

The Shepherd of Moscow, Idaho

By John Kobler

Psychiana is both a business and a religion. Its founder, Dr. Frank B. Robinson, has put his home town on the world map and himself in clover. And it all began with a little chat with God

OF ALL the formulas for quick victory, perhaps the most original—certainly the one involving the least bother—is known as the American Fifth Column. It promises Hitler's collapse in a twinkling, and the only effort required consists of intoning the following rubric three times a day: *The unseen forces of God are bringing about the speedy defeat of the Axis.*

The genius behind this strategy is Doctor Frank Bruce Robinson, who for fourteen years has been selling a spiritual cure-all called Psychiana. Doc, who claims frequently he chats with God, circulates thousands of pink post cards pledging people to join his mystical blitzkrieg. The post cards also carry a plug for Psychiana, and replies to them augment Doc's files of prospective customers.

"If ten per cent of the population belonged to the American Fifth Column," he figures, "the war would end overnight. As it is, I have thirty-five hundred signatures and I'm not sure that won't do it. Ever since the movement started, the Axis has taken a beating."

To the high priest of a cult with 2,000,000 followers and a fat annual gross, winning a war overnight is difficult only in degree. Take Doc himself. In his buckeye ads, now appearing in 700 newspapers and 86 magazines, he proclaims:

I TALKED WITH GOD

(Yes, I did—actually and literally)

... Before I talked with God, I was perhaps the world's No. 1 failure ... and now?—well, I own control of the largest afternoon daily newspaper in North Idaho. I own the largest office building in my city. I drive two beautiful cars. I own my home, which has a lovely pipe organ in it, and my family are provided for after I'm gone. ...

And that isn't all. The unseen forces, manifesting themselves through Doc, so he reports, have enabled him to summon his dog through two locked doors, to cause goldfish to leap in and out of their bowl, and to discuss politics with his mother, who's been dead for forty-eight years.

Among its other distinctions, Psychiana is the only mail-order religion in the world. It guarantees satisfaction within 45 days or your money back. Specifically, it purveys a series of 20 lessons in how to talk with God at \$28 (\$8 off for cash); three advanced courses at \$10, \$40 and \$100; fifteen books at \$1 to \$5; one-dollar Psychiana emblems, and 40-cent phonograph records with Doc talking on one side and playing the organ on the other.

