

MAIL-ORDER RELIGION GIVES "MONEY-BACK" GUARANTEE

Former Toronto Druggist Directs "Psychiana" at Moscow, Idaho

WAS IN BELLEVILLE

"Salvation or your money back!" has already brought 17,000 Canadians inside the spiritual tent of Dr. Frank Robinson's "Psychiana." Headquarters of "Psychiana" are at Moscow, Idaho, and in Moscow to-day Dr. Robinson, a former resident of Toronto, told The Star his mail-order religion was something like the Oxford Group.

"The chief difference," he said by telephone, "is that I give every man his money back if he's not satisfied, and the Oxford Group doesn't. Nor does any other religion, for that matter."

"Thirty years ago I attended the Toronto Bible Training School, but I didn't find a true religion until I thought of Psychiana, long after I left Toronto. I'm not interested in the superstitions of 2,000 years ago. To-day's clergymen are not hypocrites, but they have not thought their religion through."

Meanwhile Psychiana has prospered. It did a gross business of \$400,000 in 1934, and currently Dr. Robinson has 60 or 70 employees in Moscow who handle a vast correspondence from the 500,000 people enrolled in 67 countries.

Beginner's Course \$20

A beginner's course of Psychiana, including 20 lessons, costs \$20 with the right to ask Dr. Robinson for personal advice. Advance courses are also offered—10 lessons for \$10 and 40 lessons for \$50.

"I've seen quite a lot of Canada," continued Dr. Robinson from Moscow. "My first job was in a drug store at Belleville, where I played in the Salvation Army band, and then I came on to Toronto, where I worked in another drug store for several years."

"Meanwhile I was studying the origin of all religions without finding anything that satisfied me. I was brought up a Baptist, but I'm no longer one. I've carried on the drug store tradition, however, for here in Moscow I had three drug stores of my own, plus a daily newspaper."

The man in Toronto who best remembers Frank Robinson is J. G. Templeton, for it was at Mr. Templeton's chemist's shop that Dr. Robinson worked while in Toronto.

"Frank was the cleverest assistant I ever had," Mr. Templeton remembered to-day. "It was about 32 years ago that he came to me from my uncle drug store in Belleville. He was about 20 at the time."

"He showed no signs of Psychiana in Toronto. We're still the best of friends and I visited Frank last year in Idaho, but I don't think much of this religion of his. He knows it, too, for I've often told him."

"Had Dynamic Personality"

"He joined the Salvation Army in Toronto and I wouldn't be surprised but that he was in the band, for he beat the drum in Belleville before coming to Toronto. He was born in England, I believe. But Frank had a dynamic personality. There was apparently nothing he couldn't do, and I was sorry to see him leave Toronto and go over to the United States."

Dr. Robinson confirmed the report that he is still a British subject. He ran afoul of the immigration laws a few years ago when he asked for an American passport, but everything is straightened out now and he soon expects to be a naturalized American citizen.

The mixture of psychology and religion which the former Toronto druggist calls Psychiana is not Christianity wrapped up in a new package.

"It is not Christianity at all," explained Dr. Robinson. "My parents pumped hellfire and damnation into me until I was sick."

Yet he did attend the Toronto Bible Training School for a while. "I couldn't say just when I was there," he added, "but it was around 30 years ago. The president of the training school, Dr. Elmore Harris, paid all my expenses for me."

According to Dr. Robinson's own story, Psychiana got its start as an organization when he borrowed \$500 and used \$400 of it to advertise in a psychology magazine. Among the 2,852 replies he received was one from Geoffrey Birley, a cotton importer of Alexandria, Egypt, who mailed him his photograph.

Dreamt About Religion

The former druggist had a dream. He dreamt he saw Birley exclaiming, "This is Psychiana, the power that will bring new life to a spiritually dead world."

He wrote to the cotton broker and asked for \$40,000. Two weeks later half the money was put on deposit in a Spokane bank, and the rest followed in a week. From then on, with this capital as a foundation, Psychiana prospered. Advertisements in 400 newspapers

and 50 magazines keep its message before the public.

Dr. Robinson (the 'doctor' represents a D.D. degree given him by the College of Divine Metaphysics in Indianapolis) has visited President Roosevelt at the White House. Another of his friends is Senator Borah of Idaho, who often stays at his home in Moscow.

And despite his professed dislike of organized Christianity, he often contributes to Christian charities. Yet it was the Christian churches, Dr. Robinson charged, who attempted to stop his broadcasts over 18 radio stations and asked the post-office department if there was not something illegal about mail-order religion.

"Frank's position in Moscow is an amazing one," Mr. Templeton declared. "When I was out there last year he had just given an entire lake to the town for swimming and boating. A little girl was lost in the mountains, and he chartered an aeroplane himself, found her, and brought her back. He's 'it' with the people of Moscow."

Drug Clerk Launched His Money-Back Plan on \$500 Borrowed From a Friend

By RAPHAEL GIBBS
Of The Journal Staff

PROBABLY the only "church" in the world in which you can reach in the "collection box" and get your money back if you don't like the sermon, is operated in Moscow, Idaho, by Frank B. Robinson in the form of a mail order religious outfit.

Everybody who knows him calls him "Doc" and a letter addressed to "Doc" Moscow, Idaho, will not go astray.

He offers "money back if you are not satisfied" with Psychiana, a non-Christian (but godly, he says) religion with more than 500,000 followers in 67 countries.

Behind the rise of this unusual "happiness company" is the story of an unusual man who in telling why he created his own religion says, "My father was a minister of the gospel but I just couldn't stomach the hellfire talk he pumped into me."

In the eight years I lived in Moscow, I watched Doc rise from a drug clerk to a financier. Doc didn't have much money when he started, but he had an idea. He also had convincing ways.

