



09.0 The Executed

09.2 William Pearse

William (Willie) Pearse (1881-1916), only brother of Patrick Pearse, was born at 27 Great Brunswick Street (now Pearse Street), Dublin, the son of James Pearse, an Englishman with a stone-carving business, and his wife Margaret Brady. Like his brother Patrick, he was educated at the Christian Brothers' secondary school in Westland Row and afterwards intermittently at the Metropolitan School of Art in Kildare Street where he studied sculpture and drawing. Like Patrick, he joined the Gaelic League and learned Irish to the extent that he was able to give classes to some of his fellow art students.

It was intended that Willie should join his father in his stone-carving business, but when James Pearse died in 1900, Patrick took over the business while Willie completed his education. Patrick financed his continuing art education, including periods in Paris and at South Kensington in London. Willie had a modest degree of artistic talent and in the period 1906-13 he exhibited work at the Royal Hibernian Academy and the Oireachtas exhibitions. In 1907 he exhibited at the Irish International Exhibition. He eventually took over the family business, but it was already in decline and closed in 1910.

By then, Willie had teaching posts at Patrick's school Saint Enda's and its sister school Saint Ita's, his main subjects being English and art. As Patrick became more actively involved with his work for the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Willie took on more of the

administrative burden of Saint Enda's, being effectively in charge for long periods. He had an intense interest in amateur dramatics and participated in a number of productions at Saint Enda's, but his performances as an actor were not always impressive. Such was his enthusiasm, however, that he and his sister Mary Brigid established a small amateur company, the Leinster Stage Society, which presented a number of productions, including a few at the Abbey Theatre in the period 1910-12, in some of which he played leading roles.

Willie was devoted to his brother and as Patrick became more politically extreme from around 1912 onwards Willie tended to follow suit. He joined the Irish Volunteers on their formation in November 1913, being promoted to the rank of captain by the end of 1915. By then he had also been sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He provided secretarial and other services for Patrick and seems to have been taken into his confidence in the latter stages of the preparations for the Rising. Unwisely as it turned out, when signing certain documents on Patrick's behalf he designated himself 'acting chief of staff, which may have cost him his life.

In the Rising, Willie Pearse served as a captain on the headquarters staff in the General Post Office. He was among the Moore Street group that surrendered on the Saturday afternoon; on the way to the surrender point near the Parnell Monument he carried the white flag. It was generally thought that he was not sufficiently senior to warrant execution, but being Patrick's brother may have damned him. At his court-martial he pleaded guilty, the only one of those executed to do so. William Pearse was executed by firing squad on Thursday, 4 May, the day after his brother.

