

Presentation to Dr. R. R. Marett

A VOLUME of anthropological essays by friends and former pupils, entitled "Custom is King", a notice of which appears on p. 1014, was presented to Dr. R. R. Marett, Rector of Exeter College, Oxford, and reader in social anthropology in that University, on June 13, to mark the occasion of his seventieth birthday. The presentation was made in the College Hall by an undergraduate, and was attended by the Vice-Chancellor, a number of heads of houses and professors. The chair was taken by Sir Charles Harper, a former pupil. In acknowledging the presentation, Dr. Marett reminded his hearers that, as the University had claimed three quarters of his time in his main business of philosophy, only one quarter had been available for the claims of anthropology, while his books had been written in vacation. In speaking of anthropology in the University of Oxford, he referred to the late Arthur Thomson and to Henry Balfour. With himself they had been 'three men in a boat', of whom it was possible to say that no one was captain; and to them had been added Dr. L. H. Dudley Buxton, and later Mr. T. K. Penniman, as cabin boys. In conclusion, he spoke of the termination of his long tenure of the readership in social anthropology, and rejoiced that Oxford at last was to have a full professorship in anthropology.

It is scarcely necessary to recall how great is the debt of anthropology in Oxford to Dr. Marett. With the exception of Sir Edward Tylor, who of course stands apart from and above all, this branch of academic studies, perhaps, owes more to him than to any single individual—even though the great services of the late Arthur Thomson and Henry Balfour be not forgotten. Long before the contemplation of the manners and customs of 'savages' had been raised to the dignity of forming part of an official course, his lectures on ethics and psychology had directed many of his pupils to this pleasing intellectual adventure; and not only did he take a foremost part in the movement which led to the institution of a diploma in anthropology, but also, as secretary for twenty years of the committee responsible in the University for this subject, he imposed his broad and philosophic outlook on the Oxford school of anthropological thought.

Plants and Medicine

THE lecture which commemorates annually Sir Edwin Chadwick, "the father of English sanitation", was this year given at the Chelsea Physic Garden by Sir William Willcox on June 11. In choosing "Plant Pharmacology and Medical Practice" for his subject, Sir William might well have been excused from dealing with synthetic chemical medicaments; he nevertheless claimed as plant products "coal and coal tar with its myriads of derivatives", a claim which suggests a perilous affinity between rhubarb and the barbiturates. It seems a strong thing to hold, as Sir William Willcox is prepared to do, that "plant products rarely act as tissue poisons because of their purity . . . (while) in the chemical laboratory the

conditions are so different from those obtaining in Nature that by-products injurious to health always occur during any chemical synthesis", and that "it is for this reason that so many of the modern artificially synthesised drugs are liver and tissue poisons: examples are cinchophen and similar derivatives". Nevertheless, it is certain that if in recent years orthodox medicine has preferred the synthetic product of the laboratory, the public have turned in increasing measure to herbal remedies, and there has been a large increase in the numbers of herbal stores and in the trade in herbal medicines. The benefit derived from drinking several pints of hot water daily in the form of a *tisane* or decoction may be substantial, and certainly the danger of positive harm is minute compared with the results of uncontrolled resort to the tonics, sleeping-draughts, digestive pills and headache tablets which are a by-product of modern civilisation. The representative exhibition of medicinal plants shown at the lecture served to link the Physic Garden of to-day with its beginnings in the seventeenth century, when it supplied the apothecaries of London with those herbs which they failed to collect on their 'herbarizing' expeditions in the fields of Greenwich and Battersea.

English Death Rates

THE retiring president of the Royal Statistical Society, Prof. Major Greenwood, took for the subject of his valedictory address, read on June 16, "English Death Rates, Past, Present and Future". Prof. Greenwood pointed out that down to the beginning of the twentieth century, there was no improvement in mortality at the beginning of life and little improvement in old age, but that since the turn of the century there had been great improvement in the mortality of little children and some improvement in old age. From the beginning of registration, rates of mortality at ages between early childhood and old age improved, but the improvement began in time with the earlier ages and seemed to pass like a wave down the ages. In the opinion of some students, this wave-like movement was determined by the course of social reform, first directed to the protection of the young and only later to that of adults; Farr attributed the slow improvement of the rates of mortality in his time to the growth of towns; in his view, the general social and hygienic reforms of his time were offset by the disadvantages of density of population. Modern students, notably Kermack, McKendrick and McKinlay, have objected that the wave of improvement is too regular to be explained in these ways and suggested that the prime factor regulating mortality rates is the environment of childhood. Prof. Greenwood concludes that, even if this hypothesis does not completely explain the whole movement, it furnishes an important element of truth, so that contemporary emphasis upon the paramount importance of caring for the young is properly placed. This does not, of course, lead to the pessimistic conclusion that measures directed to the improvement of the conditions of life of adults are useless; there is much evidence that they are of value. Thus, the