

hence the many weeks of anxiety as to their fate. Details of the flight are awaited with interest, since the route was across the unexplored Hearst Land and presumably over the unknown extension of the Queen Maud Ranges.

Jubilee of the Aga Khan

IN the celebration of the jubilee of the Aga Khan on January 19 and four succeeding days in Bombay, one of the most striking incidents, perhaps for its incongruity, has been the assessment of the tribute from his followers to mark the occasion by the ceremonial of weighing His Highness against bars of gold in a huge balance. This is the usual method by which the contributions to his personal expenditure are determined annually; but, on this occasion, the £25,125 representing the value of the weight of gold at which he 'tipped the balance' is to be devoted by his decision to the benefit of his community. By his activities in Europe the Aga Khan has become so intimately known to the public that the significance of his position in India is sometimes overlooked. Without territory, as hereditary Imam of the Ismailia sect, he is spiritual head and virtual dictator to a body variously estimated at from four to twenty millions, and distributed over north and east Africa, Central Asia, India and Burma. Although the Ismailia sect is regarded as heretical by both Sunni and Shiah, from the latter of whom it originally derived, in India the Aga Khan by his personal qualities, his influence and his services, has come to be regarded as in some sort the representative of the Moslem community. His hereditary position and influence are derived not so much from his descent from the Prophet, as from the fact that he is of the line of the "Old Man of the Mountains", the legendary figure of the Middle Ages, by whom the Ismailia sect was founded, and whose fanatical followers, the Assassins, were said to be devoted to his service through the use of hashish, whence their name. The leaders of the Ismailia dominated Syria in the twelfth century until overcome by the Mongols. They then settled in Persia, the grandfather of the Aga Khan going to Bombay in 1845.

Cave Exploration in South Australia

A REMARKABLE series of discoveries made in the course of cave exploration in South Australia is described by the Adelaide correspondent of *The Times* in the issue of January 16. The caves are situated in the Nullarbour Plain, which itself is not the least remarkable feature in the geography of South Australia. It is a treeless expanse of some 38,000 square miles in extent, which has made a deep impression even on the imagination of the aborigines; for it figures prominently in their legendary lore, one belief being that it is the home of an immense serpent, which devours human beings who enter its province. At different times a number of attempts have been made to explore the caves of the Plain, but without marked success. The present expedition was carried out by a party of nine, of whom the leader was Capt. Maitland Thompson of

Port Lincoln. It started from Ceduna in November last. A number of caves were examined, of which the most impressive was the Koonalda Cave, situated sixty miles from Eucla. The entrance was in an almost vertical shaft and was reached by ladder. Passing through a chamber eight hundred feet in circumference, the exploring party penetrated for more than half a mile to a narrow passage leading to a subterranean well fifty feet in diameter; while another tunnel was followed to a distance of 2,400 ft. from the entrance until the passage forked and further progress was blocked by water. An interesting piece of evidence of previous penetration was found near the well in the form of an impression in the sand of the foot of an aboriginal.

IN the Weebubble Cave, a canoe, which the party had brought with them, came into use and after effecting an entry to a circular entrance hole three hundred feet across in the face of an eighty foot cliff, a tunnel was followed until a vast room, of which the back wall was four hundred yards from the entrance, was reached. Here the water, 320 ft. below the surface, was at the level of the sea fourteen miles away. The lake was found to have a depth of twenty feet at the edge and more than two hundred feet at the centre. An interesting piece of evidence of the attitude of the aborigines towards these remarkable caves was found at the Murrawidginie Cave, where at the entrance were a number of imprints of the human hand (usually the left) in red on the surface of the rock, which was also daubed or stained with red ochre. The practice of the Australian aboriginal of leaving the imprint of his hand on a rock surface has been recorded from numerous districts on the continent and is a custom which he shares with the Bushman and palæolithic man of Europe. Frequently the fingers show mutilations. Various explanations of the custom have been offered, and it may be that in the present instance it is correctly interpreted as a taboo sign, especially as it is believed that the cave may have been used as a store-house for the churingas and other emblems which were used in tribal ceremonial. Among other caves explored was the Abrakurrie Cave, where a drop of 250 ft. led to a cavern 1,200 ft. long, 160 ft. wide and 150 ft. high. It is proposed to follow this very successful exploration with further investigations, the next immediate objective being a search for the caverns known as "The Catacombs", of which the situation, frequently sought, appears to have been established by a recent aerial reconnaissance.

Association of British Zoologists

THE annual meeting of the Association of British Zoologists was held in the rooms of the Zoological Society on Saturday, January 4, Prof. J. S. Huxley being in the chair. At the previous meeting the Association had appointed a committee to inquire into any means which could be devised to lessen the confusion at present caused by frequent changes in the scientific names of animals, and especially of the common species used in schools and universities as