teachings he claims to have received seem a mix of Vedic wisdom, Taoism, and New Thought Christianity. These teachings clearly focus on one God, so they cannot be Buddhist. Dingle referred to Balzac (53), Jacob Boehme (101), Paracelsus (108) and Montaigne (179), but he never mentioned Swedenborg<sup>18</sup>, who was a Jacob Boehme's great continuator.

In sheer contrast with the one-volume-bound *Across China on Foot, My Life in Tibet* does not provide the reader with any clear evidence in favor of its authenticity. The Institute of Mentalphysics still exists and his books are being reprinted, which indicates Dingle has not been forgotten at least in the US. However, I have never met a follower of Mentalphysics, so the true popularity of Dingle today is a moot question.

#### THEODORE ILLION

The last of our three protagonists is the one we know least about, even though he is closest to us in time. He was born in 1898 in Canada (uncertain) and died in Austria in 1984. He wrote in German and English and comes into our equation because of two books he authored: *Rätselhaftes Tibet* (1936), translated into English in 1937 as *In Secret Tibet*; and *Darkness over Tibet* written in English and published 1938.

Illion used two pen names, Theodor Burang and Theodor Nolling. His book on Tibetan medicine, written as Theodor Burang, is available in English translation as *Tibetan Art of Healing*, 1975. He authored several papers on Tibetan medicine under the name of Theodor Burang.

*In Secret Tibet* does not seem to have made a sensation at the time of its first edition. It is a forgotten book now, at least in the English-speaking world. Martin Brauen in *Traumwelt Tibet, Westliche Trugebilder* (Brauen 2000, 75) wrote a detailed account of the myth of Tibet and what the West projected onto it. He mentioned Illion in passing but failed to mention Spalding and Dingle.

As in all the three cases, Illion did not include a map of his travels, nor did he mention any place names other than Lhasa. However, he seems to have put a deal of

<sup>17</sup> See: <http://www.drepunggomangusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/English-Root-Text-Bodhipathapradlpa.pdf>. Access: 05.10.2017.

<sup>18</sup> On Swedenborg's teachings see: <https://swedenborg.com/emanuel-swedenborg/explore/>. Access: 05.10.2017.



Theodore Illion 1898 (?)–1984<sup>19</sup>

thought into providing his readers with some proof of the authenticity of the book – *In Secret Tibet* is generously sprinkled with Tibetan words and expressions, most of them correct or at least recognizable. The reviews of the book available on the web stress its numerous similarities to Alexandra David Nèel's *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*. Illion's accounts of how he used iodine to darken his skin and nose-plugs to flatten his nose are interesting if not fully convincing but they could have occurred. However, he claimed to have spent two years in Tibet, from 1934 to 1936, but would he have survived that long without being discovered, even if, as he said, he tried to speak as little as possible so as not to reveal his foreign accent?

His liberal sprinkling of the book with Tibetan words is no guarantee of the credibility of the author and may only be an indication that he did his Tibetan homework more thoroughly than Spalding or Dingle. If he managed to conceal his foreign identity so well then why was he not in a position to be able to present some proof of the adventures he so vividly described? There is a strange mix of the seemingly authentic and the concocted in the book. He is correct on many points, but then again he could have gleaned them from Alexandra David Nèel. Even 20 years later the Lobsang Rampa's *Third Eye* seemed still convincing to its British editors.

<sup>19</sup> <https://4.bp.blogspot.com/-yPqOjCownF8/VtNRbceJkaI/AAAAAAAAIak/BV5FzgB1c7w/s1600/Illion%252C%2BTheodore%2Bbl.jpg>. Access: 05.10.2017.

Unlike Spalding and Dingle, Illion did not present Christian teachings in Oriental disguise. He carefully distinguished between the truly wise Tibetan hermits and their pretenders. He realized that the Buddhism of Tibet had little in common with the teachings of the Buddha: “Dogmatic Buddhism is an organized distortion of the spirit of the living Buddha” (Illion 1937, 189). Similar to Dingle, Illion quoted his Tibetan friend saying that:

“the guiding principle should be Love... Life would have no meaning if there was anything certain. The more you are pushed by life, the better. Never be satisfied, especially with yourself” (Illion 1937, 184, Illion’s italics).

These are definitely wise words close to the essence of Buddhism.

The way the book is written seems to preclude any possibility of Illion’s taking photographs or making any drawings while in Tibet, nor of bringing any artifacts back with him. This indeed could have been the case but it could also have been a carefully planned hoax. From a ‘factographic’ point of view – if indeed this term can be used in this context – Illion’s book easily outpaces Spalding’s and Dingle’s. If the three books discussed here were judged here on the principle of *beneficio dubitandi*, it is Illion’s who would win hands down.