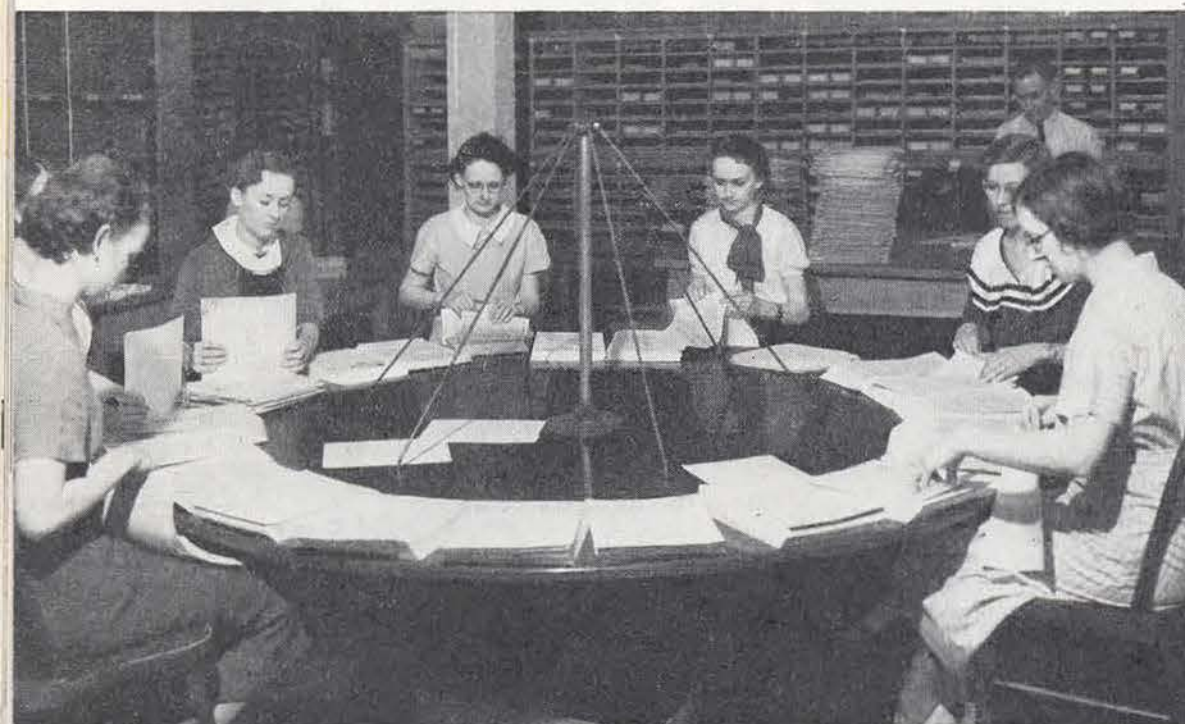
Boiled down to essentials, this multimillion-word gospel preaches the literal existence on earth of a Power, variously called the Great Without, the God-law, the Living God, and sometimes just plain God. Anybody can use it to attain his heart's desire. All he has to do is to believe in it. To set the Power in motion, Doc prescribes a set of simple, Coué-like exercises. For example, you repeat 30 to 100 times, "The Living God is making me whole." Then, *jump suddenly to your feet* and say three times out loud the same statement, clenching your fists at the same time.

"You will have a 'flash' from the skies, one might say, and you will be supremely happy, I assure you," Doc maintains, adding cautiously, "I cannot say to you definitely when this experience will come—maybe months or years."

As proof, he cites testimonials from "students." A St. Louis housewife attributes a whole sequence of little family miracles to the Power: "Before, my (Continued on page 62)



Dr. Frank Bruce Robinson in a moment of repose, "catching spiritual impulses." Out of his "talks with God" has developed a profitable religion, Psychiana. It has paid the doc off handsomely, including his pride and joy, the 700-pipe organ, on which he makes recordings to sell to his followers



Psychiana requires a staff of twenty-three, and a mechanically rotating table, to assemble the 25,000,000 pieces of literature mailed annually. Doc Robinson, dictating, thinks best in his shirt sleeves. He promises students a "flash from the skies;" carefully refrains from saying how soon



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No unpleasant Scrubbing! Cleans Toilets FAST!

For over 30 years, Sani-Flush has been the quick, easy, sanitary way to keep toilet bowls sparkling-clean. Use it at least twice a week. Every application cleans away recurring toilet germs and a cause of toilet odors. Removes unsanitary film.

Don't confuse Sani-Flush with ordinary cleansers. It works chemically. Even cleans the hidden trap. When used according to directions on the can—Sani-Flush cannot injure septic tanks* or their action and is absolutely safe in toilet connections. Sold everywhere. Two convenient sizes.



*FREE for Septic Tank Owners

Septic tank owners don't have to scrub toilets, either! Tests by eminent research authorities show how easy and safe Sani-Flush is for toilet sanitation with septic tanks. For free copy of their scientific report, write: The Hygienic Products Company, Dept. Z7, Canton, Ohio.

Sani-Flush CLEANS TOILET BOWLS WITHOUT SCOURING

WAKE UP YOUR LIVER BILE —

Without Calomel—And You'll Jump Out of Bed in the Morning Rarin' to Go

The liver should pour out two pints of liquid bile onto the food you swallow every day. If this bile is not flowing freely, your food may not digest. You get constipated. You feel sour, sunk and the world looks punk.

