about dangerous furnishing materials and other fire hazards, of the Health and Safety executive about dangerous factories and industrial processes, of the environmental health departments of local authorities about dirty and dangerous cafés, butchers and other food shops. The British Official Secrets Act and libel laws, in respect of health, and probably other things, protect the negligent and the wicked and put in danger the mass of innocent citizens. There is no reason to suppose that 'National Health Promotion Teams' could serve us any better.

The Medical Role in Environmental Health is a little book that performs the difficult task of describing the interlocking relations of the dozens of government departments, quangos and local authorities, private and nationalised industries and the health service, all monitoring the environment in the interests of our health. The Medical Officer for Environmental Health has a difficult job. He must advise his health board and assist his local authorities with inadequate resources and information. To remedy this, Waldron also proposes a team. His is to be made up of representatives of public organisations with overlapping interests. However, once more the laws ensuring secrecy would hinder free communication within the team and prevent the public information necessary for a healthy political response to its findings.

This book is admirably suited to the needs of students. It is a pity it lacks an index and £2.50 for 64 pages is a bit steep even for these days.

Reviews of Medicine Men develops the story of American medicine from the beginning of the century to the present day. It informs us about the role played by the huge charitable trusts associated with industrial fortunes and specially emphasises the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations. Their founders were amazingly frank about their purposes. They wished to preserve their fortunes, keep the control of their enterprises in the family, and through the charitable nature of the trusts encourage the belief in large numbers of American citizens that the most aggressive capitalists were basically simple people with hearts of gold. They set out to capture a major profession, medicine, and the universities that nourished it and win them for support of 'scientific' medicine and laboratory research and teaching. They converted medicine into a highly technological capitalist industrial enterprise supporting subsidiary industries in insurance and drugs and spending about one-eighth of the country's finances. But not content with control of medical education and practice they sought to determine the way American citizens think about their illnesses. Ill-health is individualised. You are ill because of some personal defect. You eat too much or drink too much or smoke too much. Treatment is to alter you, by exhortation to change habits, or by performing an operation or by prescribing a medicine. No one associated with the foundations suggests social change as a method of preventing disease.

This is a fascinating book. It tells an interesting story extremely well. It is, however, irritating to discover that either through poor editing and revision or because the author does not trust the reader's memory, that within a small number of pages, he repeats ideas, phrases, sentences and even a note with a quotation.

These books in their use of the term 'scientific medicine' adopt the common Anglo-Saxon habit of confusing science with technology. Scientific medicine does not mean to them an internally harmonious body of knowledge which can be used by society for the increased comfort and well-being of its citizens. They mean the use by teams and individuals, of physical, chemical and electronic gadetry, some of it useful, much of it unproven value, but all spectacular and impressive. The authors are all very well aware that medicine is a social science with social and political solutions that determine the value and outcome of the merely technological approaches to health problems.

DONALD CAMERON

A physician faces cancer in himself

The English tend to have, of course, a fantasy picture of the typical American: generous, brave, unoriginal, naive, yet shrewd. And there may be as much truth in that as in the transatlantic vision of the Englishman as unsure, nostalgic, intelligent, work-shy, envious, lacking in conviction and self-respect.

These not very original thoughts surface many times on reading this little book. It begins by the effortless production of platitudes as if they were thundering new truths.

To English ears the foreword by the wife is almost a send-up of the book, beginning: 'To Dr Samuel Sanes all of life was a learning experience'. The doctor then hammers it all home by such telling phrases as 'Life has a way of setting a man back on his heels'. Thus it is a book mostly written in graceless journalese, a book whose banality of thought and expression render second-hand and predictable the last months of a worthy physician whose progress is recorded from the diagnosis of malignant lymphoma to his correct- ing proofs two weeks before death.

This is the truth; but it is not the whole truth. The journalistic style is at least better than the tortuous pedum of much academic writing, and the banality becomes in a strange way valuable and absorbing and touching as we see a man who accepted unquestioningly the values of medicine and of life in a way typical of his society, but who describes his courage without intending to, and the difficulties of his colleagues and friends because he so fully shared them.

The book then becomes less a chronicle of a single man than an uncut piece of social history. The trite faith is there: 'The family should be impressed by the fact that the threat of cancer never ends, even with a supporting "cure", and that it is good insurance to have periodic checkups.' But keeping it company is the honest recognition of inadequacy: 'Hopelessness and helplessness may disorganise family life. They can send patients and families to other physicians or even lead them to consult quacks or to use scientifically unproven methods at a time when cancers may still be in controllable form'.

Gradually as I read this book my impatience and condescension were overwhelmed by respect for the author's honesty and courage. It was an emotional mixture that I had felt before, but it took some time to recognise it. Eventually I remembered - it was the way I had felt when I read my old father's war diaries from the First World War. Samuel Sanes' war diary also describes a big battle and a good man, and inevitable doom. No matter how it is told, that is a fine story.

ERIC WILKES