international quarantine, biological standardization and other subjects. Its organization operates in six regions of the globe. As was inevitable, it has encountered difficulties and set-backs, but the record shows that it is steadily moving towards its objective, which is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.

In the checking of epidemics WHO has been endowed with the triumphs of recent medical research for preventing and treating disease, unknown to earlier international organizations. Here may be mentioned especially the antibiotics, immunization against bacterial and virus diseases and the insecticides against vectors of malaria, typhus, etc. The chapters on malaria, virus diseases, tuberculosis, nutrition and atomic energy in relation to health are of special interest.

In this important book, well illustrated and produced, WHO has given a commendable account of faithful stewardship during its ten years of existence.

ARTHUR S. MACNALTY

Alexander Gordon, M.D., of Aberdeen. IAN A. PORTER, M.B., CH.B. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1958; pp. xii+92. Illustrated. 12*s.* 6*d.*

It is commonly supposed that evidence pointing to the transmission of an infectious agent to women in labour by those attending their confinements was first brought to light by Oliver Wendell Holmes of Boston, U.S.A., and, a few years later, by Semmelweiss of Vienna.

But in fact the credit for recognition of this important landmark in obstetrics would seem to belong rather to Alexander Gordon, who practised in Aberdeen fifty years before Holmes produced his classical paper (1843)—in which, incidentally, he frankly acknowledged Gordon's earlier work.

Dr. Ian Porter has made a valuable contribution to the history of obstetrics by reviewing the scanty knowledge (and the speculations) about puerperal fever before Gordon's time: by telling us the circumstances in which Gordon made his observations and also a good deal that has not been known hitherto about Gordon himself.

Briefly the story of his puerperal fever work may be summarized as follows: he studied some seventy-seven cases (twenty-eight fatal) occurring in a period of fourteen months in and around Aberdeen, most of them in their own homes. In many of them puerperal fever had followed delivery by a doctor (sometimes Gordon himself) or a midwife who had been in contact with another febrile obstetric case. It was on this association, so often repeated, that Gordon based his hypothesis. Erysipelas complicated the puerperal fever in some cases, and it was unusually prevalent in non-obstetric patients during the same period. Recovery, in early cases of puerperal fever, sometimes followed vigorous bleeding and/or purging, but even in cases so treated the mortality was high.

LEONARD COLEBROOK

Sir Charles Bell, His Life and Times. SIR GORDON GORDON-TAYLOR and E. W. WALLS. E. & S. Livingstone Ltd., 1958; pp. 288, with 50 illustrations. 42*s.*

Strangely enough, this is the first full-length biography of Sir Charles Bell. From the 'letters', written to his brother George and published in 1870 by Lady Bell, and from