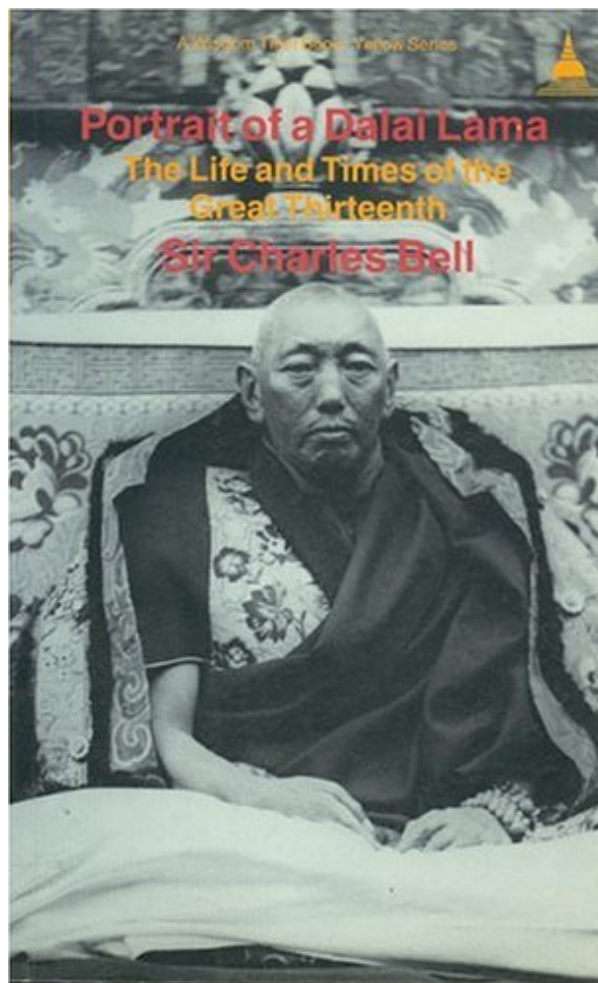
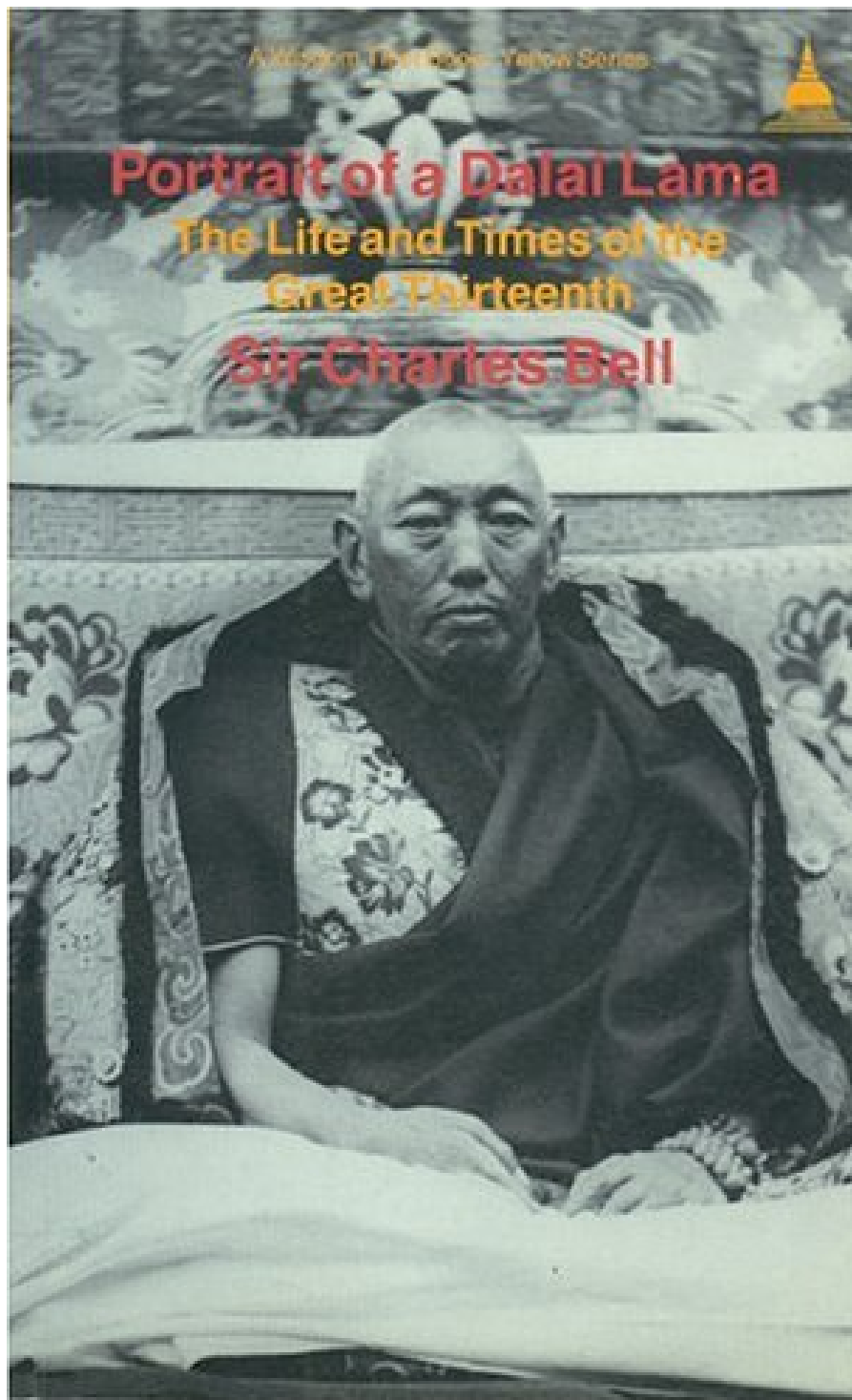


