

tion, the Belgian organisation, the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, offered the loan of five grams of radium for two years free of cost except for insurance, with an additional five grams at a later date if considered necessary. An executive research committee has been formed with Prof. J. C. McLennan as chairman. The place for the research is the London Radium Institute, Ridinghouse Street, Portland Place, London, W.1, which has generously placed the whole of the accommodation necessary at the disposal of the governing body.

Alcoholism in Medieval England

At a meeting of the Society for the Study of Inebriety and Drug Addiction on July 11, a paper on alcoholism in medieval England was read by Dr. J. D. Rolleston, who said that the chief sources of information concerning the prevalence of alcoholism in the Middle Ages were lay writers, especially poets, historians and ecclesiastics, whereas little was to be gleaned from contemporary medical works. In the Middle Ages, distilled liquors were unknown as a convivial beverage and alcoholism was due mainly to indulgence in ale and to a less extent in wine. Inebriety was widely spread in all classes of society, but predominated among the clergy, in spite of the protests of leading ecclesiastics such as Anselm, Bede, Boniface, Dunstan and Wycliffe, and among the university students. The medieval publican had a bad reputation for fraud and dishonesty, while the tavern was often regarded as a place of ill-repute. Alcoholism during the Middle Ages in England, as elsewhere, resembled in many ways the alcoholism of classical antiquity, which Dr. Rolleston discussed in a previous paper before the Society (see *NATURE*, Oct. 23, 1926, p. 601). Legislation dealing with drunkenness or control of the liquor trade was practically unknown in the ancient world, whereas taxation of drink, reduction in the hours of sale and the number of taverns and other restrictions were introduced in the Middle Ages. The absence of syphilis in both ages was noteworthy in view of the fact that alcohol was such a frequent incentive to exposure to infection and was liable to aggravate the disease when once it was acquired.

Atmospheric Pollution in Great Britain

In a paper read before the National Smoke Abatement Society on July 14, Sir Frank Baines, the well-known architect, dealt at some length with the effects of atmospheric pollution on buildings, vegetation and public health. While he was Director of Works and Buildings at H.M. Office of Works, Sir Frank had exceptional opportunities for studying the effects on national buildings of the various impurities in the atmosphere due to the burning of coal, and for estimating what it costs the nation in deterioration of buildings and repairs due to this cause alone. He gave this cost for the last twenty-five years as a minimum of 55 million pounds sterling, and contrasted this with the niggardly parsimony of H.M. Treasury in its provision of funds for the investigation of the problem and the institution of

methods of prevention. All legislation hitherto devised to cope with the contamination of the atmosphere has failed to deal with sulphur gases, the greatest destructive agents of all. To these agents Sir Frank attributed the rapid deterioration of the stonework of the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey and other great national buildings. Sedimentary stones are peculiarly subject to the attack of atmospheric sulphuric acid formed by the action of moisture on sulphur effluents: but even the surface of granite in buildings is completely destroyed by this acid. Bricks, cement, lime mortars, metal, paints and composite materials of all kinds, vary in susceptibility to this attack, but the general effect is to make it probable that the readings of history in all our national monuments will be rendered unintelligible. The mass of evidence collected by Sir Frank Baines will be invaluable to the serious student of the problem of atmospheric pollution and it is gratifying to know that the National Smoke Abatement Society proposes to make this important paper available to the public.

Memorials in Westminster Abbey

JUST after the commemoration on April 22-24 of the centenary of Richard Trevithick, to whom there is a window in Westminster Abbey, Eng.-Capt. E. C. Smith, in a letter published in the *Times* of April 29, directed attention to the removal some time ago, from the north aisle, of three memorial windows, to Joseph Locke, Robert Stephenson and Sir William Siemens respectively. It came as a surprise to many unfamiliar with the memorials in the Abbey to learn that these three windows were no longer in place and further correspondence on the matter has since appeared in *Engineering*. It is known that it is a good many years since the windows were removed to make way for others, and in a letter in *Engineering* of July 7, the Dean of Westminster, the Rev. W. Foxley Norris, writes: "The windows in question were removed before my time and I know nothing of the circumstances, and we are at this moment taking the necessary measures for their replacement, which was, I understand, intended by my predecessor." As the windows to Locke, Stephenson and Siemens were erected mainly through the efforts of contemporary engineers and men of science, in recognition of their high professional standing, it is most desirable from every point of view that the windows should be re-erected, and we trust the Dean and Chapter will be able to find a reasonable solution of the problem with which they are faced.

Thermal Convection Air Currents and Gliding

THE recent spell of hot sunny weather in England made possible a series of experiments concerning the existence and magnitude of thermal convection currents in the air, arising from the reflection of heat from the sun-baked earth. Mr. G. E. Collins, instructor at the British Gliding Association's Summer School at Huish Hill, near Marlborough, using a two-seater glider of the B.A.C.VII type, was towed