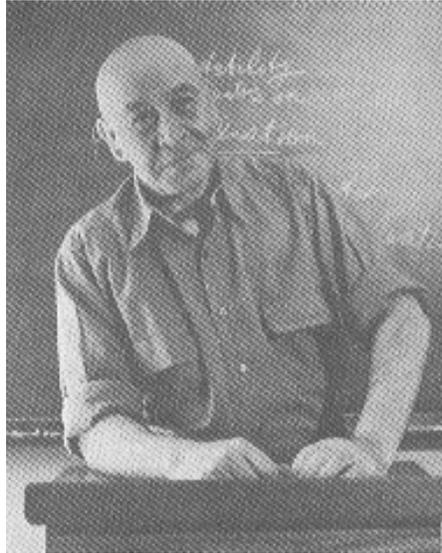


Alfred Habdank Skarbek Korzybski A Biographical Sketch

by Charlotte Schuchardt Read

(Provided courtesy of the [Institute of General Semantics](#))



The world into which [Alfred Korzybski](#) was born on July 3, 1879, in Warsaw, Poland, was stirring under the weight of oppressions, and the impacts of new outlooks. Repeated partitions of Poland by the Austrians, Prussians and Russians had only intensified the nationalistic feelings of the Poles, and in Warsaw they were chafing under the rule of Czar Alexander II; Emperor Franz Joseph in Vienna was reigning over his Hapsburg Empire; the philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Hegel had seeped into the fabric of cultures; fired by Marx and Engels, workers were rebelliously, surreptitiously, banding together; only twenty years earlier Darwin's *The Origin of Species* had begun a storm of controversy in England; and there was feverish activity in science, as a revolutionary new era led by Faraday, Bunsen, Maxwell, etc., was breaking ground and laying the foundations for the even greater discoveries to come.

Alfred Vladislavovich Habdank Skarbek Korzybski was the son of (Nobleman) Ladislav Korzybski and (Countess) Helena Rzewuska. His father was an admirer of British customs, hence the name "Alfred". The Habdanks or Skarbes, his father's family, were one of the original Polish *comites* (from the Latin *comes*: overseer, teacher ... scholar, noble youth, etc. ... one of the imperial court). The legend about the origin of this family name goes back some four centuries to the time when there was a problem of war or peace between a German prince and a Polish prince. One of his ancestors was sent as an envoy to the German prince, who arrogantly took him underground and, showing him a vault of gold, said, "With this we will beat you." The envoy replied by taking his ring off his finger, flinging it into a barrel of gold, and saying, "Go gold to gold, we will beat you with iron!" The German prince was amazed and said, "thank you" (*habe dank*). When the Polish envoy returned to Poland and the gesture became known, he was given the name "Skarbek" ("skarb", "treasure"), with the crest "Habdank", a flattened barrel. A war followed and the Poles won.

The surname of Korzybski is derived from the name of the estate of Korzybie, the suffix "ski" being comparable to "of", or the French "de".

Alfred Korzybski was the second child in the family, and the nursery had already been established for his sister,

about two years older. As a baby, he was unusually quiet. "My friends will never believe me today, but I was born silent," he used to say. "I didn't cry; I just looked around." For half of each day there was a French governess, for the other half a German governess. Learning these two languages, besides Russian, used in all public places, and Polish, taught in schools in the Russian language, was significant to him in his later work. There were no other children in the family, and according to the prevailing custom, the son of the gardener was chosen as a playmate. Alfred had no toys except tools, or bits of material that he found and made into playthings. He watched the blacksmiths, the horses, the cattle and the workers on the family country estate of Korzybie near Warsaw. He accompanied his mother when she traveled to the baths of Europe -- Karlsbad, Franzenbad, etc. When he was five years old, his father, an engineer with the rank of General in the Ministry of Communication, and a lover of mathematics and physics, gave him the *feel* of the differential calculus, the mathematical way of thinking, an outlook which was so profoundly to influence his life.

Korzybie was considered a model farm, to which the United States Department of Agriculture sent representatives for study. His father had devised new methods of agriculture, contour plowing, irrigation systems, etc., and had written a book on "Agriculture Amelioration". That part of Poland ("flatland") was agriculturally handicapped by a cold clay undersoil. The tax imposed by the Russian government on the landed aristocracy, paid in this case in potato alcohol, was such that the estate had to be carefully and penuriously managed -- each potato mattered, each pig or hide of cow. With his father often at the Court in St. Petersburg (now Leningrad) or traveling, young Alfred had to assume the duties of supervising the farming activities. The peasants loved the "little master" ("golden hands") some called him. He in turn looked after them, advised them, was their 'doctor' when there was no medical help available for many hours, etc.