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Portrait of a Dalai Lama is the story of one of Tibet's greatest religious and political leaders. It also stands as an important historical portrait of a pivotal era in Asian and world affairs.

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The power of reincarnation.....

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent insight into the life of the Great 13th Dalai Lama & Tibet in the early 1900's

By Darryn McKay

Sir Charles Bell is one of a privileged few Westerners to gain access not only to Tibet's 'forbidden city' of holy Lhasa but to a reasonably open and close personal relationship with the 13th Dalai Lama. This amazing opportunity has been eloquently detailed in this book, and it is a fascinating introduction to Tibet in the early 1900's.

This time was an extremely turbulent period in Tibetan history: the British invaded them in 1904, and the Dalai Lama fled to spend several years in Mongolia, China, and then finally India as the British withdrew but the Chinese invaded. Luckily the Tibetans were able to use the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in China to revolt against Chinese rule but as we all now know the Chinese again took control of this country by force in 1959 and still maintain that to the present day.

Tibet has changed beyond all hope of return since the 1959 Chinese invasion, so this book is unique in revealing what life was like in traditional times. We will never know Tibet again as it was then, and Bell covers a full range of topics from politics to religion, the powerful monastery's and the feudal society that existed.

This book and Bell's perspective is also unique in that the 13th Dalai Lama is one of only two incarnations to be honoured with the title 'Great' (as was the 5th). We get to know a great man of history from a first person account, and the 13th is shown to be an intelligent and driven individual who worked unswervingly hard to improve Tibetan life both spiritually, and in the workings of government and justice.

I read this book within a week it was so good. It covers both the history of the times as well as providing one of the few close encounters with one of the often mysterious Dalai Lama's, so well worth buying!

16 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Sir Charles and the Great Thirteenth

By John Kittridge

Sir Charles Bell was a career diplomat in the service of the British raj, the personification of the grandeur of an empire that spanned the world. The Great Thirteenth Dalai Lama of Tibet was the spiritual and temporal leader of a remote and isolated theocracy in the heart of the Himalayas. Sir Charles represented the power and limitless potential of the new century. The Dalai Lama was the literal embodiment of an ancient lineage, an incarnation of the Buddha of Compassion, the ruler of one of the most inaccessible and forbidding places on earth. That the two men should find so much in common and develop a bond of deep and lasting friendship is a wonder that does credit to them both. 'Portrait of a Dalai Lama : The Life and Times of the Great Thirteenth' is the story of that friendship.

Sir Charles takes us into a bygone Tibet, fearful of and hostile to outsiders. He brings to life the cold and dusty streets of Lhasa, a capital hundreds of years out of step with the modern world, and introduces us with remarkable sensitivity to a culture that is so alien to our own that it could easily belong on another planet. He describes the hardship, the inconvenience, the discomfort of life on the cold, arid Tibetan plateau in a way that emphasises the dignity of the people who flourish there. That hygiene in Tibet at the turn of the 20th Century was low by the standards of a cultured European is not ignored; but through his eyes we see that the comparison is unimportant in a near arctic climate; the dustiness of a noble's home is insignificant when measured against the hospitality and warmth of a noble spirit. We see that what Tibet lacked in material development it made up for in a level of ethics and philosophical sophistication that might have been the envy of the world.

The Great Thirteenth (The present Dalai Lama of Tibet is the fourteenth emanation) brought his country to terms with the new age. He modernised government, the judiciary, and Tibet's tiny army through sheer hard work and unflinching determination, in the face of fierce opposition from monks and aristocrats. Sir Charles shows us a lonely man driven by a powerful vision. The Dalai Lama desperately tries to redefine Tibet's relationship with its powerful neighbours, Russia, British India, and China, which looms menacingly on the horizon. Both men clearly saw the impending Chinese onslaught, and both recognised the tragedy of what was to befall Tibet.

Sir Charles Bell gives us a unique insight into the personality of the man behind the ritual and pageantry of the Dalai Lama's high office. He shows us a man of profound intelligence and sensitivity, a man of wit and humour, a man quick to anger, a man of compassion. This man, who ruled with absolute authority and was revered as a living god, gave Sir Charles Bell his friendship; and, through his eyes, we see a man of warmth and charm, who loved his dogs and his garden. This is a moving book one should feel very privileged to read.

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