#### CONCLUSION

What can be said about our three protagonists is that none of them made such an impact in Tibetan study circles the way Lobsang Rampa did. Illion seems to have been completely forgotten, Dingle maybe less so and only Spalding remains truly popular. As regards their ‘setting up the Oriental stage’, it is obvious that Spalding knew nothing of India and Tibet as he was wrong on almost every detail mentioned. So, it seems clear that the main message of his work for readers lies elsewhere, in other aspects than those connected with Tibet. Nevertheless, their influence on building the stereotypical image of Tibet and the popular Tibetan myth in the Western world, was enormous.

Dingle mentions no Tibetan details at all; no names, no place names, no Tibetan words save *om mani padme hum*, not even Tibetan salted tea. This is quite surprising as the earlier book with which *My Life in Tibet* is bound up – *Across China on Foot* – shows he could be the master of describing small details. The possibility does exist he wanted the later book to have the appearance as if a timeless piece of spiritual teaching.

Theodore Illion’s book, *In Secret Tibet*, seems the most authentic of the three. The book is clearly not intended to start any organized group of believers as first and foremost it is a travel book with its main spiritual message contained in its last four pages.

It is more difficult to draw some conclusions about Dingle. He really knew the country of his main interest – China. Dingle’s – or rather his Master’s – teachings on the human body seem close to Taoism and the teaching on the Seven Kingdoms of

the Universe is an interesting attempt at relating the Buddhist Eightfold Path to the Christian God (in this teaching the Eighth Path is *THE ABSOLUTE GOD* (Dingle 1939, 148, Dingle's capitals). This seems like the New Thought Movement yet again. Dingle's Institute of Mentalphysics had already been functioning for several years by the time *My Life in Tibet* was published and perhaps Dingle wanted to give the Institute a scripture of sorts to aid it by providing it with a source of authority.

Spalding remains the only one of the three whose books are still readily available. It is obvious that his 1894 expedition was a hoax. When he went to India with a group of friends and followers in 1935 he promised they would meet one of the Masters on arrival, but they never did (Bruton 1934, 66). The photographs from India included in vol. VI of his work do not prove anything and most of them could simply be postcards.

Perhaps Spalding and Dingle simply wanted to share with others their own interpretations of Christianity, and decided to do so by dressing them up in an Oriental disguise. If this is the case then they would have been following in the footsteps of other writers such as Plato and the story of Atlantis, Thomas Moore's *Utopia*, Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*, Jonathan Swift's *Travel to the Country of the Houyhnhnms* (the much-neglected fourth part of *Gulliver's Travels*) to name just some. It is the *message* that is key and not the alleged country of its origin or the man who is telling it. Both Dingle's and Spalding's books would have caused a splash without their Oriental embellishments. Dingle's book could be seen as an interesting extension of yoga philosophy. Spalding's volumes IV, V and the first part of vol. VI are much more interesting and thought-provoking than the first three and it is in the brief papers and answers to questions that Spalding the true thinker can best be seen.

Dingle wrote his book some years after he set up his Institute of Mentalphysics. The question arises whether Spalding wanted to start a religious movement. It seems highly unlikely as his spiritual roots – the New Thought Movement – was already well-established by 1924. Moreover, he seems to have been completely taken aback by the incredible success of his first volume and was completely unprepared for it. He was faced with the choice to confess that he had made it all up or simply to go on. He chose the latter but never tried to make money on it or capitalize on his own popularity. The man whose books sold hundreds of thousands of copies died alone and penniless.

I think that David Bruton<sup>20</sup> gives a fair picture of Spalding the man:

"It seems they [=his books, PK] had to be put across by a man whom science would ignore and religion would not challenge. He never defended anything he said and I never knew him to attempt proof of his statements. People accepted him wholeheartedly because he told them what they wanted to hear. In other words, something about his books confirmed an inner conviction each one feels about his ability to attain spiritual understanding. His writings gave the people a release from the hell

<sup>20</sup> David Bruton's *Baird T. Spalding As I Knew Him* is the only biography of Spalding, written by one who knew him well. David Bruton should not be confused with Paul Brunton the author of *A Search in Secret India* (London 1934).

and damnation of Christianity and, above all, rescued them from being classified as sinners living in a veil of tears... I do not consider that Baird T. Spalding was a great man; rather, he was fabulous and fantastic and he did fulfill a great destiny in a fantastic way. His books, whether garbled or not have ushered in the New Age of Light” (Bruton 1934, 128–129).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> There is another strange story connected with Tibet. The author was the Swedish aero engineer Henry Kjellson (1891–1962). In his book in Swedish entitled *Fornitiders teknik* (Stockholm 1952) translated into English as *The Lost Techniques* in 1961 (both unavailable to me at the moment of writing) he describes a strange event seen in Tibet in 1939 or 1940 by his friend Dr. Jarl (a medical doctor), when Tibetan monks used the power of sound waves to move stones. Bruce Cathie’s account of it in English is available on the web (see bibliography). This story is also described by Guy Lyon Playfair and Scott Hill, 1978 (212–214 in the Polish edition of their book, see bibliography). Henry Kjellson’s stub biography is available in Swedish Wikipedia but Doctor Jarl remains unidentified.

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