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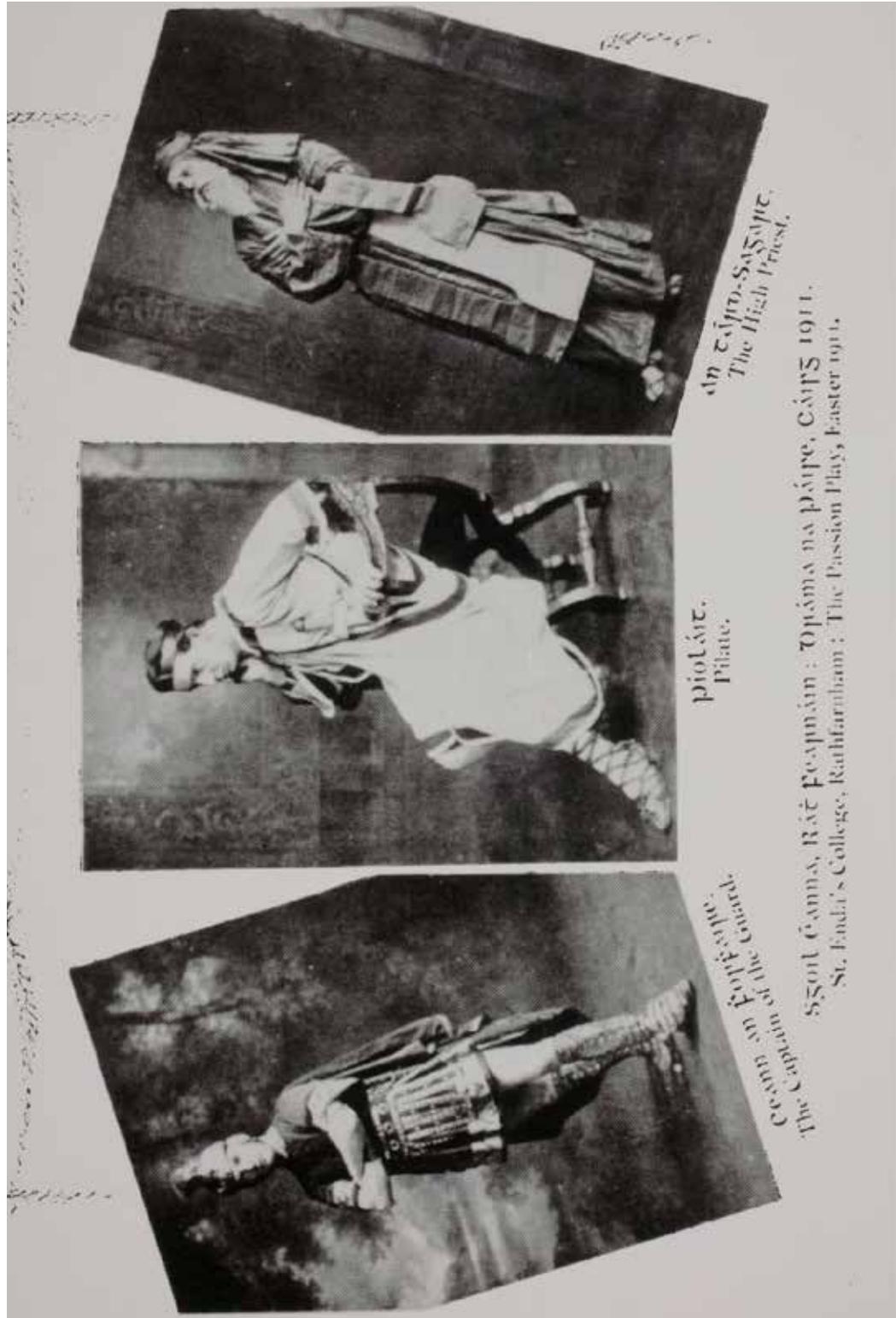
Willie Pearse. He has been described as an earnest and pleasant-looking, slender young man with sad eyes, a receding chin, and flowing dark hair. (Keogh 98).

