> Fair speech is more rare than the emerald that is found by slave-maidens on the pebbles.

Since the actual parchment is said to date from 2500 B.C., and since Ptah-hotep lived about 3500 B.C., this gives us a written mention of the emerald and its occurrence as a placer mineral on a document 4,500 years old, and shows that it was prized as a gem about 5,500 years ago, perhaps 2,500 years before the "Iliad" and "Odyssey" had come into existence, and over 2,300 years before the traditional date of the siege of Troy.

Whether the word here translated emerald is strictly the emerald as we define it I do not know. At any rate such a translation harmonizes with the usual implication that Egypt is the place of earliest recognition of the stone. The Encyclopedia Britannica, for instance, says:

> Ancients appear to have obtained the emerald from upper Egypt, where it is said to have been worked as early as 1650 B.C.

The document under discussion shows that it was searched for and prized almost 2,000 years before this.

The same publication that contains the "Instruction of Ptah-hotep" contains a short "Instruction of Amenemhê'et" who ruled in Egypt about 2778–2748 B.C. He remarks:

> I have made me an house adorned with gold, its ceilings with lapis lazuli. . . .

This document in the part quoted is said not to be so reliable as the preceding one.

Since a geologist would only by accident have this book called to his attention, it seems worth while to quote such ancient—so far as I know the most ancient—references to these minerals.

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METHYL AND ETHYL ALCOHOL

To the Editor of Science: When the Mapp prohibition law, which went into effect in Virginia last November, was before the state legislature we communicated with our representative, asking that the interests of the colleges be safeguarded in respect to the use of alcohol for scientific purposes, but the law as enacted ignores biological laboratories entirely. We are therefore compelled to seek a substitute for ethyl alcohol, at least until the law can be amended. Hence the following queries:

1. Can methyl alcohol be substituted generally in processes of dehydration without modifying the methods otherwise or without prejudice to the staining or keeping qualities of the preparations?
2. Can methyl alcohol be generally substituted in the formulas for stains, etc.?
3. Are there any special cases in which this substitution may not be made?
4. What kind of methyl alcohol should be used?

The manuals on histological technique give little information on this question, but it may be that someone in "bone dry" territory has found a substitute for ethyl alcohol. If so, there are a number of readers of Science who would be grateful to hear of it.

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SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Institut de France. Académie des Sciences, Annuaire pour 1917, Paris, Gauthier-Villars et Cie. sm. 8vo (17 × 11 × 1.3 centimeters). 315 pp.

The Yearbook of the Académie des Sciences bears but slight trace of the terrible experience through which France is now passing, an experience all well-wishers of our traditional friend trust will have a speedy ending. It is thus a grateful sign that science may pursue her way unperturbed by the conflicts of the hour, and may have nothing to unlearn or to forget when the period of destruction and suffering brought about by an outbreak of man's basest passions shall have at last been brought to a close.

The most attractive part of the *Annual* for one interested in the history of science is the complete biographical index of all the members and correspondants from 1795 to 1917 (pp. 111–288). In this register of 1,188 names appear all the leaders in French science for the