Handsome Salesman

Doc is a tall, handsome, smiling salesman. Typical of his drug clerk days is the story he relates of selling five one-gallon jugs of mineral oil to a man who came into the store wanting only a pint. Doc used that selling power to convince a friend he had an idea that would pay big dividends. The friend loaned him \$500.

Spending \$400 of this for some advertising space in a psychology magazine, Doc used the remaining \$100 to set up shop in a rickety office about 10 feet square. Replies began to come in, and after finishing his work at the drug store, Doc would hustle up to the room and mail out literature half the night. The first advertisement brought

2,852 replies, but it was really the one from Geoffrey Peel Birley, a British cotton importer of Alexandria, Egypt, that counted the most.

Send \$40,000!

Doc was probably a little startled to get a reply from such a distant place. Anyway, he says that that night he saw Birley (who had enclosed his picture with his letter) making mystic motions over a corpse. Birley was saying:

"This is Psychiana, the power that will bring new life to a spiritually dead world."

Doc's reply to the cotton broker was brief and to the point. He wrote:

"You are to be associated with me in this business. Please send \$40,000."

A short time later, Doc got a call from a Spokane (Wash.) bank. Cotton Broker Peel, a hit apologetic for not sending the whole \$40,000 at once, had deposited \$20,000 to Doc's account. The rest would come later, he said.

Doc quit his job at the drug store, and since then his biggest worry has been trying to find enough office space. He rented two more offices adjoining the original one, but they proved inadequate in a few weeks.

Finding Room Big Problem

Next Doc moved into a vacant store building but he had to hire more helpers continually and they were always bumping elbows. The next move was to a two-story building formerly an undertaking parlor. It provided enough space—for a few months.

Irritated, Doc decided to build a large brick home for his "religion." Then, just when the building was completed and skeptics were claiming that Doc had "spread out too much," he sadly announced that the size of the building would have to be doubled. This enlarged structure is the present home of Psychiana.

Before Doc started his enterprise, Moscow, with a population of 5,000 (plus 2,700 students at the University of Idaho), had only a second-class post-office rating. Now the rating is first class, with Doc's firm spending about \$15,000 a year for stamps. The post office employs three men who handle nothing but outgoing Psychiana correspondence. The mail-order firm uses about 5,000,000 envelopes a year. Although there is a heavy influx of mail from parents telling university students that their allowances cannot be increased, Doc receives about one-third of the mail coming to Moscow.

Hauptmann Got His Free

Doc has found comparatively few disciples of his philosophy in the Moscow area but that does not worry him. He draws his followers from the whole world.

Perhaps his most noted correspondent was Bruno Hauptmann, facing trial for his life at Flemington, N. J., in the Lindbergh kidnaping. Hauptmann wrote in his jagged, scrawling handwriting that he was interested in Doc's religion. Doc promptly mailed him the entire course free of charge. The letter was later compared by federal officials with other samples of Hauptmann's handwriting.

With the success of Psychiana, Doc soon turned to other enterprises in the town. Ever since his drugstore days, he had had a hankering to own a drugstore of his own. The one thing of which Moscow had a plentiful supply was drug-

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If You Dislike Doc's 'Religion' You Can Get Your Money Back

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stores, but that did not deter Doc. Just to "do the thing up right," he decided to start, not one, but two drugstores. Recently he added a third exclusive prescription pharmacy in a new office building for doctors and lawyers which he constructed, but it was the original two stores that brought the most action.

Started Drug War

Doc started them off with sales at bargain prices and the town's biggest drug war was declared. One competing druggist posted a sign in his window stating that "if you buy any article from us and find that you can get it cheaper from another store, we will refund your money and let you keep the article." An armistice has since been declared, and all the stores are apparently thriving.

Among Doc's other enterprises is a daily newspaper, which carries no mention of his religion. There was already another, long-established daily paper in town, but that again did not stop Doc. Moscow is now probably the only town of its size in the United States with two daily newspapers. The University of Idaho students also publish a newspaper twice a week.

During the depression, when people were not buying "happiness" much faster than fur coats, rumors circulated that "Doc has bitten off

more than he can chew." Doc always had a sure way of squelching these rumors when they became too strong, however. He would simply buy a new foreign-make car, load it up with gleefully shouting neighborhood kids and drive it around the town.

Doubled Size of Home

Doc's home, where he lives with his wife, son, 9, and daughter, 7, was originally built by civic groups as a model home project and furnished by University of Idaho home economics students. Doc bought the place—"lock, stock and barrel"—then promptly ordered its size doubled. In the basement he had a soundproof room constructed for a large pipe organ, which he frequently plays.

One thing about Doc, he is always open to suggestions. Two years ago someone remarked that "what this town needs is a near-by lake resort." There wasn't a lake within 50 miles, but Doc decided he would fix that. He donated a forest tract, then obtained a WPA grant for construction of an artificial lake. Robinson park has become both a popular summer and winter playground.

Although Doc frequently attacks Christian churches in his literature and lectures, his recent gifts have included an altar for the Episcopal church here.

Awaits Naturalization

Because of his non-Christian theories, Doc has stirred the wrath of many churches. He blames them

for causing the postal department to investigate the legality of Psychiana and for causing him to be tried on charges that he made false statements in attempting to obtain a United States passport.

Doc was acquitted in 1936 on the grounds that he had simply been mistaken about his place of birth and was a British subject instead of an American. He was then arrested on a deportation warrant charging him with illegal entry into the country. Upon intervention of Senator Borah, who is a frequent guest at the Robinson home, the charges were dropped. After taking a trip to Cuba, Doc is now awaiting naturalization.