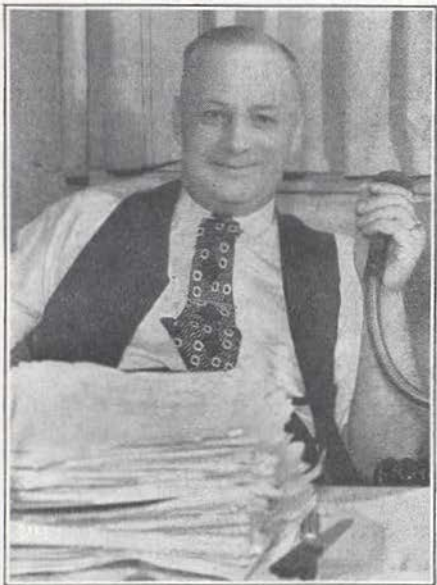


Money-Back Religion

Ten years ago in Moscow, Idaho, a tall, husky, smooth-talking drug clerk named Frank Bruce Robinson borrowed \$500 from a friend, spent \$400 of it to buy some advertising space in a psychology magazine. Reared in the Baptist Church, Frank Robinson had recanted his Christian beliefs, had acquired certain ideas on religious psychology which he wished to teach. His advertisement brought 2,852 replies, one from a British cotton importer of Alexandria, Egypt named Geoffrey Peel



FRANK BRUCE ROBINSON

He vomited hellfire.

Birley, who sent Robinson his photograph. That night Drug Clerk Robinson dreamed he saw Birley making mystic motions over a corpse, thought he heard him saying: "This is Psychiana, the power that will bring new life to a spiritually dead world." Next day the drug clerk wrote the cotton broker: "You are to be associated with me in this business. Please send \$40,000." Fortnight later, a bank in Spokane, Wash.

informed Robinson that \$20,000 had been deposited to his account, that Mr. Birley promised \$20,000 more the following week.

As Frank Robinson, now 52, is frank to admit, such a story "makes me sound nuts." Nevertheless he tells it to explain the founding of Psychiana, a non-Christian (but godly), mail-order religion which has enrolled between 500,000 and 600,000 people in 67 countries, and which is probably the only faith in the world which guarantees "money back if you are not satisfied." As a mail-order gospel, propagated by advertising (in 400 newspapers, 50 magazines), Psychiana passed a milestone last week when Founder Robinson motored from Moscow to Portland, Ore., placed an order for 5,000,000 envelopes—a year's supply—and announced a new policy which will make Psychiana more like a church. Half a million letters will shortly go out to Psychiana students throughout the world informing them how to organize study groups (resembling religious congregations) in their cities.

Where Frank Bruce Robinson was born he does not know. He used to think it was New York, where he was brought up, and whence he ran away at 14, when his British father married a second wife. Next he became a licensed pharmacist in Belleville, Ont., beat the bass drum in the local Salvation Army. The president of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont., helped him through that institution and its Bible Training School. Ordained a Baptist minister in Toronto, Robinson received a D.D. and doctorate in psychology from the College of Divine Metaphysics in Indianapolis. Beyond teaching Sunday school and helping at evangelistic meetings while earning his living as a druggist, "Doc" Robinson (as his friends now call him) never preached, soon came to disbelieve Christian doctrine. Said he: "My parents pumped hellfire and damnation into me until I was sick. I just vomited it up." He declares today that Heaven can be reached "here and now," that Psychiana is "God in operation." That this God-force can be utilized by people living moral lives is Doc Robinson's chief current thesis, and he has 10,000 letters in his files from people who believe they have drawn upon Psychiana's "mighty, never-failing power" to cure everything from lovesickness to bleeding piles.

Moscow, seat of the University of Idaho, population 5,000, was a second-class post-office town when Doc Robinson settled there. It has jumped to first class, Psychiana having sent out more & more mail—\$14,852.63 worth last year. A beginners' Psychiana course of 20 lessons costs \$20, includes an examination and the right to ask Doc Robinson for personal advice. (On a typical day last week he voiced 387 replies by dictaphone, which three stenographers took down.) Advanced courses of ten and 40 lessons cost respectively \$10 and \$50. Sending these out keeps 60 Psychiana employes busy. The firm also markets eleven Psychiana textbooks, costing from \$1.59 to \$2.50—although Founder Robinson's business aids wondered last week if sales might not slump when Psychiana students form groups, share their books. Biggest Psychiana gross to date was \$400,000 in 1934.

Frank Robinson says that at a visit to the White House a year ago President

Roosevelt told him: 'Doc, you and I are trying to do the same thing: make people think.' A top-notch salesman, Doc Robinson has never forgotten how, in his behind-the-counter drugstore days, he once sold five one-gallon jugs of mineral oil to a man who came in to buy a pint. Besides its own building in Moscow, Psychiana owns three drugstores, a daily paper, the *News-Review*. An accomplished organist, the founder has an 800-pipe Wurlitzer in his big Moscow home, invariably includes organ solos (preferably Brahms) in his infrequent lectures. Though in those lectures Doc Robinson is inclined to blast the Christian churches, thus annoying many of his hearers, he has Christian charities at home—last year he gave a new altar to Moscow's Episcopal church.

To the Christian churches Doc Robinson ascribes blame not only for attempts in the past to have his transcribed radio programs (from 18 stations) put off the air, and to have the Post Office Department find something illegal about Psychiana, but also for the fact that he was indicted and tried on charges that he made false statements in attempting to obtain a U. S. passport. He was acquitted in 1936. Doc Robinson, who, it turned out, had simply been mistaken about his birth—he is actually a British subject—was then arrested on a deportation warrant charging him with illegal entry into the U. S. Upon intervention of Idaho's Senator Borah, who stays at the Robinson home when in Moscow, the charge was dropped. His status regularized by a trip to Cuba last summer, from which he returned on an immigration visa, Doc Robinson is currently awaiting naturalization papers.