

ritorial possessions of an inferior toparch, probably confined the rage of the belligerent parties to a very contracted circle ; and hence, the enmity which was generated by the collision of petty interests most frequently assumed the utmost virulence of personal animosity. Accustomed to act under the immediate impulse of their own wishes, some of the Irish princes, like the stubborn oak, which disdains to bend and is dashed headlong to the ground by the impetuosity of the storm, brought certain and immediate destruction upon themselves; whilst a few others, possessing more policy and discretion, contrived to accomplish their respective objects by measures that were of a more political and less sanguinary nature.

But whilst the martial genius and institutions of the ancient Irish make the most conspicuous figure in their early history, their civil policy, as far as it can now be known, is not without its share of interest and instruction. It is to be regretted, however, that our knowledge of this subject is necessarily so limited, as only a few fragments of the Brehon laws, by which the people were governed, have come down to our time; and it is now impossible to determine, with any degree of certainty, the different periods at which they were enacted. The person who administered those laws was called a Breathamh, or Brehon. He sat on the summit of a hill, or on its acclivity, to hear causes; and exercised a discretionary power in his decisions on every subject. One of these ancient seats of judgment, occupied by this functionary, is still to be seen on the hill of Kyle in the Barony of Ossary and Queen's county. It is very near the top of the hill, on the side next the east, is formed from