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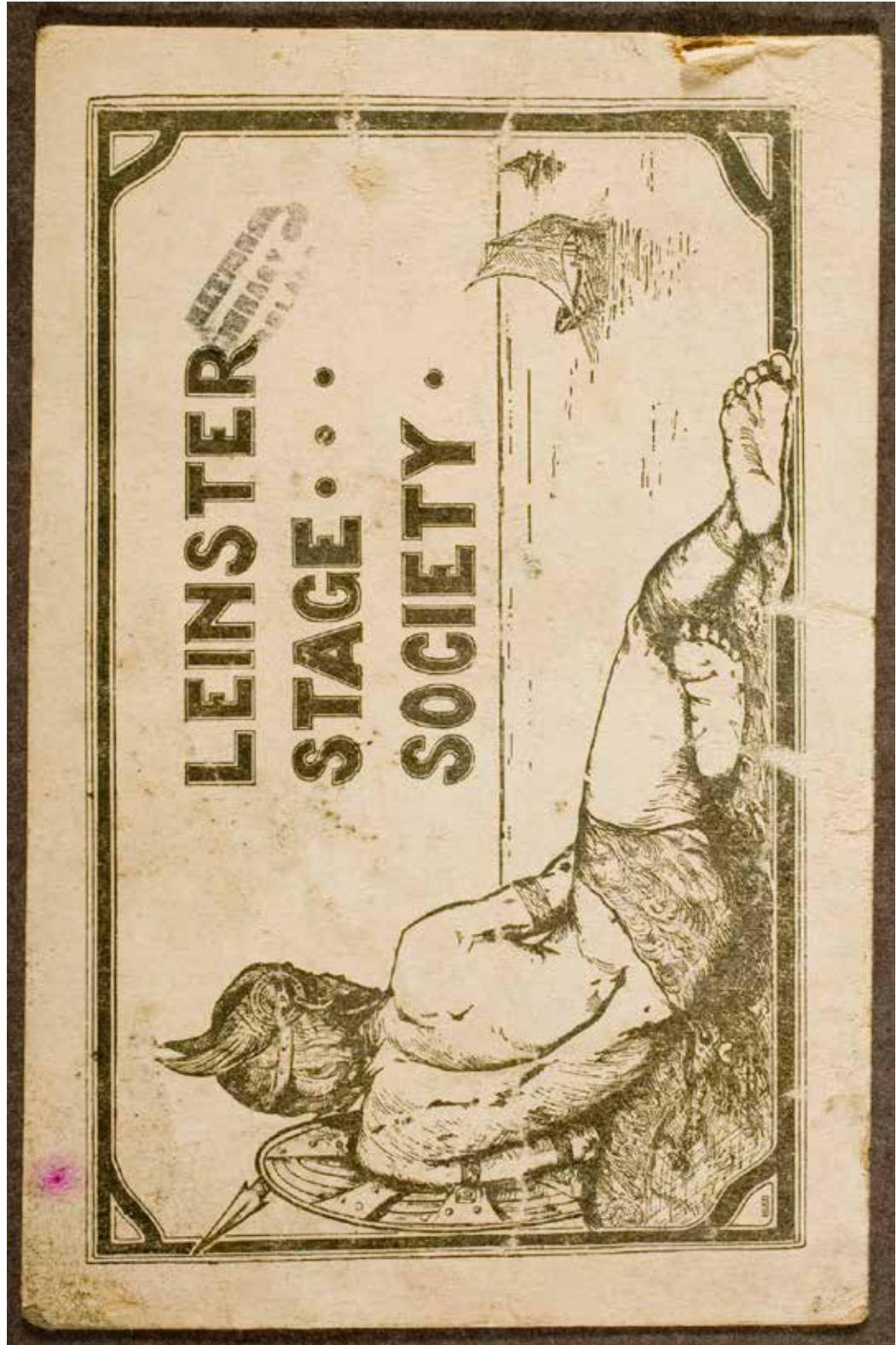
Willie and Patrick Pearse in the garden at Saint Enda's, Rathfarnham