At harvest time soldiers from nomadic tribes, Cossaks, etc., and the various areas of Czarist Russia were hired to help, and in his school uniform he learned how to handle them under stern discipline, gaining also some insight into the psychology of socio-cultural differences.

While attending school he seldom studied his homework, but sat in the front row listening attentively to what the teacher had to say, trying to grasp the subject as a whole. At his father's urging he was trained as a chemical engineer at the Polytechnic Institute in Warsaw. But privately he developed an interest in law, mathematics, and physics instead, then found, too late, that he could not enter a university to pursue a career in such fields because his previous curriculum in the Realschule did not include the prerequisites of Greek, Latin, etc. This was an intense disappointment and frustration to him. In the meantime he read constantly in the subjects of his special interests, including the philosophies of the day and of history, history of cultures and of science, comparative religions, and the literature of Poland, Russia, France, Germany, etc., each in their respective languages. At one time he taught mathematics, physics, French and German at a gymnasium in Warsaw.

Traveling as an eclectic scholar in Germany and Italy, he spent the major portion of this time in Rome and its university. He became friends with some of the Cardinals and others connected with the Vatican during the time of Pope Leo XIII. It was there, in his early twenties, before the Cardinals and the General of the Jesuits, that he made his first and only speech before coming to this country -- on "The Relationship of the Polish Youth Toward the Clergy, and the Clergy toward Polish Youth."

During these years of study, managing the estate, and an apartment house which his family owned in Warsaw, he was looking into the life surrounding him, continuously seeking to comprehend what he saw, felt or read about. He was armed with an analytical attitude which his father had conveyed to him in his explanations of scientific discoveries. He watched the men, women and children wherever he went; he learned from training and caring for his horses, which he loved, and from his English bulldog "Taft", named after President William Howard Taft.

While traveling he rode third class, eating his dark bread and garlic together with the laborers and others by whom he was surrounded. When he came to a strange city he found an inexpensive room, secured a map and studied it. Then he took long rides through the town, roamed through the slums, ate his sandwich at the aristocratic cafes (for he had little money to spend), and studied how the different people lived.

In the meantime he was participating eagerly in gaiety and mischief with his classmates and friends, swinging the ladies vigorously as he twirled to the waltzes, wrestling, riding, swimming, singing his favorite operatic arias in his resonant bass. In Rome, where he became involved in the romantic affairs of the Italian court, he fenced expertly in duels and was called the "Maladetto Polacco". He was generally the 'life of the party', but privately he was chiefly interested in reading and studying in his spare time. In their troubles, his friends came to him for advice, in their need for counsel the peasants sought his aid, at home he was the mediator for the household servants.

When he returned from Rome he was shocked with the realization that his former playmate, the gardener's son, as well as all the other peasants, could neither read nor write, yet their labor had for generations earned the money for landowners. He found release for his reactions against this injustice by building a small schoolhouse for the peasants on the country estate. It was against the Czarist law, however, to educate the peasants, who were deliberately kept illiterate. He was sentenced to Siberia, but his father had the sentence suspended.

From photographs and his own descriptions of those days, he appeared to have been rather thin, broad-shouldered and muscular, of medium height, with blue, alert, contemplative eyes, his hair very blond, and at times he grew a mustache which he habitually twirled up at its ends.

At the outbreak of the First World War, when Korzybski was 35, he volunteered for service in the Second Russian Army, and was assigned to a special Cavalry Detachment of the General Staff Intelligence Department. He became the chief assistant to Colonel Terechhoff, who in turn was close to Grand Duke Nicholas, the Imperial Commander. This Second Army was the key army of the Eastern Front. It fought (and lost) the battles of Warsaw and Łódź, and was practically annihilated when it was sacrificed in an attack on the Germans at the Masurian Lakes of East Prussia, to divert the German divisions from taking Paris. Korzybski was the representative of the Second Army Intelligence Department on the battlefields, dealing with the generals of about a half dozen of the Russian armies, concerned with espionage and counter-espionage, predicting the German movements, interviewing prisoners, etc. Under the weight of his horse as it was shot and fell on him, his left hip was severely dislocated; at another time he was shot in the knee, and again, in the panic of the battle of Łódź, when a cannon was obstructing the road of retreat he cleared it out of the mud himself and endured lasting internal injuries.