It takes those good, old Carter's Little Liver Pills to get these 2 pints of bile flowing freely to make you feel "up and up." Get a package today. Take as directed. Effective in making bile flow freely. Ask for Carter's Little Liver Pills. 10¢ and 25¢.



SAVE BLADES WITH DURHAM RAZOR AND STROP

A Durham hollow-ground blade is twice thicker. Takes almost unlimited stropplings. Saves steel for war, saves money for you. Gives you grand shaves every time.

Durham Razor and Strop Kit, \$2.50, at drug-stores. For Strop only, order direct, \$1.

SERVICE MEN: Order thru Post Exchange. DURHAM-ENDERS RAZOR CORP., Dept. P, MYSTIC, CONN. Also makers of Enders Speed Shaver

husband wore glasses for his work, now he does not. Tom was fixing the electric socket. Something went wrong. He forgot to turn the electric switch off. All of a sudden, fire sprang up, touching his hand and hair. He was surprised to find the fire was cold."

Other letters tell of blind men restored to sight, the dead raised, businesses saved from bankruptcy. Doc offers \$100,000 to anybody who can prove these testimonials spurious.

Despite frequent investigation by federal agencies, Psychiana flourishes as lustily as Father Divine or Jehovah's Witnesses. It has students in sixty-seven countries, and Doc claims many of them in high places, notably the late Senator Borah of Idaho, a warm personal admirer. During a visit to the White House, Doc reports, President Roosevelt told him, "You and I are trying to do the same thing—make people think."

At fifty-six, Doc Robinson is a beefy, handsome man, standing six feet and weighing 225 pounds. His eyes are lake-blue, his hair iron-gray, and he has the look of a tired matinee idol. His fondness for dramatic, broad-brim hats adds a touch of the Old West medicine man.

Doc's excursion into mysticism started at a remarkably tender age. "At three, I peered beyond the clouds," he recalls. "I knew I had a mission to perform." The years between this precocious discovery and his emergence as a mail-order messiah, however, were earthy ones. He was born in Stratford-on-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace, the oldest of four boys. His father, Reverend John Henry Robinson, was a hell-fire and brimstone Baptist preacher, whom Doc describes as a hard man, given to jumping up and down on his children for discipline.

Mrs. Robinson died when Frank was eight. Soon after, his father married a fetching young lady of his parish named Haigh, who turned out to have an equally picturesque temperament. One day, in revolt, the future prophet knocked her flat. His father ordered him to join the British navy and he wound up at fourteen on the training ship Caledonia.

Just Like an Alger Hero

Disliking nautical life, he jumped overboard, hoping to contract a dischargeable illness. He succeeded with rheumatism. Rather than keep him around the house, the Robinsons shipped him, steerage, to Canada.

Landing with \$2.50 in his pockets, Doc began a Horatio Algerlike economic struggle.

"I was tossed hither and thither like a piece of driftwood on the bosom of the stormy ocean of life," he says.

He turned his hand to pitching hay, logging, beating a Salvation Army drum and collecting dead horses for a glue factory. In Toronto he worked as a drug clerk. His most useful asset, salesmanship, showed itself when he persuaded a customer who wanted an ounce of mineral oil to buy five gallons.

Dropping in of an evening on local Baptist gatherings, Doc occasionally delivered impromptu sermons, Billy Sunday style.

"I can hold an audience spellbound as long as I care to," he says.

One listener was so spellbound that he offered to pay Doc's tuition through the Bible Training School in Toronto. He was duly ordained to the Baptist minis-

try, but in the process, he concluded that Baptist theology was false. He has since extended this opinion to all other religions except Psychiana, flaying them in purple language.

Disillusioned, Doc quit before completing his Bible training and launched himself on an extended beer jag. In a lucid interval, he joined the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, but he was ousted for chronic alcoholism. The U. S. Navy, in which he served as Hospital Apprentice, First Class, discharged him for the same reason. He next tried the Army, serving briefly in the Philippines. He was court-martialed for "willful disobedience of orders."

