

# **BUDDHISM AND IMMORTALITY**

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Buddhism and Immortality by William Sturgis Bigelow

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**WILLIAM STURGIS BIGELOW**

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**The Ingersoll Lecture, 1908**

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## THE INGERSOLL LECTURESHIP

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*Extract from the will of Miss Caroline Haskell Ingersoll,  
who died in Keene, County of Cheshire, New  
Hampshire, Jan. 26, 1893.*

*First.* In carrying out the wishes of my late beloved father, George Goldthwait Ingersoll, as declared by him in his last will and testament, I give and bequeath to Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., where my late father was graduated, and which he always held in love and honor, the sum of Five thousand dollars (\$5,000) as a fund for the establishment of a Lectureship on a plan somewhat similar to that of the Dudgeon lecture, that is — one lecture to be delivered each year, on any convenient day between the last day of May and the first day of December, on this subject, "the Immortality of Man," said lecture not to form a part of the usual college course, nor to be delivered by any Professor or Tutor as part of his usual routine of instruction, though any such Professor or Tutor may be appointed to such service. The choice of said lecturer is not to be limited to any one religious denomination, nor to any one profession, but may be that of either clergyman or layman, the appointment to take place at least six months before the delivery of said lecture. The above sum to be safely invested and three fourths of the annual interest thereof to be paid to the lecturer for his services and the remaining fourth to be expended in the publication and gratuitous distribution of the lecture, a copy of which is always to be furnished by the lecturer for such purpose. The same lecture to be named and known as "the Ingersoll lecture on the Immortality of Man."



## BUDDHISM AND IMMORTALITY

**T**HE view of the Immortality of Man which I have the privilege of stating is, broadly speaking, that of the Buddhist religion. But Buddhism, like many other great religions, is divided into main churches and subdivided into sects: and we find conspicuously two broad divisions, commonly called Northern and Southern Buddhism, — the former having its recognized centre in the north of India, in Nepal; the latter in Ceylon. The history, the significance, and the relations of these two divisions consti-

#### 4 BUDDHISM AND

tute a vast field of study, into which we cannot attempt to enter to-night.

What I have to say relates primarily to the Northern or Nepaulese Buddhism, and more especially to the doctrines of the two closely allied sects which represent that form of Buddhism in Japan. These sects are known respectively as the Tendai and the Shingon. The whole of Northern Buddhism is closely allied to Brahminism, with which it is historically directly connected. There is a close resemblance in the tenets and doctrines of the two religions, even in their superficial aspects; and the more deeply they are studied, the closer is the connection found to be. The forms of religious service are essentially the same in both; and even in Japan to-day the

greater part of the Shingon and Tendai ritual is not in Japanese but in Sanscrit, and is identical with that which has been in use in India since before the time of Buddha,—so long before, in fact, that there is no historic record of its origin, and there is reason to believe that it antedates written history altogether. It certainly appears to be the oldest ritual now in actual use in the world. A similar correspondence between India and Japan is found to hold essentially good in regard to those special presentations or aspects of the great central force of the universe, which are embodied in anthropomorphic forms and recognized as separate deities.

It may be said in passing, that for the understanding of such a vast and