

Head of Psychiana Began Career as Drug Clerk

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I HAVE TALKED with the man who says he talked with God. He also says that you and I may talk with God, here and now, any time.

If you read the "pulp" magazines you will have guessed by this time that he is Dr. Frank B. Robinson of Moscow, Idaho. You will recognize him as the founder of the mail order, psychology-religion, Psychiana.

Robinson and Psychiana are names to be reckoned with, despite any individual opinion as to the merit of the psycho-religion or the integrity of Dr. Robinson. They have skyrocketed into a position of international prominence, mainly through the unorthodox, startling advertising methods employed by this master mind of a new thought movement.

Typical of Robinson is the breath-taking, doubt-challenging phrase, "I talked with God," with which he heads his advertisements. He places these "ads" before millions at a cost of thousands of dollars a month.

FOLLOWERS:

Run Into Many
Thousands

This man, once a Portland drug clerk, rose with an initial borrowed stake of \$500 from the obscurity of a Moscow drug store prescription room to leadership of the religious movement that has an estimated following of three-quarters of a million persons.

Typical of Robinson is his challenge that he "can start the greatest religious revival the world has ever known" if he can get sufficient funds.

Psychiana, born in the prescription room of the Moscow drug store, written by the drug clerk in spare time, is ten years old. With Psychiana there came to Dr. Robinson the "God power" that lifted him to a position of financial importance in Idaho.

Typical of him is the boast in advertising copy, as a sort of testimonial to the potency of this new "God power," that "I own control of the largest circulating daily newspaper in my county; I own the largest office building in my city; I drive a beautiful limousine; I own my own home, which has a lovely pipe organ in it--"

Robinson is no supine prophet. He attacks vehemently the institution he calls "orthodox religion," says it is built on fear and superstition and that it is decadent. He dispenses this unsolicited advice to churches—"discard this story of Jesus Christ."

Critics call him atheist, charlatan, faker, the modern Barnum of religion. They say he has grown immensely rich at the expense of the gullible.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars pour into the coffers of Psychiana from all corners of the earth. Psychiana is the largest user of the mails in the state of Idaho. The postoffice department conducted four investigations into the business, but Robinson and Psychiana emerged unscathed.

Twice Robinson was haled into court, once on passport fraud charges, in which trial he was acquitted, and again to resist deportation proceedings, which he successfully did. He speaks often of "persecution" and hints that certain churches inspire attacks on him.

To critics he replies that Psychiana is a financial failure. Then he counters with a direct appeal for \$1,000,000 to enable him to send the "message" over the entire world by means of "every newspaper and magazine published and every radio station."

TEN YEARS:

Have Passed Since
First Stake Borrowed

He believes, he says, that "the world is waiting for the man who can bring it a common-sense conception of God," and unblushingly he says he thinks he is that man and Psychiana is that conception.

This is Dr. Frank B. Robinson, who took \$400 of his first borrowed stake ten years ago to give new-born Psychiana its baptism in the advertising pages of a national magazine and saw the dollars roll back in thousands from that bold venture.

Let me say now that I shall not attempt in this article to discover proof of Dr. Robinson's statement that he talked with God. Nor shall I try to analyze Psychiana for its merits or lack of them, nor quarrel with Robinson's followers or critics.

My interest in Robinson and Psychiana was strictly reportorial when I stepped from a Union Pacific train at Moscow one morning at 8:45 o'clock to meet Dr. Robinson by appointment.

He met me at the passenger station. With him was C. W. Tenney, who occupies the position of assistant director of Psychiana.

Robinson is a big man, blond, blue-eyed, cordial; a vital, purposeful sort of man, evidently in robust health. He looks the part of the prosperous business man, chamber of commerce committee chairman, service club member, home town booster. There is nothing in his appearance to suggest that he might be a cult leader, a prophet of a new religion.

Robinson's age is approximately 53. Tenney is 66, according to "Who's Who in America." Graduate of Willamette university and other schools, former president of Montana Wesleyan college and of Gooding college in Idaho and an ordained Methodist minister, Tenney brought to Psychiana his M. A., Ph. B. and LL. D.

Dr. Robinson has three degrees, too, Ph. D., D. D. and D. Litt., but usually uses only the D. D.

BUILDING:

Ranks Well Among
Moscow Structures

Tenney put my bag in Dr. Robinson's big Cadillac. We had breakfast at the hotel. Then Dr. Robinson suggested, to start the day, a tour of the Robinson private enterprises.

We inspected the two-story Robinson professional building which, Dr. Robinson says, cost him more than \$50,000 and is the finest in Moscow. The building supplies fine quarters for Moscow doctors and also houses the Robinson-owned prescription pharmacy.

We visited the plant of the Daily News-Review, housed in its own brick building, a property Robinson estimates to be worth \$75,000. He bought the paper, a weekly operated in another Idaho town, chiefly for its printing plant. The former owner, W. T. Marineau, came along to run the shop in Moscow.

They printed Psychiana literature in growing volume, and put out a weekly paper. Soon the weekly became twice-a-week, then a daily.

