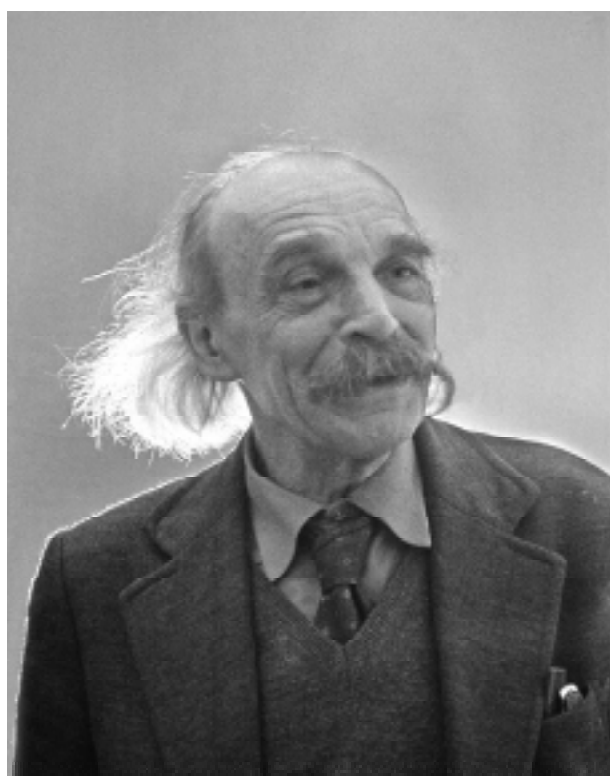


## IN MEMORIAM

### **Professor Władysław J.H. Kunicki-Goldfinger (1916–1995)** *(on the tenth anniversary of his passing away)*



August 2005 saw the sad tenth anniversary of the death of prof. Władysław J.H. Kunicki-Goldfinger, an outstanding researcher, teacher, educator and Master of many Polish microbiologists. At the Professor's grave, during the burial ceremonies in Lublin, the then Rector of Warsaw University, prof. Włodzimierz Siwiński, said "The old saying that no one is irreplaceable is not true. Professor Kunicki-Goldfinger with all certainty was such a man". Round anniversaries usually prompt recollections, so this is the right occasion to recall the Professor's biography, his scientific, social and organizational activity.

Professor W. Kunicki-Goldfinger was born in Kraków. His father, Zygfryd Goldfinger was a lawyer and his mother, Waleria Kunicka – a secondary school teacher. The Professor's youth was spent in Lublin. In 1934 he commenced studies at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University, majoring in the Natural Sciences in 1939. Because of his left-wing orientation he was not able to secure the position of assistant professor at his home faculty but after obtaining financial support began work at the Department of Agricultural Micro-

biology of the Jagiellonian University, where he met prof. Otton Bujwid, a world renown microbiologist. Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, he left for Lwow, from where he was deported to a work camp near Archangielsk. After an amnesty for Poles, he joined general W. Anders's army, with which he did the whole combat trail.

The Professor returned to Poland in 1947 and started work at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, where he defended his doctoral (1948) and habilitation (1950) theses, after which he set out on his own scientific trail, first establishing a Microbiology Workshop in the Division of Plant Physiology, and later the Department of General Microbiology. In 1955 Professor moved to Wrocław where he took over as the director of the Institute of Botany, Wrocław University and also established the Department of Bacterial Genetics in the Ludwik Hirszfeld Institute of Immunology and Experimental Therapy, Polish Academy of Sciences. The Professor's scientific itinerary ended in Warsaw, where he came in 1961 and immediately began work at the Department of Microbiology, and later Institute of Microbiology, Faculty of Biology and Earth Sciences at the Warsaw University. He was head of both for many years.

For several years the Professor was vice-director of the Institute of Biochemistry and Biophysics of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In 1970 he accepted the position of "visiting professor" at he University of California at Davies. In 1965 he was elected corresponding member of the Polish Academy

of Sciences, and in 1980 – regular member. He also received honorary doctoral degrees from the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and from Wrocław University, and was laureate of State Award.

Professor Władysław Kunicki-Goldfinger (with his group) published many scientific articles in different fields of microbiology, including veterinary microbiology, environmental microbiology and bacterial genetics. Of these papers, close to 30 were published in leading scientific journals, under the joint title “*Mechanism of Bacterial Conjugation and Recombination*”. In his last years, the Professor’s interest focused on the area between biology (especially evolutionism) and philosophy. He published many treatises in philosophical and anthropological titles, had seminars at philosophical societies as well as at the Academy of Catholic Theology. The Professor was the author of many books, including academic textbooks. He had the gift of the written word, which is not that frequent among naturalists. All the Professor’s books, including those of a popular-science nature, were enormously successful and had many reprints. There were as many as 7 editions of his unconventional textbook “*Życie bakterii*” (The Life of Bacteria).

Words simply cannot adequately describe the didactic talent of the Professor. He was always surrounded by undergraduate and post-graduate students, assistants. Many of his students are now well known researchers and some of them hold high positions, not only in Poland. These “disciples” stem from three centres: in Lublin, Wrocław and Warsaw – all created and headed by the Professor. This achievement can be rivaled by very few scientists indeed.

The Professor’s biography cannot omit at least some of his organizational and social activities. The Professor was honorary member of Polish Society of Microbiologists, founding member of the Polish Genetical Society and the journal *Acta Microbiologica Polonica*, consultant for the PWN (Polish Scientific Publishers). He collaborated with the Committee for the Defense of Workers, the stipend fund for aggrieved researchers, participated in the activity of the Society for Supporting and Disseminating Knowledge and the “Flying University”.

In 1981 he was interned for his activities in the opposition. Later, in 1989, he took part in the historic “Round Table Discussions” in the section for science and education. To sum up this short biography, it should be emphasized once again that Professor Władysław Kunicki-Goldfinger was, without a doubt, a magnificent researcher, even though he himself used to say that “I am a so-called scientist”. He was also a charismatic teacher and educator who strongly influenced the attitudes of his students and followers. He was a Master and authority for many of us, the only one we have encountered in the course of our scientific activity. He was also an outstanding individuality. His pupils always had an important place in His heart and met with kindness and help, and this aid sometimes was of key importance for more than one of us. However, the most precious thing in His life was his family – his wife, dr. Władysława Kunicka-Goldfinger and his children. The Professor’s wife, a senior lecturer at the Institute of Microbiology at Warsaw University for many years, “our beloved Mrs. Władka” died in March 2005. It should be mentioned that She was very happy hearing about a Conference (held in October 2005 in Warsaw) devoted to the memory of the Professor and took lively interest in its progress.

10 years ago, in valediction addresses, obituaries and recollections published in scientific journals, there were many voices ensuring that the memory of the Professor will persist a long time. These assurances were not hollow. A decade has passed since his death and memory about Him is still very much alive and will probably remain so for decades to come.

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