

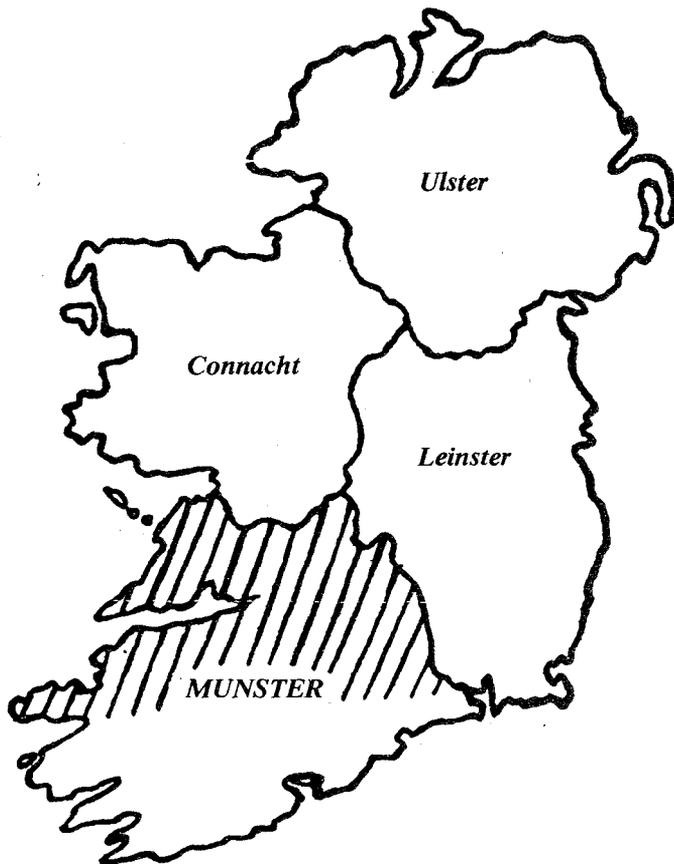
# North Munster Antiquarian Journal

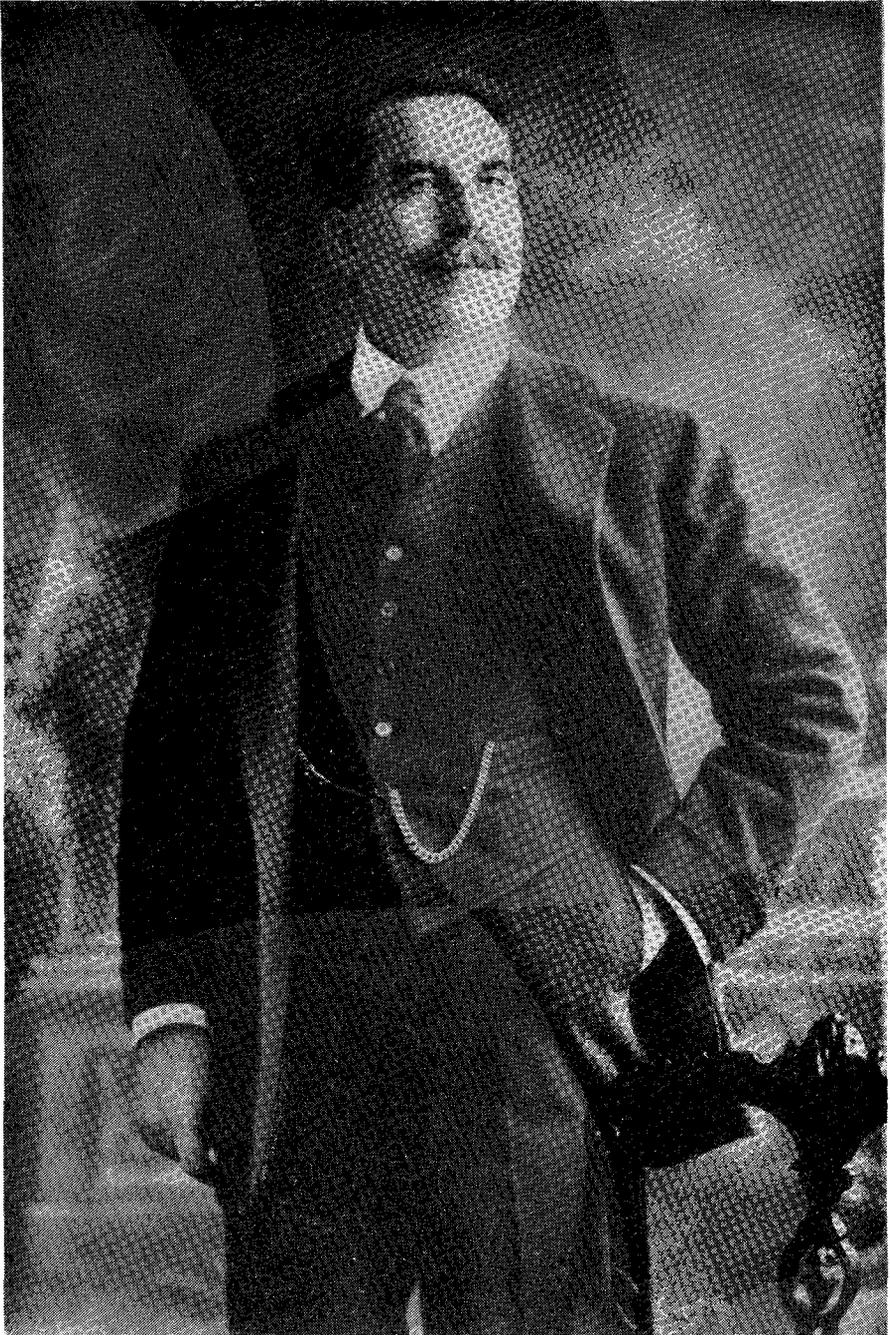
IRISLEABHAR SEANDÁLUÍOCHTA TUADH-MHUMHAN

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Illus. 3. Joseph O'Mara, Limerick's world-famous operatic tenor.

## JOSEPH O'MARA<sup>3</sup>

One of Limerick's greatest artistes, Joseph O'Mara (Illus. 3),<sup>4</sup> had a long association with the Royal. His voice of exceptional sweetness, power and quality was complimented by his great gift as an actor. It was asserted by many critics at the time that his success on the dramatic stage was assured even if he never sang. The great tenor was born in Limerick on July 16th, 1866, and was son of James O'Mara, J.P. He was educated in the Jesuit College. At the age of twenty-three he gave up business and went to Milan where he studied singing under Moratti and Perini. He returned to England after three years where he was at once engaged for the Royal English Opera House. On February 4th, 1891, he appeared there as "Ivanhoe" in Sullivan's opera. In between engagements he studied further under Edwin Holland. He sung leading roles in Covent Garden and at Drury Lane, and was ranked as one of the world's great opera singers. In 1896 he created the part of Mike Murphy in Stanford's "Shamus O'Brien". He made his first appearance in Boston at the Hollis Street Theatre on October 25th, 1897, in De Koven's "Highwayman".

Joseph O'Mara engaged in a seven month concert tour of the United States where he played to crowded houses. In the forefront of his repertoire were the ballads and songs of Ireland. In due course O'Mara formed his own Opera Company which had success at both sides of the Atlantic. In this he recruited a group of brilliant artistes, many of whom had achieved world fame. Being an English opera combination it was composed mainly of British artistes, recruited at home and from the Colonies. A brilliant young baritone came from South Africa, and a contralto, a pupil of the great Melba, came from New Zealand.

His artistic genius earned Joseph O'Mara the Freedom of Limerick, the first and only time a singer achieved this great honour. He died on August 5th, 1927.