

The German Friend: War and Postwar Letters from German Anti-Nazi Prinz Hubertus zu Löwenstein to American Hans Christian, 1942-1947

John W. Larson

CreateSpace (Oct 10, 2014)

Softcover \$24.95 (738pp)

978-1-5027-9167-2

For scholars, these letters are an invitation to a broader understanding of World War II and its aftermath.

The German Friend is a collection of letters written by Prince Hubertus zu Löwenstein, a German anti-Nazi refugee, to a young college student in Minnesota, John W. Larson, the nominal author of this book. The letters, written between 1942 and 1947, chronicle one side of the conversation between this German historian and political activist and his American friend. The volume offers an intimate portrait of a substantial European intellectual during the greatest crisis of his life and, perhaps, the greatest crisis of his homeland.

In 1942, Löwenstein, who had fled Germany in 1933 after the ascendancy of Adolf Hitler, was invited for a six-week period as a visiting lecturer at Hamline University, a small college in St. Paul, Minnesota. There, he met John W. Larson. The two became friends, and over the next several years, Löwenstein wrote over six hundred letters to Larson on matters as mundane as the weather in New Jersey (where Löwenstein was living while in the United States) and as profound as the reunification of Germany after the fall of Hitler and the reorganization of Europe into a unified economic entity.

Larson kept the letters and has organized more than four hundred of them into a coherent volume. Each chapter addresses a particular topic related to the war years and the period immediately following. The letters are both frustrating and enlightening. For the person without a deep background in the nuanced history of the period, and without an understanding of German culture and history, the meaning of many of the letters will be difficult to grasp fully. For the reader who has such a background, and for the scholar who will take the initiative to pursue the historical and literary references, the letters will be an invitation to a broader understanding of World War II and its aftermath. What clearly emerges is a portrait of an intellectual who devoutly loves his homeland and decries what he sees as the Nazi occupation of Germany.

Larson has included appendixes containing relevant historical documents that expand on the references contained in the letters. There are also nearly twenty pages of notes at the end of the volume. After the publication of this book, Löwenstein's letters and many of the letters written by Larson to Löwenstein will be available for research at a library in Frankfurt, Germany.

The cover is adorned gracefully with a reproduction of a portrait of Löwenstein from 1938. The book also includes a short foreword written by Löwenstein's daughter, Margarete von Schwarzkopf.

This volume will be a valuable tool for serious students of World War II and Germany in the mid-twentieth century.

JOHN SENGER (December 10, 2014)

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