

## BEFORE AND AFTER 1933\*

by

Charlotte Schuchardt Read

On the 10th of October, 1933, the United States and international copyrights for Science and Sanity were established, when copies were sold in this country and in Toronto. We may recall, if we were alive and aware enough, or we have heard and read about it, what conditions in the world were like in 1933. Korzybski was living in Brooklyn at the time. We were in the depths of the Depression. The cost of \$7.00 for a book seemed astronomical. Even the special price of \$5.50 for teachers in those days was probably very hard for most to meet. Korzybski and his printer, the Science Press Printing Company at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, wondered whether it would be possible to sell the 2,000 copies of the first printing. Jacques Cattell, editor of the Science Press, congratulated Korzybski on the high caliber of the people who were reading the galley proofs and thought that if they reacted to the book favorably, there should be no difficulty selling that many copies. They were the leading scientists, psychiatrists and mathematicians of that time, men like Percy Bridgman, Bronislaw Malinowski, Eric Temple Bell, William Alanson White, etc.

It is fifty years later, and the book is still selling. So far, with the 6th printing of the 4th edition, 54,000 copies have been printed. Considering the present inventory of about 3,500, this means that approximately 50,000 copies have been sold. We do not know how many of those have actually been read, or read at least twice, as Korzybski urged. Copies exist all over the world, carried into far away countries by GI's during the Second World War, ordered by persons in many lands; it has passed through a time-span of about three generations chronologically speaking, and innumerable generations of teachers and students; it has spawned countless words about it in other books, in reviews, articles, classrooms, conferences, 'bull sessions', and wrestling with it privately alone with an individual's own thoughts. Could we possibly estimate such influences?

I am attempting here a sort of brief summary of the 'fate' of the work in the span of fifty years. Most of you will know how

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\*Presented at the conference, "General Semantics: The First Half-Century and Beyond," New York, November 5, 1983.

much has been left out in the short time I have available.

Let us go back for a moment to a time before Science and Sanity was published. At the end of Manhood of Humanity Korzybski wrote in 1921: "If only this little book will initiate the scientific study of Man, I shall be happy; for then we may confidently expect a science and art that will know how to direct the energies of man to the advancement of human weal." He took up his own challenge.

Three years later, in his paper called "Time-Binding: The General Theory," the skeleton of what later would become Science and Sanity was already formulated. It took nine years for him to bring the theory to fruition, to work out the details, to elaborate. After 1924 a major change of emphasis took place, an important expansion of his formulating. Following a remark by a reviewer of Manhood of Humanity, asking how he could speak about 'man' without a knowledge of psychiatry, he set out to study psychiatry under the tutelage and cooperation of William Alanson White, Head of St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C. He studied patients and their records, attended staff meetings and made many lasting professional friendships. His work thereafter was to be permeated with psychiatric points of view. He called his work a 'theory of sanity', and his connections included not only mathematicians and scientists but also leading psychiatrists.

When Science and Sanity was nearly ready for printing, the new quantum mechanics came to the attention of the scientific world, and was immediately incorporated into Science and Sanity. Fifty years later, we see many current books and articles dealing with the human import of quantum mechanics. How many of those authors know that these issues were taken up by Korzybski in 1933? He did not, however, link it with Eastern philosophy, and I do not know if he would do so now. In that forbidding-looking Book III we can find many insights under such headings as "The Semantics of the Einstein Theory," "The New Quantum Mechanics," and so on. Stuart Mayper is conveying at the Institute's summer seminars these days what those formulations mean in our day-to-day orientations, in the way we experience our world. This is one of the main messages in Science and Sanity.

Before the manuscript of Science and Sanity was put into print, some of his friends begged Korzybski to write it in a more easy-to-understand way. But having exhausted himself for years in writing it, and feeling a great urgency to put his message before the world, he did not feel he could change it. Besides, it was his way of expressing himself. Thus, the book became a record of his own working out of his synthesis, elaborating his points over and over again from many angles in various contexts, involving the reader with the building of his system. It is a book which some shrink from reading before they have been 'introduced' through the interpretations of someone else's nervous sys-

tem, perhaps frightened by the breadth of the work. For others, it is the one they start with.

Besides formulating his system and writing it in publishable form, Korzybski was also its publisher, and he had to do the usual job of publishers. He and his wife Mira Edgerly Korzybska had to find the money to pay the printer, and that took quite some time. He had to promote it, advertise it, write circulars about it and send them to his list, send out review copies, and try to sell the book.