In 1928, Doc was drug-clerking again, this time in Portland, Oregon. He had meanwhile married Pearl Leavitt, the daughter of a circuit judge. They have a son, Alfred, now a Naval flying cadet, and a daughter, Florence. It was in Portland that the gates of salvation suddenly swung wide to Doc.

"Singing to myself," he relates, "I lay down on the bed and closed my eyes. I was always 'talking with God,' as my advertisement states. . . . I saw everything in a flash."

Regenerated, he went on the wagon for keeps.

To find leisure to preserve this revela-

tion for posterity and earn a living at the same time, he cast about for a job in a drugstore which closed early. Six P.M. was closing time for the Corner Drugstore in Moscow, a tidy little farming community of 6,000 people, nestling amid the pine groves and wheat fields of the Wasatch foothills. The Robinsons arrived by the next train, and Doc cinched the job at \$15 a week.

It was a year of great psychic ferment in America. Father Divine's Heaven in Sayville, Long Island, was overflowing with angels. In Los Angeles, a man named Dingle was selling something called Mentalphysics as transcribed by the Tibetan sage, Ding Le Ming. And in a Moscow boardinghouse, Doc Robinson composed the first ten installments of his correspondence course in salvation.

A Prolific Author

Borrowing a typewriter, he pounded them out, 150,000 words all told, in three days and rushed them to the printer. The result was a lively brew of Buck Rogers science, historical fallacies and violent attacks on existing religions.

Fellow citizens of Moscow referred to Doc as "that druggist who's cracked." Undaunted, he formed a corporation and sold stock around town with the promise of quick profits. His own capital at this time was \$40. Five investors advanced \$2,500. A clear manifestation of the Power, Doc feels. With \$400 of it, he placed his first ad in Psychology, a pulp magazine. It fetched \$24,000 worth of customers, the first orders arriving on April Fools' Day. Doc opened a one-room office of his own.

He still lacked a name for the movement. Confident that the Power would reveal it in the night, he retired, pad and pencil at his bedside. Sure enough, he testifies, a man appeared in his dreams, making mystic passes over a corpse and murmuring, "This is Psychiana, the Power which will bring new life to a spiritually dead world."

Not long after, Doc, whose practice it was to swap photographs with new subscribers, recognized, in the morning mail, the man of his dream. The name was Geoffrey Birley, a British cotton importer of Alexandria, Egypt, and he wrote: "I received Lesson 4 yesterday. . . . No words of mine can adequately express the glorious thrill it gave me."

Doc promptly replied: "You are to be associated with me in business. Please send \$40,000."

Two weeks later, the Spokane Eastern Trust Company informed him that half that sum had been deposited to his credit. The balance followed in smaller amounts. Doc doesn't know where Birley is now.

Within a year of the Birley apparition, Psychiana was booming. Doc bought back the stock, paying the investors 112 per cent on their original stake. He then obtained from the state of Idaho a charter certifying Psychiana as a nonprofit, religious corporation. Under this happy concession, it remains tax-exempt. Its surplus reverts to the corporate treasury, while Doc's personal withdrawals are limited to a salary, as president, and expenses—in what amount a board of directors fixes at its discretion. This board consists of Doc himself, Mrs. Robinson and Bill Marineau, an old family friend. In 1942, it approved a salary of \$9,000, \$3,000 expenses and a \$4,000 car.

Today, Psychiana, Inc., is a major Moscow industry. The corporation has

BOOKS FOR OUR FIGHTING MEN

The "readingest army in the world" (to quote a high-ranking officer) is sorely in need of books. That's why the 1943 Victory Book Campaign has been organized—to see that our fighting men get the books they will enjoy. Not all a soldier's or sailor's time is spent drilling or fighting; he has plenty of leisure time on his hands when an amusing or instructive book can be a godsend.