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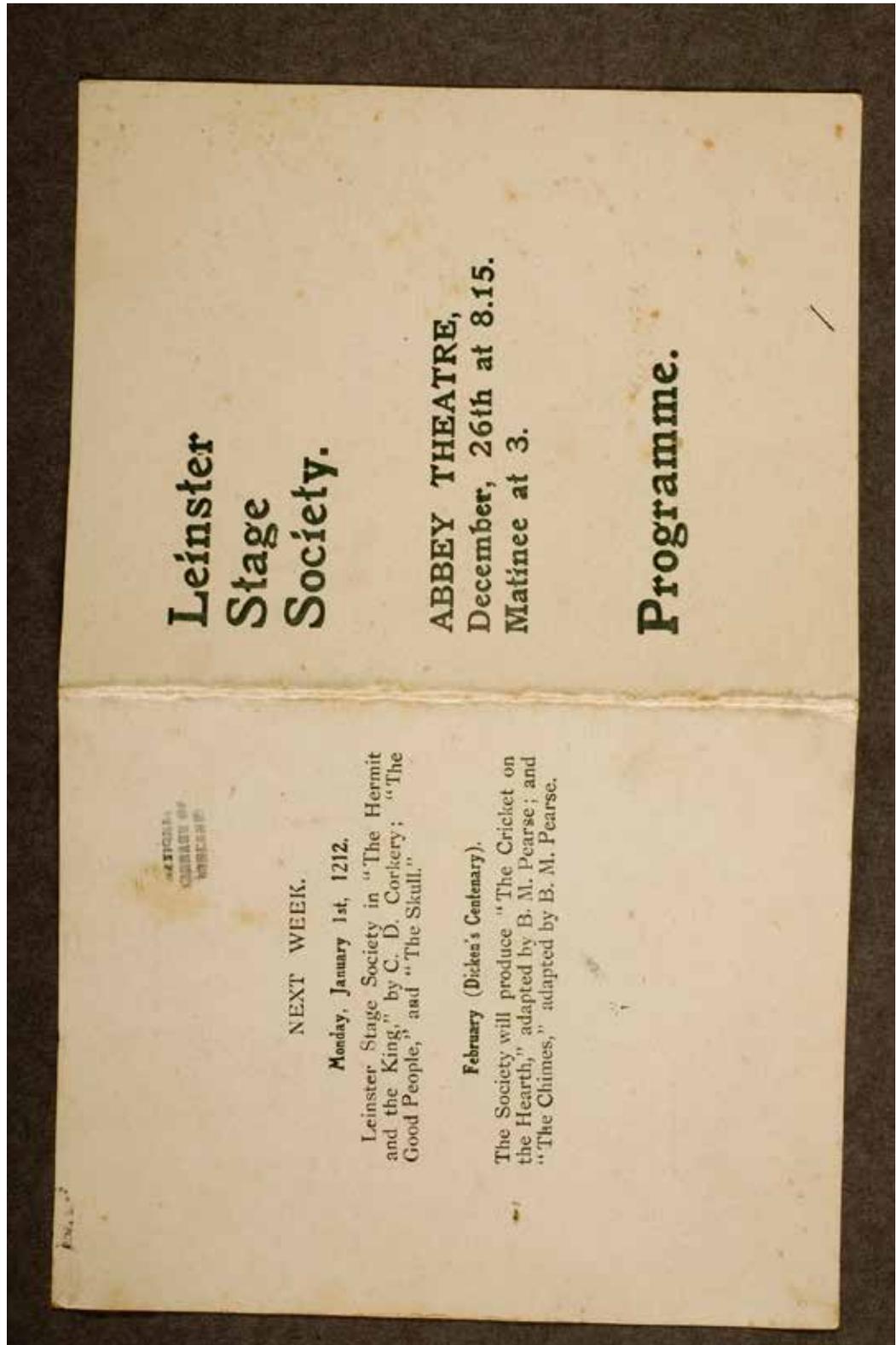
A commemorative postcard showing Willie Pearse as Pilate in his brother Patrick's Passion play featuring students from Saint Enda's and Saint Ita's. The play was produced at the Abbey Theatre in Holy Week 1911.