Immersed as he was in sufferings on the battlefronts, intimately at home with death and pain, contemplating the thousands of years of such continually recurring conflicts and their attendant human tragedies, his questioning became focussed on: "Why? What is wrong? How can this be prevented?" He had no answer.

In July, 1915, he was ordered "At the Disposal of the Minister of War", and sent to Petrograd, where he was assigned to the Bodyguard Heavy Artillery. In December, 1915, he was sent to Canada and the United States as an Artillery Expert of the Russian Army. His title: Inspector of the Commission for the Acceptance of the Orders of the Artillery Department. "I knew nothing about artillery except from the receiving end," he used to say. But at the proving grounds of Petawawa Camp in the Canadian forests he spent his spare time until late at night mastering the technicalities of his assignment and from newspapers studied English for the first time.

When that proving ground disbanded, in February 1917, he went to New York, where he supervised the loading of ammunition in New York Harbor. He then became the Chief Inspector of a horseshoe factory in Erie, Pennsylvania, where he reorganized its management to bring about greater efficiency and speed in the production.

With the collapse of the Russian Army and the Revolution in 1917, he was ordered to return to Russia. He preferred, however, as did many other Poles, to join the French-Polish Army which was being formed here, in order to continue in the war with the Allies. He was appointed Secretary of the French-Polish Military Commission and, later, Recruiting Officer for the states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. With little sleep or time to eat, with scarcely enough army funds to buy postage stamps for his recruiting work, he became more and more haggard and exhausted.

Documents concerning these varied war duties mention his "honest, conscientiousness, energy and zeal", and stress that he was "very deeply devoted and interested in the work entrusted to him . . . in the highest degree a lover of work."

The United States Government sought his services as a War Lecturer to increase the sale of Liberty Bonds and speed up production. In this capacity he traveled throughout the southern states, speaking in five or more different languages, depending upon the nationality of the local foreign groups. "How he speaks such understandable and graphic English, how he remembers facts and figures so accurately, how he imparts so much information usually considered dry in such an attractive manner and keeps the breathless attention of his large audience for so long a time is difficult to comprehend . . . He is a hard worker and is willing apparently to go a pace that would kill an ordinary man. . . His speech was direct, forceful and most compelling. The language used was most diversified and Mr. Korzybski held his audience spellbound in rapt and undivided attention from start to finish. It is rarely that I have had the pleasure of listening to such an appeal, or so brilliant an account of the great war. His work will do great good." These are quotations from letters to governmental officials about his lecturing. During part of this time he was also a Labor Inspector in coal mines, and later was ordered by the Government to attend the Pan-American Congress of Labor at Laredo, Texas.

These troubled years intensified his urge to understand, and with the Armistice there was no release from the relentlessly prodding "why". Now and then some moving experience stung him into a heightened awareness of the problem, such as when he had looked down from the top of a skyscraper (the Woolworth Building) on the seething city of New York, on the panorama of human achievements, the tiny human beings 'crawling' below, and felt pressed to ask himself again, "*How* could this have been done?" Still, he had no answer.

In Washington, D.C., shortly after the Armistice, he met Mira Edgerly, an American of wide fame as a portrait painter on ivory. Having painted in the British Isles and on the European continent, as well as throughout this country, her list resembled an international social register. Because of her own interest in people and concern for how they happened to get 'that way', she recognized in Korzybski those qualities for which she had been looking in her search for a husband. "I had never met anyone with such a *capacity to care* for humanity-as-a-whole, as few men are capable of caring for one woman," she said later. They were married in January, 1919, and for her "incomparably inspiring help and valuable criticism," "her whole-hearted and steady support, and her relentless encouragement," he expressed his grateful appreciation in the prefaces of his books which, he has said, would not otherwise have been written.

"What makes human beings human?" The endless questioning continued. With his mathematical training he realized eventually that his question must be reduced to the simplest, most encompassing, *functional* terms. Taking into consideration all living organisms, he asked himself, "What is the role of plants in this world? What do they do?" He found they chemically synthesize the soil, water and air with solar energy. "What of the role of a dog, a horse, or a monkey?" Their survival depends on moving around in space. "We cannot deny them communication. Nor can we deny them 'intelligence' or 'emotion'. Their devotion! Often they are more faithful, more dutiful than many humans. What about humans? How do they *differ*?" The question was deeply disturbing.