We came to Psychiana's own building, a one-story brick which, Robinson said, already is outgrown. It is Psychiana's fifth quarters.

From the hallway a door at the left opens into Dr. Robinson's comfortable study, where he does most of his work. To the right are other offices, for Dr. Tenney, the business manager, secretaries, assistants. In the rear is Psychiana's "work shop," its mailing department, a big circular, revolving table where the lessons are assembled, addressing machines.

This was near the end of Psychiana's "slack" season. Advertising tapers off during summer months, is resumed vigorously in the fall. Then the mail pours in, and out, too. Psychiana headquarters hums like a great bee hive and keeps a staff of 27 to 30 busy mailing and assembling.

In the study, by way of starting the interview, I asked Dr. Robinson to explain his theory of God.

"God is the invisible spirit of life," he said, and then presented it in another way:

"We believe and teach that the invisible life which is in us is the spirit of God dwelling in us, and that all may draw upon that supreme presence for everything needed in this life and in spiritual life forever more."

Psychiana, said he, changes God from an abstract theory to a living, vital power. No longer does God occupy a far-away throne in some mysterious realm in the heavens, but he is here, now, and everyone who becomes aware of his presence may talk with him.

Psychiana rejects in its entirety the story of the nativity, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, spurns it as a pagan myth employed by the Hindu religion 1500 years before the birth of Christ and by many other religions that had similar "crucified gods" of their own.

The fact that any student of Psychiana can talk with God and simplicity are the key-notes of this creed. Especially simplicity. It is quite as simple as the hump in the hairpin, an idea said to have been worth millions to the chap who first stumbled across it.

FIGURES:

Readily Produced
by Robinson

"Let's hear something about the business end of Psychiana," I suggested. He rang for a secretary, demanded records, marshaled figures and offered this:

Psychiana advertising goes into 178 "pulp" magazines that have a reputed circulation of 28,000,000, also into some of the "slicks"; 61 radio stations carried the message in 1938; in October, 1939, advertisements will be carried in 143 newspapers.

Advertising also is carried in seven magazines in England and in others in Canada and in Holland and a foreign branch office is maintained at The Hague.

Psychiana's advertising bill for ten years was \$409,574!

The printing bill in 1938 was approximately \$40,000. Here it should be noted that the Robinson-owned newspaper plant does the printing. Dr. Robinson has described the operation of this plant as "quite profitable."

The 1938 output of printed and multigraphed matter was figured to run 75,000,000 pieces. There are more than 200 separate lessons, pamphlets, leaflets, odds and ends of printed matter. Robinson writes every word.

The combined Robinson and Psychiana interests employ about 60 persons. Even the Moscow postoffice had to add three persons to handle the mail when Psychiana burst into full bloom.

The postage bill in 1938 was more than \$16,000. Figured on the basis of 1-cent permits, that indicates 1,600,000 separate pieces of mail.

Psychiana's lessons are of two major classifications. First group are those offered under the free-will donation plan. The student gives any amount he desires. One rich Californian,

says Dr. Robinson, sends \$500 a month. Not long ago he sent a check for \$20,000. Several years ago a student sent \$40,000 in one sum.

The free-will plan is a money loser despite a few such generous donations, he said. Students pay less than one-third of what they agree, on the average.

LESSONS:

Available in
Different Forms

Second major lesson group are those sold at a definite charge with money-back guarantee. The 20 lessons in "Advanced Teaching No. 1" sell for \$20, fewer lessons in "Advanced Teaching No. 2" for \$10 and 50 lessons in No. 3 for \$40. The combination of the three courses leads to a degree of doctor of divinity, which Dr. Robinson says he is empowered to grant under his Idaho charter.

Figuring that two in each family reads the lessons, books and various other items of study, Dr. Robinson estimates that Psychiana has dealt directly with 722,875 persons.

Why, with this amazing volume of lessons pouring out, money pouring in and advertising and radio programs ceaselessly questing for more, does not Psychiana make money? Why is not Robinson the modern Croesus he is often painted? I asked these questions.

"Because Psychiana is a non-profit religious organization. Because, under its charter, no one draws one cent of profits or dividends.

"I take a salary, \$750 a month, and necessary expenses, nothing more. My friends and I have put \$110,000 of private money into the movement. My personal investment in Psychiana is more than \$50,000. Why, we've lost more than a thousand dollars a month this year. I'll show you—"

LOSSES:

Claimed by
Psychiana's Founder

He rang for a secretary, asked for a "profit and loss statement" and offered me these figures revealing Psychiana's financial operations between the dates December 31, 1938, and August 1, 1939:

Income—	
Psychiana courses	\$13,207.51
Books	1,893.96
Magazines	380.35
Miscellaneous items	1,185.26
Monthly pledges and contributions	28,327.97
Campaign accounts, free-will donations	1,336.85
Total income	\$46,331.90
Expenses—	
Advertising, printing, postage, etc.	\$44,809.44
Executive salary to Dr. Robinson	5,250.00
Legal expenses	2,191.60
Donations	235.00
Depreciation	1,954.12
Miscellaneous expenses	38.62
Refunds	67.17
Bad checks returned	10.50
Total expenses	\$54,556.45
Loss	8,224.55

Robinson Enterprise Declared a Money- Losing Business

AUTHOR:

Robinson Writes
His Own Copy

Not all of Dr. Robinson's advertising brings home the bacon, although he is recognized as something of an advertising genius because of the forcefulness of his appeals. He paid \$700 for one newspaper ad making a direct appeal for new students and immediately got back \$1400 worth of responses. In a later ad of identical cost he attempted to tell something about Psychiana, abandoned the direct appeal method, and his gross return was but a few dollars.