Less than two years after publication, in March 1935, the First American Congress on General Semantics was held at the Central Washington College of Education. In those years Korzybski was travelling to various parts of the country giving seminars: At the Barstow School in Kansas City, at 'mental' hospitals, at Olivet College, and the University of Chicago.

Three years later, in May 1938, the Institute of General Semantics was established. Now there was a place where seminars could be given, month after month, where the work could have its headquarters, with a staff organized to carry out all the functions of an educational institute. This was a most important step for the understanding and development of the work.

The first edition of Science and Sanity, of about 2,500 copies, was sold and a second edition was prepared, published in 1941. The new Introduction to it was some 50 pages long, and was a milestone in the history of the book. There Korzybski included important methodological materials not printed before in that form, such as the extensional devices, which are not even in the index, over/under defined terms, a tabulation of differences between Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian orientations, the section of "Perplexities in Theories of Meaning," and so on. Written during the Second War, it is suffused by the suffering and involvement Korzybski experienced with each daily newspaper, by the atmosphere of war, with its tragedies, with insufficient money and help to carry on his work, with the inability even to get enough paper to print Science and Sanity.

During the 1940's the sales of Science and Sanity increased, until the year 1949 showed the highest number of copies on record with the sale of 3,200 copies. A third edition had been published in 1948, with a short new preface by Korzybski. By the time the fourth edition -- the current one -- was published in 1958, Korzybski was no longer here, and Dr. Russell Meyers wrote his fine new preface.

For none of these new editions were any changes made in the original text beyond a few minor errors or typographical mistakes, which continued to be discovered. In 1932 Korzybski had asked the printer not to make plates of the type immediately, as probably the book would be revised soon. But there was no time

for that, once the exhausting schedule of seminars and writing was in full swing.

By now, 1983, of course the specific scientific data Korzybski used in 1933 are long since out of date, as the enormous advances in the sciences -- and indeed in our knowledge of practically all fields -- continues at a dramatically ever-increasing exponential rate. At the end of his life, in 1948, Korzybski had written in his Preface to the third edition: "In spite of the fact that since 1933 a great many new discoveries in sciences have been made, to be analysed in a separate publication, the fundamental methodological issues which led even to the release of nuclear energy remain unaltered, and so this third edition requires no revision of the text."

In his Preface in 1958 to the fourth edition, Dr. Russell Meyers wrote: "Considering that the author himself, in applying the formulation of the 'self-reflexive map' to his own work, asserted on more than one occasion that perceptible revisions of his formulations must be anticipated . . . it comes as something of a surprise that . . . no major alterations seem as yet to be required." This was 25 years ago.

In this open-ended system, limited to its premises, based on scientific orientations, does there seem to be a need in 1983 to make any major revisions? I do not see a necessity, as long as we find it fruitful to speak that way. Ours is a methodology, offering a means to deal with age-old problems of epistemology. One of our great needs, it seems to me, is to explore the methodological issues to greater depth, to learn how to change our orientations through the methods of general semantics so that we can attain that high degree of conditionality that was one of Korzybski's main goals.

There was a way in Science and Sanity in which the changing situations over the years were reflected. In the first edition, after the title page, Korzybski listed the volumes to be included in the future in his envisioned "International Non-aristotelian Library." There was a list of twelve "Volumes in Preparation," and another list of 52 titles, laying out a large program for the future, under the heading "The Names of the authors of the following volumes to be announced later." No books listed under "Volumes in Preparation" were later published as entitled. But two excellent papers by the philosopher Oliver Reiser were published in the 1943 Papers from the Second American Congress on General Semantics, papers dealing largely with his announced volume on "From Primitive Religious to Modern Scientific Structural Assumptions." Also, books with other titles did appear.

By 1941, when the second edition of Science and Sanity was published, the names of O. R. Bontrager, S. I. Hayakawa, Douglas Gordon Campbell, C. B. Congdon, Wendell Johnson, M. Kendig and Irving J. Lee had appeared under "Volumes in Preparation." With

each printing the list changed, showing new publications deemed worthy of being included, deleting some, retaining as many of the original list as space permitted on that page. Some of the excellent books explaining general semantics in those early years continue to be among the most popular.