One night he suddenly sat up in bed with tears dripping off his chin, so moved that he had finally solved his question in his sleep. "Humans have the capacity to transmit from generation to generation; one generation or one person can begin where the other left off," he said to his wife. "Man is not an animal." He did not have the terms then, he had had to analyze first what the different classes of life DO. Shortly, he formulated the labels -- "chemistry-binding" for plants, "space-binding" for animals, and "time-binding" for that characteristic, defining capacity, out of all life, unique in human beings. With this simple functional formulation he could at last become articulate.

To be free to work it out, he sought seclusion on his sister-in-law's Missouri farm far from the interruptions of a demanding social life. But when he tried to concentrate on his new problem, he found that he could not, for other feelings welled up into consciousness. The memory of the oppressions which had been such a part of his youth and milieu still boiled within him. Some of his ancestors had had to walk the long, bitter cold road to Siberia, and a

gallows still stood symbolically on Korzybie. For ten days he had to let his pent-up feelings of rebellion burst and spill out in vilification on paper. Only after he had 'purged' himself of these feelings did he find it possible to settle down to his new task, which yet involved the old in wider perspective.

With his two fore-fingers bandaged after they had become inflamed and split with the typing, he picked out on an old "thrashing-machine" typewriter the first draft of ***Manhood of Humanity: The Science and Art of Human Engineering***. In that book he expounded and developed his new analytic functional definition of "man" as a "time-binding class of life" -- and the implications of this for humanity, anywhere. He took this crude manuscript, written in a language new to him, to the outstanding mathematical philosopher, Professor Cassius Jackson Keyser, Adrian Professor of Mathematics at Columbia University. Professor Keyser had been working on his *Mathematical Philosophy* for many years and had planned to finish it during his sabbatical year. When he read the manuscript of ***Manhood of Humanity*** he found that Korzybski had made a formulation which turned out to be the kernel he himself had been searching for, circling around, all those years. Then, instead of completing his own book that year, he spent his time helping to edit Korzybski's manuscript, and made that new notion of man and its potential consequences the thesis of his address to the Phi Beta Kappa Society in May, 1921.

Manhood of Humanity was published early in 1921, and the first printing was sold out in six weeks. "The best book of the century . . . the most useful," some reviewers acclaimed. "Epoch-making . . . A mathematical theory which may revolutionize world thought in every field . . . A more daring theory than Einstein's." It was viewed skeptically by others with "Fine, but what of it?" Yet whatever their views, none could help but wonder at the courage of this one man who, single-handed, without institutional backing, traveled and lectured on his new theory, or be amazed at the untiring energy and tenacity with which he pressed on alone, demanding no less than a revision to the roots of our ways of thinking about ourselves.

But -- *how* do we humans '*bind time*'? What are the neurological mechanisms? How do they function? He had a feeling that his formulation was somehow very important; where it would lead he did not know. He felt he must investigate it further. This required a study of mathematical foundations, mathematics, physics, anthropology, biology, colloidal chemistry, neurology, etc. His circle of friends became wide, including especially the leading scientists in the eastern universities. Part of the summer and fall of 1921 he was the guest of the biologist William E. Ritter, who had been instrumental in the establishment of the Scripps Institution for Biological Research at La Jolla, California.

Later, one day in New York Korzybski was lecturing at the New School for Social Research. There, under challenging personal circumstances, in his urge to convey the difference between animals and humans, suddenly his whole theory coalesced into visual form as he rapidly drew on the blackboard a diagram of the 'time-binding differential' or 'anthropometer' (the measure of man). This was later named the "Structural Differential", which became so fundamental in his work as a diagrammatic or modelled representation of the premises of his system, and the functioning of the human nervous system as differentiated from that of the animal. Throughout his later writing and lecturing he depended heavily on the use of diagrams. He was exceptionally 'visual-minded'; his own 'thinking' was non-verbal, in visual structural form.

During these times he found relaxation in the use of his hands, and he particularly enjoyed using his Beach-motored electric tools working with leather, metal and wood. He also devised new methods for Mira Edgerly to protect and work with the large ivories which she used for her unique technique of family group portraiture. Together they made canvas covers for their luggage, reinforced with leather; intricately designed covers for the Structural Differentials, used for travel. In Washington, D.C., they spent many hundreds of hours in the construction of the mahogany models of his Differential.

