

Comments and Communications

"Official Views" from the GPO

WITH the last publications I received from the United States Government Printing Office, there was enclosed a standard slip bearing a message over the printed signature of Roy B. Eastin, Superintendent of Documents. It begins:

Thank you for your order which is returned for your files. The publication you requested is enclosed. This book is only one of many thousands of interesting and informative United States Government publications which are available to you at small cost from this Office. *Each is completely authentic and represents the official views of your Government* [italics mine].

Innocuous as the purpose of this last statement may perhaps be, the implications incite apprehension. There is considerable precedent for the government to propagate as "official views" matters of policy and security that are its peculiar concern. There is cause for vigorous protest, however, when all scientific publications emanating from the Government Printing Office are included under a blanket endorsement of "completely authentic" and "official views." Is the day coming when Washington will have the only orthodox word about nomenclature (in both the physical and the biological sciences), conservation, phylogeny, and other scientific areas? This is the point to which the doctrine, if carried to its logical absurdity, would obviously lead us.

Lysenko has been assailed for promulgating the official views of his government, and we, fortunately, have been free to judge that they and it are in error. It will be a great tragedy if the public is led to believe that the results of research and publication conducted under the auspices of our government, true as we may believe them to be, become *ipso facto* "completely authentic" and "official views."

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Circling Planets

I WAS interested in the comments of Cyrus N. Ray and David I. Macht regarding certain interpretations of expressions appearing in the Bible, especially those pertaining to the shape of the earth and to its orbits. I would suggest that both read *The Epic of Izdubar*, written by a nameless poet on imperishable tablets of a Babylonian library some 3950 years ago. The original tablets are now in the British Museum and, oddly, are little known to the Western reader. From this and similar material, one would infer that considerable material appearing in the Bible was taken from these works of greater antiquity. All works of the ancient Assyrians who dwelt on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, over 4000 years ago, were written in the cuneiform, or old Chaldean, characters and on a substance that could withstand the ravages of time, fire, and water. These are in their original

form, unglossed, unaltered, and ungarbled, and in this respect Chaldean character records are actually superior to those of the Hebrews, the Greeks, or the Romans. Much of the material is in poetic form, though it is quite unmetrical. Like Hebrew poetry, the verses are proportioned and emphasized by means of parallelism, and they are by no means lacking in sublimity of expression. The following quotations from this epic poem are not to be considered theological disputation, and readers can interpret them as they see fit:

And lifts his mighty arm across the sky,
And strikes the sun as it goes roaring by;
The fiery world with whiter heat now glows,
While a vast flood of flame behind it flows,
That curling, forms bright comets, meteors,
And planets multiply, and blazing stars;
Upon the ambient ether forming suns
That through new orbits sing their orisons.
Hell's gate they guard with Death's remorseless

face,
And hurl the sun around the realms of space,
E'en swifter than the lightning, while it goes
Along its orbit. . . .

And countless stars thus driven whirl around,
With all the circling planets circling, round.
Around the whole Expanse, grand cestes spread
O'er paths sidereal unending lead,
As circling wheels within a wheel they shine.

. . . Thou who on the axis of Heaven dawnest,
in the dwellings of the Earth, revolves.

The path they take behind the rising sun
The setting sun they pass—with wings have
flown

The scorpion men, within wide space have gone,
Thus from his sight the monsters far have flown.

[Note: These monsters were supposed to fly
ahead of the sun and, as it passed, guide it
along its orbit.]

A girdle spans the Heavens with pure light, that
shines around the River of the Night,
Within the circling rays a host appears
The singers of the skies, as blazing spheres.

Not so, my King. Behold this glorious sphere,
Where gods at last take all these souls from here.

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A Blast for "Formicology"

"The origin of new terms for old objects may be in part adaptive change: the new terms may express more truly than the old the real nature of the entities. . . . The minting of unnecessary terms probably results also from the relative indifference of some authors to the interests of their readers—not to mention the possibility of their own occasional conceit or vanity" (SCIENCE, 109, 417 [1949]).

Reading the above quotation brought to mind a recent case of counterfeit coinage that has achieved considerable currency. I refer to "formicology," which