

**FROM POET TO PREMIER: THE
CENTENNIAL CYCLE
1809-1909: POE, LINCOLN,
HOLMES, DARWIN, TENNYSON,
GLADSTONE**

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From poet to premier: the centennial cycle 1809-1909: Poe, Lincoln, Holmes, Darwin,
Tennyson, Gladstone by Thomas R. Slicer

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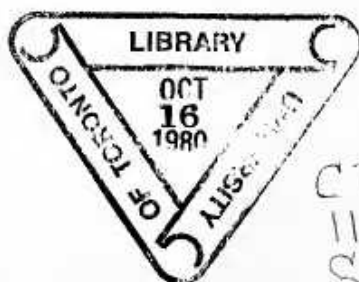
THOMAS R. SLICER

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
EDGAR ALLAN POE — The Pioneer of Romantic Literature in America	I
ABRAHAM LINCOLN — The Characteristic American	41
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES — The Friend of the World	81
CHARLES DARWIN — The Believing Sceptic	115
TENNYSON — The Interpreter of Legend and Life	157
GLADSTONE — The Great Commoner	193





PREFACE

WE have determined the conditions of fertility for the soil of the earth but have not yet been able to penetrate the designs of life which brought to birth in a single year a group of men and women who should affect the destinies of all the other millions in that year born. A twelve-months will roll by and scarcely anything will happen to the world, and then, in a single year, epochs are created and eras determined.

Such a year was 1809, in which signal events were heralded and incomparable men were born. The thunders of the Peninsular war were already terrifying Europe; the Duke of Wellington had been placed in charge of the Peninsular forces; and in that year Kinglake, the historian of the Crimea, was born to record the events of that struggle which convulsed Europe. In that same year of clamor the melodious souls of Chopin and Mendelssohn dropped upon the discords of life; Edward Fitzgerald, under some Oriental seduction

PREFACE

was tempted to earth; Goethe and Fichte were persuading the Teutonic peoples to become a united Germany. The Quarterly Review had but begun to be, seven years after the Edinburgh projectors had promised to "cultivate philosophy upon a little oatmeal," and Byron's "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" was provoked to a sprightlier criticism than was likely ever to appear in the pages which occasioned it.

While Byron's little stream of vitriol was trickling through the English mind, Coleridge's "The Friend" began its untimely life with such slack hold upon vitality that its burial occurred in 1810. The almost forgotten Anglo-Saxon Church found its competent record in the "Antiquities" of Lingard, and the first series of Maria Edgeworth's gentle comments upon "Fashionable Life" then appeared.

In this same year, and in its opening month, Edgar Allan Poe entered on the "fever called living," and, as though Nature designed a contrast, in the same year and in the same country, Oliver Wendell Holmes appeared as "the little friend of the world." Alfred Tennyson in England became the recorder of its legends and the prophet of its future greatness, whilst the sober mind of

PREFACE

Gladstone turned those legends into fact and those prophecies into history. And strangest of all, in this fertile year, on February 12, Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin saw the light, the light which from their answering eyes was reflected upon four million of slaves set free and on the tradition-bound minds of the time. The "Vestiges of Creation" were destined now to be more than a trace of life left upon our little earth, which henceforth, by Charles Darwin's leading, should be found to be the very repository of the treasures of the past. As Lincoln and Darwin, the emancipators, were born in 1809, so, in that year, the adventurous spirit of Thomas Paine struggled at last into the freedom of death.

*This volume offers a brief commentary upon six of the notable births of the year. Three Americans and three Englishmen, out of the loins of our dominant Anglo-Saxon race, are here presented in their centenary: Poe, *The Pioneer of Romantic Literature in America*; Abraham Lincoln, *The Characteristic American*; Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Friend of the World*; Charles Darwin, *The Believing Sceptic*; Alfred Tennyson, *The Interpreter of Legend and Life*; and William Ewart Gladstone, *The Great Commoner*.*