Korzybski's first paper after the publication of ***Manhood Of Humanity*** was "Fate and Freedom", published in the *Mathematics Teacher*, May, 1923. This was the result of an address delivered before the joint meeting of the Detroit Mathematics and the Detroit History Clubs, January 11, 1923; which he also delivered before the Mathematical Club of the University of Illinois, January 12, and at the University of Michigan, January 15. Here he emphasized his

heavy obligations to the work of Alfred North Whitehead, Bertrand Russell, Henri Poincare, Cassius J. Keyser, and Albert Einstein, and we see the beginnings of what was later to grow into his new synthesis to include methodologically all branches of knowledge. "In this paper," he wrote, "I propose to analyze the principles on which the foundation of the Science and Art of Human Engineering must rest if we are ever to have such a Science and Art . . . it must be mathematical in spirit and in method and if we do not possess methods to apply mathematical thinking to human affairs, such methods must be discovered. Can this be done? . . . Most of what I have said is hardly so much as a sketchy outline of a vast, coherent system, due, in the main, to the recent work of the few mathematicians before mentioned."

The other great men from Aristotle to Wittgenstein to whom he felt most indebted as his work progressed are listed in his dedication in ***Science and Sanity***. It is revealing, now, to see the markings, the underlining and marginal comments, in the books in his library which seem to have been influential in the building of his system, selections from which head each chapter in ***Science and Sanity***.

By 1924 the main outlines of his second book had already been formulated in the paper he present on "Time-Binding: The General Theory" at the International Mathematical Congress at Toronto, Canada.

The following two years he studied psychiatric manifestations at St. Elizabeths Hospital, Washington, D.C., with the permission and under the guidance of Dr. William Alanson White, with whom he shared his study of mathematical methods as applied to psychiatry. There he had the freedom to read case histories, to watch and talk with the hospitalized patients. He regularly attended the staff meetings at the hospital and meetings of the psychiatric societies in Washington, discussed papers with Dr. Harry Stack Sullivan and others, etc. Two lectures given by him during this period are published in his second paper on time-binding, which was an elaboration of the first: June 25, 1925 before the Washington Society for Nervous and Mental Diseases, and March 3, 1926 before the Washington Psychopathological Society. In the short bibliography given for this second paper, he made the following classifications: Science, Method; Mathematics, Mathematical Philosophy, Logic; The Theories of Relativity; The Newer Physics; Psychiatry; Miscellaneous; Human Engineering. "The material presented here so roughly," he wrote, "is being worked out in a book form under the title ***Time-Binding, The General Theory: An Introduction to Humanology***." The title of this next book, as we now know, was changed to ***Science and Sanity***.

Korzybski then went to Pasadena, California, where in one year he wrote the manuscript of his second book. After that there was the long, tedious labor in Brooklyn, New York, where he elaborated his manuscript, refined it, and attended to all the details of publishing it. During this time, in 1929, he went to Warsaw, Poland, where he presented a summary of his new findings as worked out at that date, at the Mathematical congress of Slavic Countries.

In December, 1931, he delivered a paper before the American Mathematical Society on "A Non-aristotelian System and its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics." This crisp abstract of his system has been included in ***Science and Sanity*** as Supplement III.

Most of the time, however, from 1928 to 1933, was spent at his desk in the large, crowded studio room which was his home in Brooklyn, with almost no help except from his wife and one part-time secretary. There, on the top floor, he and his wife broiled in the summer and froze in the winter. His energy was becoming sapped by the years of blinding, straining toil over manuscripts, checking and rechecking proofs, verifying the formulas with endless patience and precision, specifying to the smallest detail the size and style of type, the layout, the binding, etc. He had added some materials to the original draft, such as the chapter on Colloidal Behavior, the double punctuation standing for "etc.", and such terms as "multiordinality". When the book was already in type he decided to call his work "general semantics", and this, and related terms, had to be inserted throughout. ***Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*** is a word portrait of his own struggle, the record of the developing of his new system, his 'spiral' way of analyzing, and the serious reader must work through it with him to arrive at an understanding of what he tried to convey. After these seven years, worn, haggard and exhausted, with finances depleted, in October 1933 Korzybski and Mira Edgerly finally saw the book off the press.