As books and articles began to appear explicating or popularizing Korzybski's work, some people settled for the interpretations by others and judged his work by those interpretations. Others were led to Science and Sanity by what they read about it elsewhere. Or perhaps they were put off by what others said. Examples of half-truths and distortions abounded. The 50 numbers of the General Semantics Bulletin show a valuable record of the events, observations and developments in the work since 1950, a "clearinghouse and exchange for workers in the field." The journal Et Cetera continues as a quarterly and has just published an issue containing some of the finest articles in its 40-year history.

In another area, that of research, there has been only limited activity. Kenneth Johnson, together with Franklin Silverman, in 1980 established a "General Semantics Research Information Exchange" at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Korzybski himself had suggested many areas to be explored. Ralph Kenyon made the valuable suggestion, elaborated on in a recent issue of the Bulletin,\* that in considering 'research in general semantics', we index what we refer to as 'research' and also index 'general semantics'. Questions such as "What do we mean by research?," "What aspects of general semantics are 'researchable', and which are not?," are of crucial interest to us.

If we consider, now, the area of teaching general semantics, how has Korzybski's work fared there? We may differentiate between teaching at courses held by the Institute, the center of training in the work, and courses taught by others under other auspices.

We have recognized over the years that more than only an 'intellectual' understanding of the theory is essential, important as that is. Korzybski realized this when he urged us to use the Structural Differential. In the process of working through the principles of general semantics toward influencing our behavior, we utilize methods from other disciplines -- areas of study whose premises are similar to ours. For instance, we become involved with group processes, study 'sensory awareness', draw and paint in sessions of 'non-verbal abstracting in the visual field', experience Adelbert Ames' experiments in perception, and so on.

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\*"Researching General Semantics," General Semantics Bulletin, No. 49, p. 108. And see Dr. Johnson's report in this issue pp. Ed.

Central to the inclusion of other methods, other disciplines, and materials from other fields of study, is relating them to the premises of general semantics. This has a more general import, as we deal with the relationships of our premises, based on modern science, with other areas. It requires a knowledge of the premises, the limitations of general semantics, and the premises and limitations of other disciplines. We must, in each case, investigate the deeper assumptions of what we are considering. This is no small task, and requires some epistemological knowledge. We must learn to walk the fine line between being open and receptive to the new, and also rigorous with respect to the assumptions on which our work is based.

In the teaching of general semantics outside of Institute seminars, by others who have presumably studied it, there seems to be wide disparity of competence. There have been, and are now, some outstanding teachers. After fifty years, it is still difficult to teach a course in a college, university or other school when it is called 'general semantics'. Although most of the teachers surveyed some years ago who said they were teaching it, reported an increased interest among their students, and an enjoyment themselves in the challenge of teaching general semantics, there remained the problem of getting it 'into the system'. Usually they incorporate it into other subjects, or call the course by another name.

Many of those who reported teaching general semantics during a survey a few years ago were very poorly equipped for it, judging from their report of actual study of the subject, and the materials used. Of the great wealth of materials that exist, relatively little of it seems to be known enough to be widely used. The problem of the criteria for teaching the subject, the demands of competence, etc., is an area of which the Institute is painfully aware. A lack of standards has contributed to a poor image of general semantics academically. Fortunately, with the establishment of training seminars and addressing this problem rigorously, this situation is on the way to being corrected. The unfortunate situation has not been the result of lack of vision, but to a large extent a lack of money to carry out the extensive training program needed.

Mary Morain has made the constructive suggestion that we index the teaching of general semantics with regard to the level of education: whether in elementary education, secondary, collegiate, and so on.

We often use the term 'apply' in connection with general semantics: 'apply the methods', 'apply general semantics', etc. In Korzybski's words, "If [the methods of general semantics] are not applied, but merely talked about, no results can be expected." There have been a great many reports of beneficial applications over the years -- in the professions, in business, in education, in personal life, in countless situations. This aspect of

the work I believe shows a healthy vigor, and continues to show promise.

Yet I feel bound to say that I do not feel entirely satisfied with the term 'apply'. It is our aim in general semantics to so change our orientations, our attitudes in general, that we meet ongoing happenings with the highest possible degree of conditionality (at a date). Thus, in our everyday behavior we would 'automatically', without 'trying' so to say, respond in what we call a non-Aristotelian way. I take the term 'apply' to refer to situations where we consciously respond by using words and by acting in accordance with the principles. This is extremely important. I differentiate between a non-Aristotelian general orientation and specific applications, and I would like to emphasize the importance of working toward the deeper transformation envisioned by Korzybski, a condition of living where our way of meeting each moment reflects an extensional orientation. It is a question of how far each of us, individually, wants to go. I feel sure that in this audience we are working toward a non-Aristotelian orientation.