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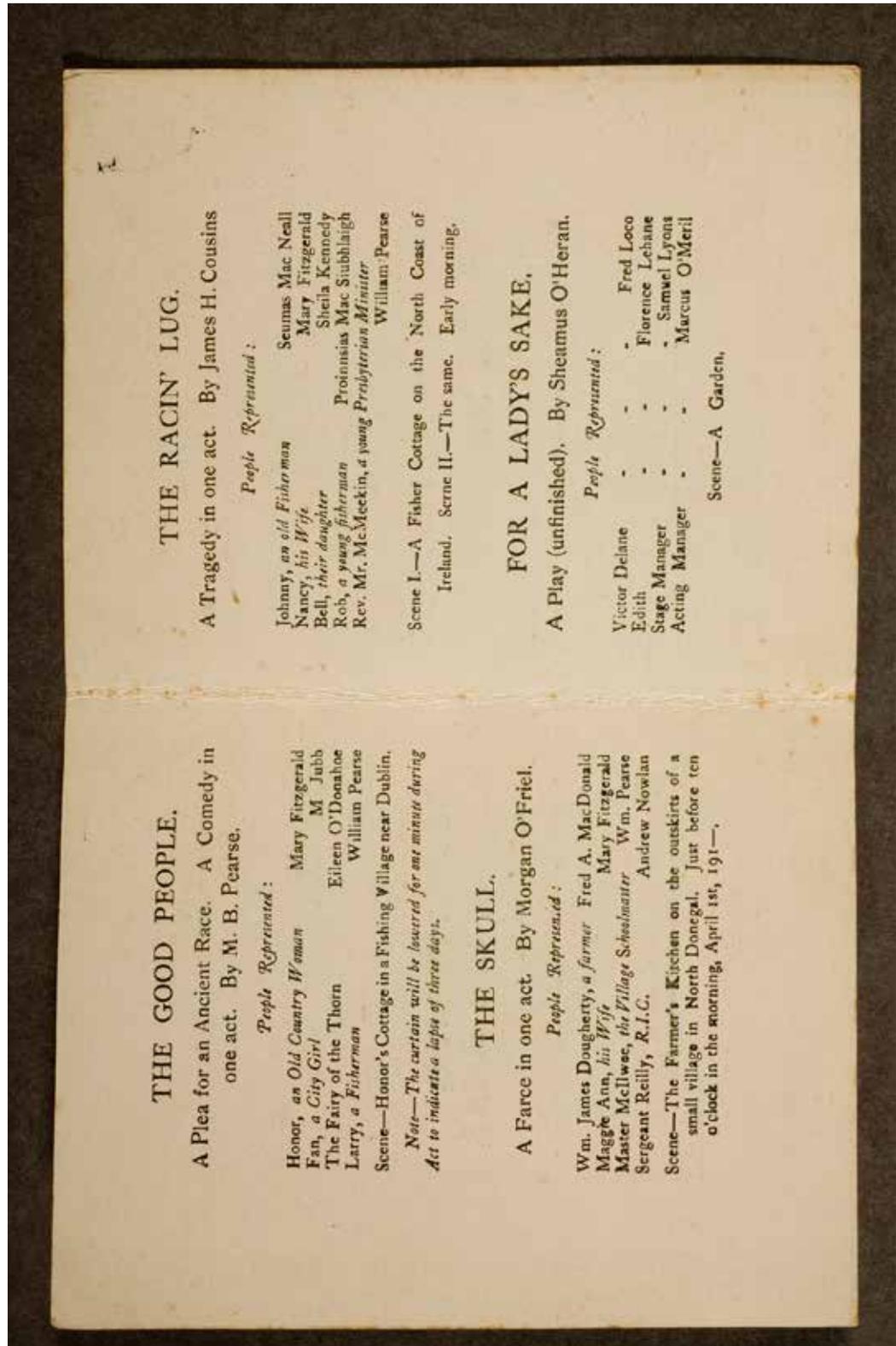
Programme for Leinster Stage Society productions at the Abbey Theatre, 26 Dec. 1911.
(Ms. 21,074).

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THE GOOD PEOPLE.

A Plea for an Ancient Race. A Comedy in one act. By M. B. Pearse.

People Represented:

Honor, an Old Country Woman Mary Fitzgerald
Fan, a City Girl M. Jubb
The Fairy of the Thorn Eileen O'Donahoe
Larry, a Fisherman William Pearse

Scene—Honor's Cottage in a Fishing Village near Dublin.

Note—The curtain will be lowered for one minute during Act to indicate a lapse of three days.

THE SKULL.

A Farce in one act. By Morgan O'Friel.

People Represented:

Wm. James Dougherty, a farmer Fred A. MacDonald
Maggie Ann, his Wife Mary Fitzgerald
Master McIlwae, the Village Schoolmaster Wm. Pearse
Sergeant Reilly, R.I.C. Andrew Nowlan

Scene—The Farmer's Kitchen on the outskirts of a small village in North Donegal. Just before ten o'clock in the morning, April 1st, 1911.

THE RACIN' LUG.

A Tragedy in one act. By James H. Cousins

People Represented:

Johanny, an old Fisherman Seumas Mac Neill
Nancy, his Wife Mary Fitzgerald
Bell, their daughter Sheila Kennedy
Rob, a young fisherman Proinsias Mac Siubhlaigh
Rev. Mr. McMeekin, a young Prohibitory Minister William Pearse

Scene I.—A Fisher Cottage on the North Coast of Ireland. Scene II.—The same. Early morning.

FOR A LADY'S SAKE.

A Play (unfinished). By Sheamus O'Heran.