"If it is as important as you say, prove it. Does it actually work?" This was the inevitable challenge. For, having built this weighty, encompassing, unprecedented, non-aristotelian system, the ummensity of which staggered even him, and the inter-relatedness of which caused him to wonder and doubt (he had seen how easy it is to build verbal structures not related to life facts), having checked the soundness of his theory with leading specialists in many different fields, it remained to be shown what could be *done*. On this its validity as a methodology lay. He had dismissed metaphysical speculations, no matter how wise, as unworkable, and he had proclaimed that physico-mathematical methods could be applied with benefit to human living. Did the application of his new methodology influence the *evaluations*, and so behavior, of human beings? Empirical evidence was the only test. This was the next task to be faced.

Still, without institutional backing, he set out alone once more to lecture on his work, now named "general semantics", at the same time training a few serious students for longer periods. In March, 1935, only seventeen months after the publication of ***Science and Sanity***, the First American Congress on General Semantics was held at the Central Washington College of Education, Ellensburg, Washington. He conducted lectures and seminars at the Barstow School, Kansas City; in Berkeley, Los Angeles; Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; Olivet College, Michigan; Harvard University, Marlboro State Hospital, New Jersey, etc., and continued to write scientific papers.

In June, 1938 in Chicago a long-hoped-for goal was realized: Through the efforts of some of his students, particularly Dr. Douglas Gordon Campbell and with a two-year grant from Mr. Cornelius Crane, an institute was incorporated as the center for training carrying on his work, with Korzybski as its Director. It was called the Institute of General Semantics, for Linguistic Epistemologic Scientific Research and Education. A long list of distinguished scientists and others who had known him or his work for many years encouraged him by becoming Honorary Trustees of the Institute -- Dr. Abraham Brill, David Fairchild, Dr. Clarence Farrar, Earnest Hooton, Dr. Smith Ely Jelliffe, Edward Kasner, Cassius J. Keyser, Dr. Nolan D.C. Lewis, Bronislaw Malinowski, Dr. Adolf Meyer, Dr. Winfred Overholser, Roscoe Pound and many others.

The following years were devoted to his Institute, his students, his further writing, etc., and during this time (in 1940) he became a naturalized citizen of the United States. There was continuous pressure of work -- the days, evenings, Sundays and holidays were filled with lecturing, interviewing, writing articles, letters of personal advice to students, long theoretical correspondence with scientists, attending to the office routines, even supervising the most minute details of the care of the large building, at 1234 East 56th Street. There was only occasional relaxation -- simple pleasures with students, listening to phonograph recordings, reading detective stories (Joe Archibald was one of his favorites he chuckled over). He often worked during early morning hours, and was reluctant to rest during the day when too weary to go on. He was oblivious to the hours on the clock. There was only the ceaseless driving to finish a piece of writing (an arduous process of many drafts and prolonged "delousing", as he called it, but the creative work which he craved to do); there were the many intensive seminars for 30-50 students, on whom he poured his energies hour after hour, as if it were of utmost importance for each individual to understand, to feel the weight of the world problems, the human values, he dealt with; there was endlessly some student to be seen to try to help (whether he or she wanted it or not). And all the while he was worrying that uncertain finances would not allow the Institute to continue.

By August, 1941, when the Second American Congress on General Semantics was held at the University of Denver, there were already applications in many fields, and his work was being taught in schools and colleges, such as the University of Iowa, University of Denver, Northwestern University, etc.

In 1942 a group of Korzybski's students in Chicago organized a society, now called the International Society for General Semantics, for the purpose of making his work more widely known, and also, originally, to help to support the Institute financially.

Nothing gave Korzybski greater pleasure than the realization that his work was of help to others, in whatever way, to find how it was applied with benefit in professional or other pursuits -- in education, law, medicine, psychiatry,

industry, journalism, governmental and military problems, etc. -- and to watch the development of maturity in his students. He was convinced that "the man comes before his work," and that therefore the study of general semantics naturally begins with the incorporation of its methods in an individual's own processes of evaluation.

Sometimes in his dealings with people, including students, he had "no tact -- only contact", and this with a force which could hurt or repel.

In his private work with students, if he often did not spare their feelings in exposing with relentless vigor their 'worst', holding up to them 'the mirror' of themselves with uncompromising shocking clarity, he also spared no efforts to help them to achieve their 'best'. Many were devoted to him, as he was to them, whether their contacts were long or brief. Some, for whom these methods were too disturbing and hard, became antagonistic; some, overcoming their hostilities, realized years later the impact of what he had tried to convey.