As I view this span of fifty years of general semantics history, much of which I have participated in, and as I speak about it, I am reminded of an article I recently read in the current issue of The Sciences, published by the New York Academy of Sciences.\* Horace Freeland Judson, author of The Eighth Day of Creation, is dealing in the article entitled "Reweaving the Web of Discovery" with the use of interviews in writing the history of contemporary science. He speaks of some of the pitfalls he encounters. He says: "The deeper problem is getting the interviewer to force his respondent to break the mold of the stories and events as he has recounted them frequently before. The respondent must stop remembering what he has come habitually to say about events of the past, and start remembering afresh the events themselves. . . . we remember not the past event directly but the way we have recounted that event." Perhaps this applies to me, and to some others here as well. Whether we are speaking about events of the past, or our encounters with a book such as Science and Sanity, with which we are familiar, or are caught in our usual way of thinking about or speaking about general semantics, we may ask ourselves whether we can approach them with a fresh look. Could we go beyond such words as 'map', 'territory', 'abstracting', et cetera, and experience them in a new way? Perhaps this could prepare us to find some of the deeper significances in the wealth of material left us by Korzybski.

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\*November/December 1983, p. 44 ff.

## BIOGRAPHY

Charlotte Schuchardt Read is Emeritus Director of the Institute, Secretary of its Board of Trustees, Literary Executor and Trustee of the Alfred Korzybski Estate, Executor of the M. Kendig Estate, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alfred Korzybski Foundation, President of the International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, Associate Editor of the General Semantics Bulletin, President of the Charlotte Selver Foundation -- et cetera! That's why, when we announced her 'retirement' as Director of the Institute a year and a half ago, we put quotation marks around that word.

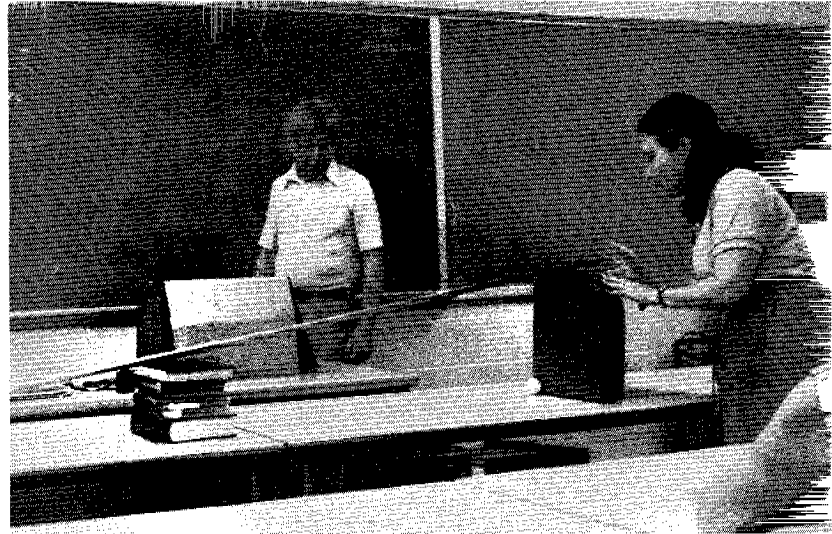
Charlotte's curriculum vitae appears in G.S.B., 47, 1980, p. 34. By way of update, we note that, in addition to activities related to the positions listed above, she continues to participate in conferences, teach at Institute seminars, work on the Korzybski archives, and

publish papers reflecting her historical involvement in general semantics and her current evaluations thereof. These include "A Personal Perspective" in G.S.B. 47, 1982, pp. 30-34; her report-cum-interview derived from Barbara Morgan's Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture of 1980, "A New Sense of Relatedness," G.S.B. 49, 1982, pp. 8-22; her review of The Kyoto Review, ibid., pp. 135-136; and "Marjorie Mercer Kendig Gates: A Biographic Sketch," in the special memorial section devoted to M. Kendig in G.S.B. 50, 1983, pp. 47-57. Indeed, Charlotte gathered the materials and wrote the introductory, descriptive, and connecting passages for that 83-page 'segment'. Amounting to a small book, it constitutes a rich compendium of Institute history and sharp formulating.

We thank her for that job, for her current paper, and for those to come.







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