

The next blow was struck by the Common Law Procedure Act, and among the best features of that statute are those provisions for the settlement of a certain class of disputed facts, by a less expensive, a more expeditious, and a more certain method than the "antient system."

The argument to be drawn from prestige and habit merely is of little avail, when speed, cheapness, and certainty of decision are in the opposite scale: if good justice may be had without troubling twelve men to agree in an inference, it will be sought for without their aid.

We would not desire to be understood as disparaging trial by jury in criminal cases, or desiring to see it entirely withdrawn as part of the machinery of civil proceedings; but the "gradual, easy process" our contributor refers to, is at work, and may before many years, pronounce that the institution of trial by jury has outlived its value, as respects indiscriminate application. So far as individual opinion goes, we are "heretical enough" to suppose that the judgment of a single, intelligent judge, will be better than that of a jury; and at no distant day we propose discussing the question, unless in the meantime our valued contributor should favour us with a full examination of the *pros.* and *cons.*

#### --- FALSIFICATION OF DOCUMENTS.

The act of erasing writing, though brought to comparative perfection by the inducement to falsify documents and the fear of detection, owes its origin to a more honest source, and perhaps dates from an earlier period. The scarcity and expense of parchment suggested the idea of removing the ink from old manuscripts. Skins from which the first writings have been erased, and which have been written on a second time, are called *palimpsest manuscripts*: they are met with not unfrequently in the continental libraries, and are traced to the monks of the middle ages, who, anxious to supply the demand for books of devotion, erased the writing of classical authors to make room for those of the Fathers. The erasure was frequently imperfect, which has led to the restoration of some valuable works supposed to have been lost. Thus the "*De Republica*" of Cicero was discovered in the Vatican, re-written with St. Augustin on the

Psalms,—and the Institutions of Gaius gleaned through the epistles of St. Jerome in the library of the Chapter of Verona.

Cicero himself shows that the practice was common in his day, by praising his friend Trebatius for his economy in using a *palimpsest*, though he hints at the same time the supposition that he had destroyed writings more valuable than his own: Martial also refers to it, Lib. XIV 7. But enough of the history of erasure: we will proceed to mention the agents by which it may be effected, and the means which may be employed for their detection. Ordinary ink is composed of sulphate of iron and nutgall, and may be dissolved by using diluted nitric, hydrochloric or oxalic acids, by a solution of caustic, potash, and by butter of antimony: all these substances, while they destroy the writing, attack also the paper, softening it, and changing its colour; this is guarded against by using the agent much diluted, by washing the paper to remove it as soon as the object is effected, and by sizing it afresh and pressing it. Nitric acid gives a yellowish colour to the paper where it has been applied, as do likewise the alkalies and the butter of antimony; hydrochloric and oxalic acids, on the other hand, give it an extreme whiteness, especially the former: sometimes the place of erasure is browned, *i.e.*, when an alkali has been used. Any change of colour should be noted, when falsification is suspected. If the erasure is even, the writing may be restored; if it was removed by nitric acid, it will reappear when the spot is wetted with a weak solution of carbonate of potash; if an alkali was employed, it will return if wetted with diluted nitric acid; if hydrochloric acid was the agent, an infusion of nutgall will restore it; if oxalic acid was used, a solution of ferrocyanide of potassium will bring out the words. If the erasure is so old that the words cannot be made to appear, the solution of ferrocyanide of potassium will show the place by striking a blue tint, forming prussian blue with the iron which remains in the paper from the ink which has been effaced; if an alkali was employed to destroy the ink, reduced tincture of litmoss applied to the spot will change it by having its blue colour restored. The endeavor to prevent erasure has led to many attempts to invent an ink which could not be destroyed without the destruc-