During the Second War it became more and more difficult to secure help to carry on the office for the growing work of the Institute, as the correspondence and complexities increased, and many who had begun to apply his work professionally were serving in the armed forces. He participated vicariously in the war, partly through large correspondence with students, some of whom were carrying **Science and Sanity** over "the Hump" in Pacific jungles, etc. He followed the news intently, 'lived through' the tragedies as they unrolled, with their implications. He repeatedly urged the establishment of scientific coordinating boards in the government for consultation on problems of human behavior, to "advise how to conserve and prevent the abuse of human nervous systems."

In August, 1946, when Korzybski was 67, during the acute housing shortage in Chicago, the building rented by the Institute was sold, and it was necessary to move. New headquarters were established in Lakeville, Connecticut. In this location he continued his wide reading, his writing, and conducting of seminars. Here also, Miss M. Kendig, Educational Director and Editor of the Institute since 1938 and Associate Director since 1942, continued to organize the courses and other activities.

But if, by now, the growing acceptance of his work brought some slackening of his need to fight to demonstrate its value for others, some difficulties grew larger than ever. Along with the complexities of moving and resettling in this new environment of a Connecticut countryside he was plunged deeper in distress over the increasing financial crisis of the Institute, as its continuing existence hung in the balance. More than that there were other problems to be met: he had to protest against a number of misrepresentations or distortions of his work by his students, and this was very difficult for him -- a most exhausting concern -- for it involved conflicts within him between his feelings as a teacher, a friend, and his 'scientific social conscience'.

Due to the voluntary contributions of the Members of the Institute, the tuitions from seminars, and the increasing sale of books and other publications on general semantics, the Institute managed to continue.

By now Korzybski's formulations had begun to penetrate in some measure into many fields, through individuals' applications and writings, study groups, teaching, etc., and **Science and Sanity** was in increasing demand. If he was "to a large degree responsible for much of the development of [applied] anthropology," as one anthropologist said in 1942, or if his methods were, as some put it, being "bootlegged" into colleges and universities, etc., the deeper significance of his work was little felt generally. This was, perhaps, partly due to his not emphasizing the general theory out of which it originally grew, the continuity in its development, and its inter-relationships, also partly due to too easy acceptance by many of the verbal formulations only, and of fragmentary glimpses evaluated as the whole, etc.

Turning once more to his first book, **Manhood Of Humanity**, preparatory to publishing the second edition, reviewing and summarizing his life work, the importance of his new definition of man as the basis of his work began to loom larger than ever in his awareness. He had not stressed it for many years. "In 1921 the world was not prepared for it," he said. "It is more ready now. In a way, I had to mature myself."

Korzybski had learned continually from his students, and his confidence in the workability of his methods became strengthened. "I am the same kind of moron as the rest of you, it's the method that does the work, for me as well as you," he used to say. In his writings and conversations he continued to develop creative ramifications, yet circled closer to the core.

For some years his new introduction to the second edition of his first book had been postponed, because of the pressure of other work. During this time of intermittent writing on it, it remained a constant focus for him. He was analyzing the humanly disastrous effects of dictatorships in general, the evaluations of the people of the U.S.S.R. and their leaders in historical perspective, their socio-cultural milieu, some deeper aspects of symbolism, etc., in relation to the time-binding theory. There he also stressed the power of a theory as shown throughout history -- in the realms of science, political science, religion, etc. -- and the *potential* unifying, directive power of a theory as comprehensive as the General Theory of Time-binding. He found that each problem could be, and must be, reduced in its final analysis to the common root of misunderstandings. After over 25 years, he felt convinced once more, now with the conviction of maturity, that "we must first have a new notion of humanity."

He also felt the need more strongly than ever for the 'silence', the quiet wide-eyed observing, with which he started his life, as an attitude essential for creative living. In 1948 he wrote, "There is a tremendous difference in 'thinking' in verbal terms, and 'contemplating', inwardly silent, on non-verbal levels, and then searching for the proper structure of language to fit the supposedly discovered structure of the silent processes that modern science tries to find." ¹ In his last paper he was analyzing this attitude more in detail. ²

This stressing of "inwardly silent contemplation" seemed to grow out of his own hunger for close rapport on deeper levels with his environment, living or non-living. In whatever or whomever he observed, he "made the insignificant significant," and his comments were punctured and diffused with warmth of living values. He opened the doors of life and moved about freely, sensitively responding to the surrounding nuances -- the feel of fine wood or of a precision cut steel tool, the look in one's eyes, or the twist of a smile, the style of a man's writing, the attitude behind the words, etc.