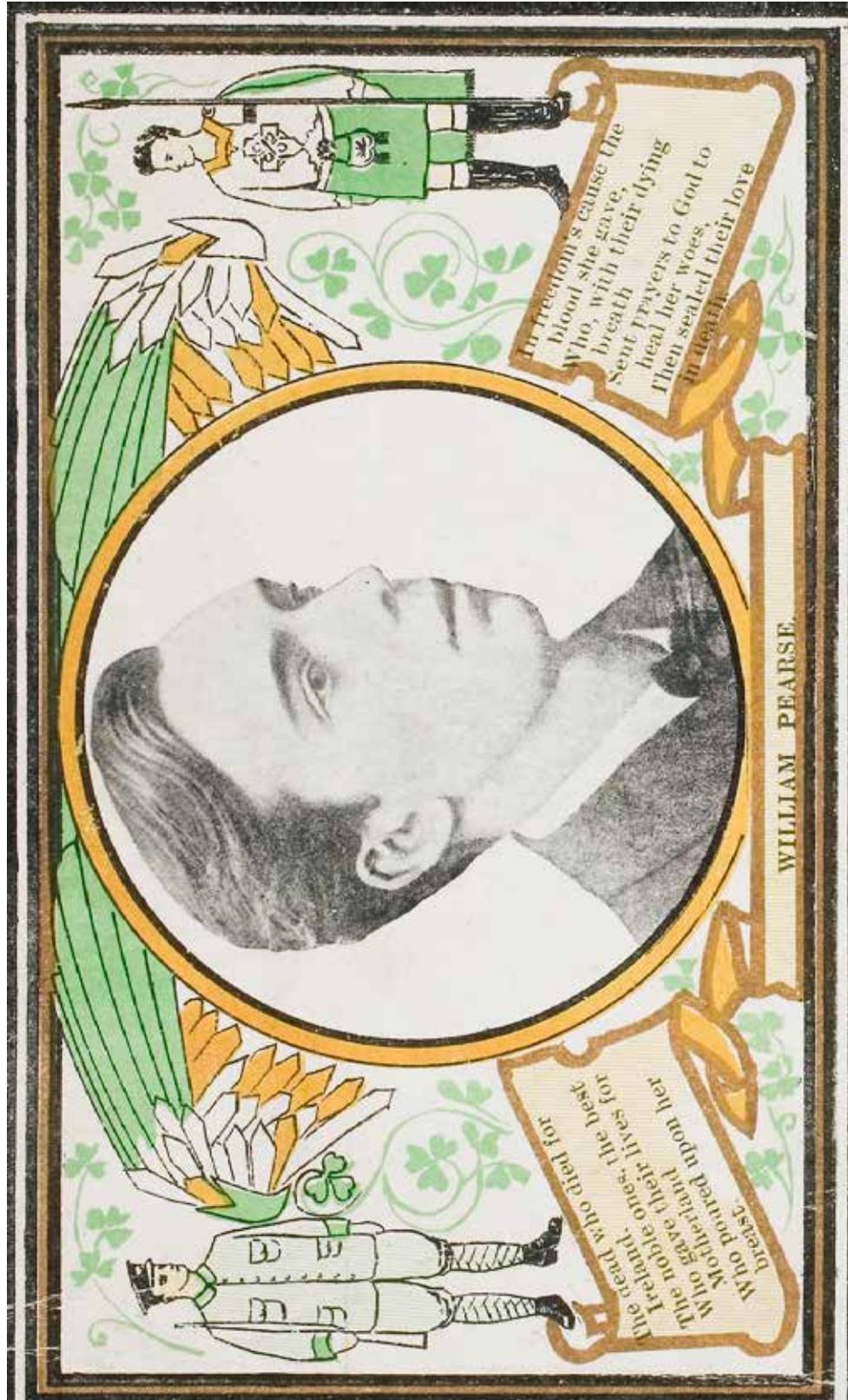
People Represented:

Victor Delane - Fred Loco
Edith - Florence Lehane
Sage Manager - Samuel Lyons
Acting Manager - Marcus O'Meril

Scene—A Garden.

Programme for Leinster Stage Society productions at the Abbey Theatre, 26 Dec. 1911. (Ms. 21,074).

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A commemorative postcard for Willie Pearse. (O'Mahony Album).