
In 1780, at the age of 28, with testimonial letters from the Corporation of Surgeons of London, Gordon entered the Royal Navy as a surgeon’s mate and advanced to the rank of surgeon. Put on half pay in 1783, he went to London where he studied at the Lying-In Hospital in Shore Street. While there he also attended lectures of Drs. Thomas Denman and William Osborn at the Middlesex Lying-In Dispensary and practised surgery and dissection at the Westminster Hospital. In 1785 Gordon returned to Aberdeen, gained an MD from Marischal College and entered general practice. He was appointed physician to the Aberdeen Dispensary. During the next nine years there were 12,925 admissions for treatment at this institution. Gordon’s main interest was midwifery and obstetrics and, he regularly gave lectures on this subject to the University students. This treatise shows Gordon’s insights into the contagious nature of puerperal fever, its epidemiology, pathology and the means of prevention. Gordon was the first to advance as a definite hypothesis the contagious nature of puerperal fever, thus preceding Holmes and Semmelweis by half a century. He also advocated the disinfection of the clothes of the doctor and midwife.