Until this year he used the heading, "Man Can Now Talk With God," for all his ads. An advertising man said: "Doc, don't you think you ought to give us some new copy?"

He sat down at a desk, wrote "I Talked With God," and composed the text of his present standard ad copy. The first insertion under that heading, ten inches in a big newspaper, brought more than 2000 responses.

He says he never has found any professional writer who can prepare ad copy for him, so he writes all his own. He has written every word of the more than 200 lessons, those in the free-will group prepared for eight years in advance.

He has written 12 books, his latest "Gleams Over the Horizon," 328 pages, printed in Portland, price \$3. He writes his own speeches, his talks for records and radio electrical transcriptions, and writes all the copy for the Psychiana Quarterly magazine.

TENNEY:

Answers Most
of the Letters

He writes some letters and telegrams to students who ask his aid in times of trouble and sickness, but that is chiefly Dr. Tenney's job now, and it keeps Tenney pretty busy. They estimate that they have 150,000 testimonials from all over the world testifying to miracles in restoration of health and happiness through contact with the "God Power."

His proudest boast is that Psychiana was received into 67 countries in its first year. His files, he says, show that the lessons go to students in more than 12,000 towns and cities in the United States.

Another world war, Dr. Robinson believes, will prepare the people all over the globe for a new religion. He must, and says he will, be ready to meet that opportunity when conflict becomes universal.

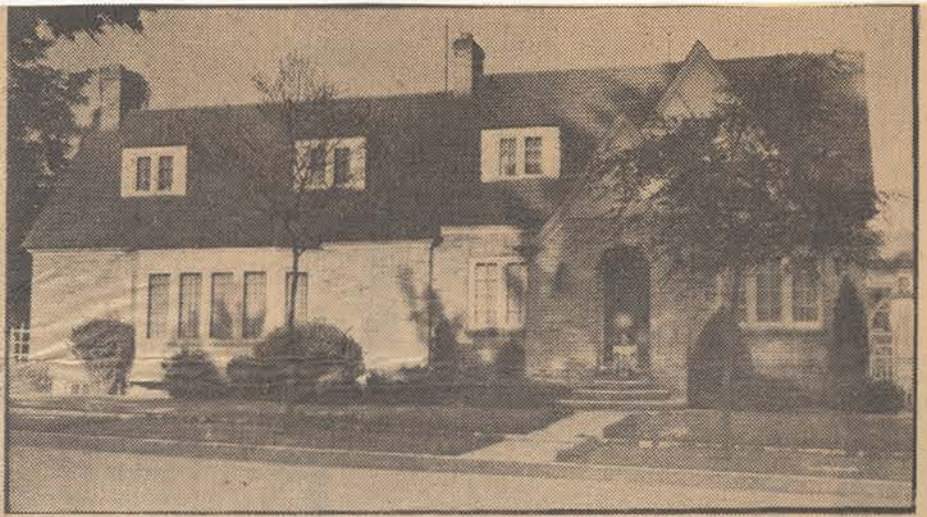
I had a brief glimpse of the Robinson home life, dinner at the fine brick home, a peep into the doll house of 8-year-old Florence. Both Dr. Robinson and Alfred, high school athlete, played for me on the pipe organ in the Robinson home. Mrs. Robinson, who is active in lodge work, was not home that day.

Robinson, senior, has composed music in past years, makes a hobby of the pipe organ. Alfred, 16, he says, has talent, is the real musician of the family now.

So I leave Dr. Robinson and Psychiana with the conviction, as when I met them, that despite personal opinions, they are factors to be reckoned with in more ways than one.



"He looks the part of a prosperous business man, chamber of commerce committee chairman, service club member, home town booster."



The fine brick home of Dr. Frank B. Robinson, head of Psychiana, in Moscow, Idaho. It boasts a pipe organ, which is one of Dr. Robinson's hobbies.



Names of thousands upon thousands of Psychiana followers are kept in business-like files in Psychiana's one-story headquarters building.



Dr. C. W. Tenney, above, an ordained Methodist minister and one-time head of Montana Wesleyan college and of Gooding college in Idaho, is Dr. Robinson's chief assistant in directing the work.



In one year some 75,000,000 pieces of printed matter, lessons, pamphlets, leaflets and odds and ends of printed matter went through the mail desk at left. Psychiana is said to be the largest user of the mails in Idaho.