What kind of books do soldiers, sailors, Marines, coastguardmen and merchant seamen read? The same kind of books you read. They want adventure yarns, novels, topical books by war correspondents, Westerns, mysteries, biographies; books by Sinclair Lewis, Pearl Buck, John Steinbeck, Ernest Haycox, Agatha Christie.

You can't expect a man headed for combat duty to take a feverish interest in the State Papers of Grover Cleveland or the Ladies' Guide to Home Needlework. Don't make this Victory Book Campaign an excuse to clean your attic of those tired-looking, dusty books no one has looked at since the turn of the century. If you've enjoyed a book, that's the book to give.

You will find boxes in libraries, stores, theaters. Fill them with books and fill them wisely. You never can tell what will happen when your book joins the fighting forces.



its own international headquarters, a red brick, factory-size building staffed by 23 employees, its own printing plant, the heaviest private pay roll in the county, and an annual advertising bill of \$150,000. Donations from the faithful have swollen the gross take by some \$200,000.

"Remember the Movement in your will," Doc urges hopefully.

In new customers last year, he counted about \$197,000 worth. Of these, half signed up for one or more of the three "advanced courses," another \$129,000. Sales of Doc's books, Psychiana emblems and phonograph records brought the grand total to around \$400,000, and Doc expects to double that in 1943.

Psychiana aside, Doc's personal holdings aggregate half a million. His bank credit is high and by shrewd borrowing he has acquired a forty per cent interest in Moscow's only newspaper, the Daily Idahonian, a prescription pharmacy, an office building renting to doctors and dentists, and numerous minor properties. A sizable portion of his income he devotes to local good works.

The Enemies of Psychiana

Such heights are not scaled without reverses, and Doc's have been extensive. He blames most of them on a sinister cabal of church leaders and envious businessmen, who, he feels, are chiefly responsible for the numerous investigations of Psychiana by the Treasury Department, the Post Office Department, the F.B.I. and the American Medical Association, to name a few.

"But they can't get anything on me," he says confidently. "My ads never claim anything for Psychiana—only for the Living God."

Less easily dismissed was a federal indictment in 1936, charging him with passport falsification. A few years earlier, preparatory to a European junket, he had given America instead of England as his birthplace. In a nine-day trial, Moscow's biggest sensation since the last Indian massacre, Doc testified that his parents once lived in New York and gave him to understand he'd been born there. Why they so misled him puzzled the jury, but it acquitted him.

No sooner was he free, however, than the Immigration Department opened deportation proceedings. Doc was saved by his most distinguished student, Senator Borah, at whose intervention a review board worked out a compromise. Doc agreed to reside outside the country temporarily, to re-enter on a visa and apply for naturalization. Only last year did the

prophet finally become a full-fledged American citizen.

In the face of Doc's bounty, Moscow has taken a mellower view of him. It regards his teachings with amused tolerance (Psychiana's files contain only nine Moscow students), but on Doc as a citizen, opinion is evenly divided. Many are inclined to endorse his boast: "Moscow was unknown. It is known all over the civilized world today."

The prophet's day begins at 5:30 A. M., when he bounds out of bed to breakfast with Mrs. Robinson, a comely, silvery-haired woman who considers her husband a "soul from beyond." He reaches his office by seven. It is a snug, lushly carpeted room, plastered with morale boosters like: WHEN YOU GET INTO A TIGHT PLACE AND EVERYTHING GOES AGAINST YOU TILL IT SEEMS AS IF YOU CAN'T HOLD ON A MINUTE LONGER, NEVER GIVE UP THEN, FOR THAT IS JUST THE PLACE WHERE THE TIDE WILL TURN.

Doc, who has been in plenty of tight places, keeps a sound-recording system behind the paneling. "I have many interesting conversations in my private files," he confides.

At least two hours a day Doc spends behind his locked office door, thinking. "I am a natural-born thinker," he says. As an aid to meditation, he burns incense and plays organ recordings on the phonograph.

