INVENTIONS IN LITHOTRITY.

NOTE FROM MR. W. FERGUSSON.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—In No. 548 of your Journal I observed a letter from Mr. Weiss, cutler, in London, in which he assumes the merit of having invented a double-bladed instrument for breaking stone in the urinary bladder, long before Baron Heurteloup came to this country. As this is a matter for those two individuals to decide upon, I shall not interfere; though it appears very clearly that Heurteloup is the inventor of the *perceuteur*. Mr. Weiss seems not to deny this; and what object he could have in publishing his letter, further than personal abuse towards me, I cannot make out.

In a former number of *THE LANCET* (15th February, 1834), I described a modification of Heurteloup's *perceuteur*, which I fancied might be of service in simplifying the nature of the lithontritic process. This modification consisted in the application of a rack and pinion to the double-bladed instrument, the bruising force being applied by means of that apparatus instead of the hammer, as used by the above-named operator. The various trials which had been made with this modification convinced me of its superiority over the apparatus of Heurteloup, and I therefore felt no hesitation in laying a description of it before the public, particularly as I was not aware of such a one having been described previously.

In my letter I mentioned having seen an instrument, constructed by Charriere, of Paris, in which the bruising force is applied by means of a screw, and that I considered it a useful one though inferior to my own. I still hold the same opinion. The screw force, though in many respects more powerful than that with the rack and pinion, cannot be applied with such facility or rapidity. The instrument in question is, I presume, similar to the one at present so successfully used on the continent, by M. Ségalas, and nothing astonished me more on reading Mr. Weiss's letter, than the ignorance he betrayed regarding this instrument, which, in point of ingenuity and efficiency, is infinitely superior to his own "latest improvement," of which he has favoured us with a sketch.

I may be wrong in considering myself the first who has applied the rack and pinion, and therefore shall with pleasure give up whatever merit is due on the subject, to him who establishes a prior claim. I am willing, however, to be the advocate

of the invention, and of its superiority over any that I have yet seen for the purpose of breaking stone in the urinary bladder.

I have requested Mr. Macleod to make an instrument on the same plan, but much stronger, for the purpose of breaking large calculi which cannot be readily extracted in the lateral operation of lithotomy; and as it is a much more applicable and manageable one than that described by Mr. Earle, or any other that I know of, for the same purpose, I conceive it may be of considerable efficacy in lessening the danger and difficulty of this very formidable operation. Mr. Macleod has already procured a patent for both of these, and I trust that he will soon be remunerated for the great expense he has been at in accomplishing my views.

I am grieved in having to notice the very indiscreet style of the letter from an individual so much esteemed by the profession as Mr. Weiss is. He ought to have been sure that he was perfectly free from any "obliquity of vision," ere he published his "latest improvement," and more guarded in his attack upon the private character of an individual with whom he was not in the slightest degree acquainted, and, moreover, one of a profession to which he, Mr. Weiss, has admitted his numerous and great obligations.

I have the honour to remain, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

WILLIAM FERGUSSON.

Edinburgh, March 22, 1834.

CLAIMS OF MR. WEISS TO THE INVENTION OF THE URETHRA DILATOR.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—Mr. Guthrie, in his clinical lecture, published on the 15th ult., gives an account of "an instrument for dilating the urethra," which he speaks of as being his invention. Judge of my surprise, therefore, when I discovered that this instrument was one made and wholly invented by me, slightly modified at Mr. Guthrie's suggestion. Mr. Guthrie may suppose, that I have only now to resign into his hands the honour of the invention, which, with his characteristic modesty, he has hitherto permitted me to enjoy, and to be grateful for his kind forbearance in having so long allowed me this privilege; but I beg to be allowed permission to prove my claim to the merit of having contrived this instrument, by a plain statement of facts, through the

medium of your journal; and I trust it will have the effect of repairing the injury done to me by Mr. Guthrie, and also serve to refresh his memory with respect to the point at issue.

About the latter end of the year 1820, Sir Astley Cooper called on me, and gave me a drawing of an instrument which he wished to have made for the purpose of extracting a number of small calculi from the bladder of a patient. I made the instrument according to his instructions, but it was found not to answer the purpose. I then said that I thought I could contrive an instrument, which would effect the proposed object, by making it to open *in the bladder instead of the urethra*. This, Sir Astley said, was just what he wanted. I made the instrument, and its success was complete. Sir Astley called on me a few days after, and told me that he had extracted several calculi through the urethra, and among them some large ones, by opening the instrument while in the urethra, and thus *dilating it sufficiently to allow of their passage*; but that there still remained several more in the bladder. Soon after this I took to Sir Astley another instrument, much more perfect, with which he was so highly pleased that he kept it, and returned me the former one, thanking me for the trouble I had taken.* Some months afterwards Mr. Guthrie suggested to me the idea of an instrument *on the same principle*, but with three blades instead of two, for the purpose of dilating stricture, which I accordingly made, and this is the instrument which Mr. Guthrie calls his. I have always called it "Weiss's Dilator," and no objection was made to that appellation until about five years ago, when Mr. Guthrie called on me and stated verbally the substance of what he has now published. This I disproved, as I thought, to his satisfaction, by producing my workman's book, by which the priority of construction of the two-bladed instrument was manifest; since then he has not mentioned the subject to me, and I thought he had abandoned the notion of claiming it, until I saw his statement reiterated in print.

The reputation of the surgeon in his professional capacity, and of the mechanic in his occupation, are separate and distinct; and it would not really be a greater assumption on the part of the mechanic to arrogate to himself the merit of a successful operation because he had made the instrument with which it had been performed, than for the surgeon to lay claim to the credit of the invention of

the instrument, because he had suggested the object of the instrument wanted. The instrument spoken of above, which I made for Sir Astley Cooper, from his drawing and instruction, was his, not mine. The one I afterwards made according to my own plan is mine; the idea of it was mine; the principle was carried into effect by me, and Sir Astley Cooper has always allowed me the credit of it. But Mr. Guthrie's suggestion was only a modification, as I said before, of my instrument. The merit of his suggestion I neither dispute nor claim; but the instrument with three blades is still my invention, as it was before with two.

I should not need to encroach upon your space, or to intrude myself upon the attention of your readers on this occasion, were not the degree of merit that fairly belongs to me too frequently claimed by others, and not only my share of praise, but of "solid pudding" denied me. The only reward a mechanic can reap from the success of his ingenuity, is the preference given to him in his business, and at least the profit arising from making instruments of his own invention; but the reverse is too frequently the case. It has often happened to me, that my improved instruments have been ordered from other makers, who never invented an instrument, but profit by copying the improvements of others. In proof of this I may be allowed to mention a fact which shows the extent of the injury done me by such misrepresentations as this of Mr. Guthrie. Sir James M'Gregor wrote to the Secretary at War, stating, upon whose authority I do not know, that the improvements and inventions to which I laid claim, and an account of which I had published in my book, did not belong to me, and to that I owe the loss of my business of supplying the army with instruments. Mr. Guthrie being well aware of this circumstance, I am the more surprised to find him injuring what I most value, my character and reputation. I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN WEISS.

62, Strand, 26th March, 1834.

NORTHERN DISPENSARY, NEW ROAD.

To the Editor of THE LANCET.

SIR,—I have read THE LANCET too long not to know that for the promotion of the public good your pages are accessible to laymen. A late Number contains an invitation to the profession and others, to communicate with the Parliamentary

* An account of this case will be found in the *Medico-Chirurgical Transactions*, vol. 2, p. 349.