In his later years he had become more mellow, and he was slowed down now by the heavy fatigue of constant pioneering struggle and the giving of himself. The injuries he sustained in the War grew increasingly difficult to cope with. He never lost his pithy unconventional humor, his eager interest in life and the urge -- the necessity -- to share it with others. He never ceased to care, and so he could not spare himself the suffering he felt when confronted by life's daily tragedies, of small or large scope -- some student's trouble, or some disaster of historical import. Indeed, one may say that on 1 March 1950 his sudden death was characteristic of his life. But now, his organism could no longer handle the stress of his concern, and a coronary thrombosis was fatal.

Often Korzybski had mentioned his wish that his body should be made available for scientific study. This has been done and it may be of interest to quote here from a preliminary report by Dr. Nolan D.C. Lewis, Director of the New York State Psychiatric Institute and Hospital. The friendship between Dr. Lewis and Korzybski began in the days when they were both doing research at St. Elizabeths Hospital. At that time Korzybski watched Dr. Lewis perform many autopsies, and in planning for his own, had requested Dr. Lewis to do the autopsy and report his analysis. "The brain was found unusually well preserved," Dr. Lewis has found. "It showed some of the normal shrinkage due to the age of the man, but it had a very rich blood supply which is significant and a complex convolitional arrangement which will be very important to study in detail, as it is the brain of a great scientist."

Regarding his work wrote in his last paper, in process of being completed at the time of his death: "There are many indications so far that the use of the extensional devices and even a partial 'consciousness of abstracting' have potentialities for our general human endeavor to understand ourselves and others. The extent of the revision required if we are to follow through from the premises as previously stated, is not yet generally realized. Our old habits of evaluation, ingrained for centuries if not milleniums, must first be re-evaluated and brought up to date in accordance with modern knowledge." ³

While he had this large perspective, he remained keenly conscious of the limitations of his work, of himself as an individual, and of all humans. His theory of time-binding laid the embracing *foundation* for the study and realization of the *potentialities* of humans. "One of the key problems of my life work is that it is limited, limited," he said. "With the extensional devices you *limit* the seemingly *unlimited*."

With a feeling that his formulations and methodological synthesis were but a part of the long processes of discovery of the natural laws of this universe, he was serene -- the mysteries of life remain to be solved. "As to the space-time problem of the 'beginning and the end of the world,' I have 'solved' it for myself effectively by the conviction that we are not yet evolved enough and so mature enough as humans to be able to understand such problems *at this date*. In scientific practice, however, I would go on, in search for structure, asking "why?" under consciously *limited* conditions," he wrote in his 'credo'. ⁴

He had a deep reverence for the methods of mathematics and the exact sciences, as expressions of human behavior in our general search for the structure of the unknown. He had a strong social feeling of responsibility in a personal, and a historical sense.

It may be said, perhaps, that Alfred Korzybski was very 'Polish': he was idealistic, yet practical, independent and staunch. He was unpretentious, lovable, earthy, vital, compelling, moved by a deep desire for feeling, knowing life, and around him there was a pervading warmth. He himself did not feel 'Polish' or 'European' or 'American'; he had, rather, a feeling of belonging to the world-in-time. In the long time-binding sweep of human life, he has welded together past, present and future into a new form.

Charlotte Schuchardt
Lakeville, Connecticut
July 14, 1950

NOTE: Records concerning Korzybski's life prior to his coming to this country in 1915 are, as far as I know, practically non-existent. He did not write diaries and kept other records later only in relation to his work. The data given here are derived from biographical information Korzybski had related to his students at various times, from a few war documents, from his wife, Mira Edgerly Korzybska, and my own observations since my first seminar in 1936 and working with him at the Institute since 1939. -- C.S.

¹ "What I Believe", in ***Manhood Of Humanity***, 2nd ed., 1950. International Non-aristotelian Library Publishing Company. Institute of General Semantics, distributors.

² "The Role of Language in the Perceptual Processes", in Clinical Psychology Symposium on *Perception: An Approach to Personality*. To be published, Ronald Press, New York.

³ "The Role of Language in the Perceptual Processes". *Op cit.*

⁴ "What I Believe". *Op cit.*