Across the hall, stands the accounting room, where two girls total the day's receipts and dump them into a cannonball safe. In the mailing room, another team sits at a mechanically rotating table, assembling packets of literature. Anybody who answers a Psychiana ad, customer or not, gets 67 separate pieces over a period of 22 weeks. They total 25,000,000 mailings a year, an opulence which has lifted Moscow's post office from second to first class. Not until the 67th mailing fails to take does Doc abandon his prospect as spiritually irredeemable.

It is in these promotional follow-ups that the prophet, a master of upper-case, gee-whizz prose, really spreads himself.

"Have you seemed as a piece of flotsam or jetsam in life's troubled sea?" he asks in blood-red letters half an inch high. "The most significant discovery of the age IS WHAT? . . . It's POWER. DYNAMIC—PULSING—SURGING—THROBING. POWER to achieve anything you want . . . poverty to abundance . . . sickness into health . . . miserable defeat into marvelous success. I have CHANGED THE LIVES OF thousands."

One of the world's most prolific writers, Doc personally types, hunt-and-peck

system, every syllable of these rousers, not to mention the lessons, the books and the advertising copy. Averaging 5,000 words a day, he has worn his index fingers to the nub and now tapes them when working. He never revises anything and consults neither lawyers nor ghost writers.

He also used to answer personally the telegrams requesting help which pour in regularly from ailing students. This duty now occupies his assistant, an excommunicated minister of doleful countenance named De Bolt, who receives \$50 a week for his efforts. Formerly, De Bolt would consult a collection of sixty form replies suitable to every emergency, lest he involve the corporation in an indiscretion. But now Doc trusts him to compose his own replies.

DOWN WITH BACK. PLEASE HELP, reads an appeal from Nevada. To this De Bolt wired back: EXPECT SPIRIT OF GOD TO HELP. WILL REMEMBER SPIRITUALLY.

When not meditating or writing, Doc concentrates on the corporation's business problems. With Lesson No. 3, the flow of spirituality is interrupted by a practical note: "Do not let a single remittance lapse, as you cannot expect the God-law to work unless everything you do is honest and straight. Don't break the LAW."

Doc bombards laggards with a series of thirteen dun letters, each one rising in emotionalism. No. 13 kisses dead beats goodby in these words: "Now in parting I wish you the very best of everything. I question if many good things will come to you. For, you will remember, the Law of God never forgets. I wish you peace. I wish you joy. I wish you happiness. I do not believe these things CAN EVER come to you for the reasons stated before. If you ever feel that you want to square this account . . ."

In extreme cases he has used collection agencies.

A Prophet in Shirt Sleeves

Doc usually gets home for supper around six and immediately strips to his shirt sleeves. The Robinson house, a Moscow landmark, is a glossy, nine-room structure, verging on modernism. It is crammed with gifts from students. One of the costliest features is a burglar-alarm system which he installed after somebody heaved a brick at him through the window.

"Crackpots have often threatened my life," he says. To protect himself, he keeps a deputy sheriff's badge, a Colt police special and a tear-gas pen.

Every evening at nine, he sits down to a 700-pipe organ, his pride and joy, and plays by ear. His favorite selection is Tales From the Vienna Woods.

"Do you catch the spiritual impulses?" he asks students. "Try listening for them."

As befits a "soul from beyond," he avoids social life, going out only Monday nights for the weekly Rotary Club get-togethers. His only intimate friend is Bill Marineau, who manages the Idahonian. He hasn't seen a movie in two years, takes no exercise whatever, and confines his recreational reading pretty much to pulp detective fiction.

After listening to a ten o'clock news broadcast, he prepares for bed by drinking coffee, always out of the saucer. Should the few visitors, whom Mrs. Robinson occasionally invites, overstay this limit, Doc is likely to start undressing in the living room.

"Some people think I'm a roughneck," he says.

The prophet no longer observes the Psychiana ritual before retiring.

"I have passed beyond that stage," he explains. "I just think."

THE END