

Mail-Order Messiah

Founder of 'Psychiana' Claims Following Of 600,000—All Paying Membership Fees

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FOR more than 40 years Frank B. Robinson, as he says, had been "groping for God." Now, on a night ten years ago, he believed he had the kernel of an idea, needed only time to compose it. It was for that reason he had come to Moscow, Idaho, where, pharmacist that he was, he had found a drug store job in which his evenings would be free.

But, standing there in the rain-puddled streets of the little university city with his wife and young son, he felt discouraged. Let's go back to Yakima, he urged Mrs. Robinson. No, she said firmly, let's stick it out. They did.

Now 'Practically Owns' Idaho Town

Today, in the words of Moscow citizens, Frank B. Robinson "practically owns the town." In addition to the fine building which houses his "religion," Dr. Robinson owns one of the city's daily newspapers, the Moscow News-Review; owns two drug stores and the Robinson professional building, one of the most up-to-date business structures in the area. And his high-gabled brick residence is one of the most comfortable in town.

But all this substantial property—impressive though it is that a drug clerk in his late 30s could have amassed so much in a brief ten years—is comparatively nothing.

It is nothing, that is, compared to Frank Robinson's stake in "Psychiana," his new philosophy, from which this wealth stemmed.

Get the picture. Dr. Robinson claims an international following of 600,000 persons—he said so in a Portland interview two weeks ago when he was addressing audiences in the Shrine auditorium.

Followers Pay Membership Fee

More than half a million adherents, paying membership fees of \$2.50 each, chipping in dues of \$2 a month, buying a \$44 course of study and acquiring books of Psychiana gospel at an average price of \$2.50 a copy.

The figures are staggering, and must be so even for skeptics who might believe the Mail Order Messiah's following to be no more than a half, a fourth or a tenth so large.

And clinching proof that Psychiana's membership must be large lies in the fact that Robinson's mail alone served to raise Moscow from a second-class to a first-class postoffice.

What is this "religion" of Psychiana which—eschewing all such theological trappings as virgin birth, holy ghost, trinity, absolution, confession, atonement, baptism, sacrament, resurrection, etc.—claims to have secured the adherence of thousands?

That, says the doctor, constitutes "the amazing story of Psychiana."

Was Son of Baptist Minister

Robinson's exploration of the unknown, he relates, began when he was scarcely out of diapers. On the lawn of his father's English, pastorate he used to lie peering with infant eyes "beyond the clouds." In his study, his father—Baptist preacher—would be composing his heaven and hell's fire sermons for Sunday to come. But he, toddler though he was, already had begun to detect "some of the glaring inconsistencies" of accepted religion.

Thus began Robinson's search for God, a quest in which he per-



Frank B. Robinson

sisted even after he went fortune-seeking to America, where at 21 he became a qualified pharmacist.

He joined the Salvation Army, renewed relations with the Baptist faith, tried sect after sect of Christianity, psychology, metaphysics, but always he was left with a "feeling of dissatisfaction."

He felt himself no nearer the truth when—some time after his marriage to Pearl, youngest daughter of Klamath Circuit Judge A. L. Leavitt—he came to Portland to work for Frank Nau's drug store.

Doubts Miracles Were Performed

"But I never gave up the search," he says, "and it was right here in this town that I first got my eyes opened. From then on it became merely a matter of finding a job where I would have leisure to compose my thoughts."

That was how he eventually came to Moscow, where late at night in the back room of the

force can be drawn upon at will and used for the accomplishment of every material and spiritual desire. I consider this force God—if you think the word God necessary."

But on the score of how mortals are to detect this force within themselves and put it to work, Messiah Robinson is somewhat vague.

Conceives Idea Of Huge Force

"I can't tell you about the means employed—no more than you can explain how you were born—other than to say Psychiana is God in operation."

But as proof that his followers have been able to tap and utilize this force the doctor offers hundreds of letters testifying to cures ranging from love-sickness to bleeding piles. Ten thousand such missives he has in his office cabinet.

Psychiana, born ten years ago in the back room of an Idaho drug store, has—and there is no denying it—burgeoned astonishingly. Robinson's advertisements appear in 400 newspapers and in 50 magazines; electrical transcriptions of his addresses emanate from 18 radio stations, and 163 agencies in the United States as well as headquarters in Holland, Canada and the Philippines, minister to his 600,000 disciples.

Religious Groups Disapprove Theory

Such figures indicate the scope of Psychiana, and shows how, as Robinson avers, Christian ministers may see cause for alarm.

It is on religious organizations that the Moscow Messiah blames attempts to keep Psychiana programs off the air; three different postal investigations made of the movement, none of which discovered anything worth prosecuting, and persistent efforts of the bureau of immigration to have him deported.

Most serious has been the last "attack."

Robinson claims he was born in the United States, that his parents took him to England in swaddling clothes—but he has no birth certificate to prove it. Whether church adversaries inaugurated the charges or not, in 1935 he was indicted by a federal grand jury meeting in Boise and charged with "falsely stating in a passport application that he was born in New York."

Wins Support From Borah

His acquittal in the following year failed to still the allegation, and he was at once re-arrested on a deportation warrant charging illegal entry. Senator Borah, becoming interested in the case, thereupon interceded with a request that "persecution" of Robinson be discontinued. Impressed, immigration officials dropped the charges, but only after Robinson had gone to Cuba to obtain a new visa in which the controverted data were omitted. Now, however, his status is that of alien, and he has had to apply for citizenship.

Extremely un-Messianic-looking, Frank B. Robinson today still reveals the drug clerk he was for the greater part of his career. Big, blond, blue-eyed and friendly, he is easier to see as the man who sells toothpaste and castor oil than as the prophet of a mundane kingdom of God. He is devoted to his two children; doesn't drink; makes a hobby of motoring, driving powerful cars, currently a Cord, although he previously had a Deussenberg, and in general, despite his wealth, acts much like your Mr. Average American.

Barnum or Savant?

BARNUM or Messiah, who is this man who claims 600,000 converts to his new philosophy, "Psychiana?"

Strange combination of Billy Sunday, Robert Ingersoll and Montgomery Ward, Frank B. Robinson of Moscow, Idaho, has in 12 years risen from struggling drug clerk to leadership of a psycho-religious movement with thousands of adherents in all parts of the world.

This article describes Robinson's philosophy and explains how he achieved it.

drug store he sat at a borrowed Corona and wrote "Psychiana."

In the atheistic vein of Robert Ingersoll, he declared Christ was a myth; that if the Savior had performed the miracles ascribed to him it was remarkable no mention was given them by painstaking Greek and Roman historians of the period; that there were "crucified gods galore," whose stories, almost identical, were told in a score of pagan "bibles," beginning with the ancient Hindoo Vedas, and finally that theologians of the era Anno Domini have been unconsciously deluding their followers with a belief they must die to be blessed.

Thence rises "Psychiana," Robinson's postulate that heaven, for those who seek it, can be reached "here and now" (a sense of immediacy reminiscent of another and better-known "F. R.").

"There is," says Robinson, "an invisible, dynamic force permeating the entire universe, which



At the organ console in his Moscow, Idaho, home

The Sunday