Mathematical Quiz: A Friendship of Lasting Value

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Mathematicians have often competed with one another throughout history, though sometimes with disastrous consequences (think of Newton and Leibniz). Collaborations, on the other hand, were fairly uncommon prior to 1900, though the nineteenth century certainly witnessed a few striking examples of joint research (for example, Sturm–Liouville theory and the early work of Lie and Klein on transformation groups). But the proliferation of fruitful collaborations and friendships was a hallmark of mathematical research throughout the twentieth century. Hardy and Littlewood spring immediately to mind, as does Paul Erdős, who famously collaborated with mathematicians all over the world.

Do you recognize the two men pictured below, discussing (presumably) a mathematical manuscript?

Here's a hint: Their friendship, which began in 1931, would later have significant consequences for mathematical relations in Europe after the Second World War. Readers who have never seen this photo before (no insiders please!) are invited to write me and guess their names. The contest winner(s) will not only know who these two mathematicians were but also why their friendship is well worth remembering. Please address your reply in the form of a short essay. I will provide space for the best essay in a not-too-distant future issue.

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