

## CHAPTER ONE

# JEWISH PATHS—HUNGARIAN LIMITS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

### LIBERALS, ANTI-SEMITES AND JEWS AT THE BIRTH OF MODERN HUNGARY

The spring of 1848 promised the advent in Hungary of “liberty, equality and fraternity.” The twenty years of gradual progress, known as the Age of Reform, and the relentless struggle for the country’s bourgeois transformation, in parallel with changes in Europe, had finally come to fruition. The revolt of 15 March and the will of the parliamentary assembly in Pozsony [Pressburg, Bratislava] gave the impression that nothing could stand in the way of the notion of equality before the law.

But the universality of liberty was challenged in the first days. Anti-Semitic riots broke out in Pozsony on 19 and 20 March, as they had a month earlier, sparked off by the granting of full civic rights to Jews in the city. Anti-Semitic protests were not restricted to Pozsony, and continued in April. Jews found themselves facing the horrors of pogrom-inclined anti-Semitism in Szombathely on 4 April, Székesfehérvár and Pécs on 5 April, and Pest on 19 April. The public meeting in Pest resolved that (1) payment of rents should be waived for a quarter, since there had been no earnings during the month of revolt; (2) the situation of the workers should be improved; (3) Jews should be driven out of the country; (4) Jews should not be admitted into the national guard.

The sweeping demands, and the idea that bound them together, cast some doubt on the unqualified popularity of equality before the law in

Hungary. This was the background to poet Sándor Petőfi's complaint, written in the wake of disturbances following the events of 15 March:

The harmony which has so far prevailed without exception in the capital is beginning to fall apart. German burghers, I denounce you before the nation and future generations for being the cause of its disintegration! May both pass judgement upon you.

It was they who first declared that they would not recruit Jews to serve alongside them in the national guard, and they who first flung mud on to the virgin pure flag of 15 March!...Or do not the words still hold true, did you not cry out with us: liberty, equality, fraternity?<sup>1</sup>

The anti-Semitism which in Pozsony had degenerated into a pogrom by Easter Monday (23 April) prompted the most prominent liberals to take open action. Mór Jókai, Antal Csengery, József Bajza, and Zsigmond Kemény all spoke out against the anti-Jewish provocations, and Hungary's "poet laureate" Mihály Vörösmarty, wrote in an article published in May under the title *The Jewish Question*:

There can be no more bitter mockery of the proclamation of equality and fraternity than the hatred and rage which have raised their fists against the Jewish people throughout the world, though perhaps most savagely in our country. After the first few untainted days of freedom, in which the noblest pearls of human emotion bubbled to the surface, the dregs are now showing their face, making counterfeit claims to plunge the shining ideal of civil society into darkness. After freedom had bravely stood up for its inalienable rights, lawlessness could not remain silent, demanding the waiving of rents and the division of land, and many violated the peaceful process of petitioning by setting out, in the name of equality, to batter and plunder the Jews, first of all.<sup>2</sup>

The liberal intelligentsia responded to this anti-Semitism with unanimous and unqualified rejection. On the other hand, liberal politicians and the liberal parliament—to quote Vörösmarty—took action

with an “irresolute hand.”

Kossuth himself wanted to postpone equality under the law for Jews, calling on them to “be patient a little longer in the interests of the homeland and the freedom of the people.”<sup>3</sup> He justified his standpoint by saying that, although what had occurred was distressing, prejudice was a reality against which “the gods themselves contend in vain.” Behind this position probably lay the conviction that for the sake of the reconciliation forming up among different interests, a sacrifice had to be made, even if this put a question mark against the whole process.

Naturally, not everyone shared Kossuth’s views on the need for an important sacrifice of principle in the interests of practical politics. Samu Bónis reacted to Kossuth in the National Assembly by saying, “it is impossible to share the view of those swayed by unrest; legislation may not be dictated by sordid street demonstrations, but by justice and principle alone. The heroes of disruption must be punished, not honored in contempt of justice.”<sup>4</sup>

The liberal and democratic intelligentsia raised their voice in vain; similar views were pressed without result in political circles; the advocates of postponement prevailed. Only on 28 July 1849 did the National Assembly adopt the law on emancipation of the Jews, on the same day as the law on nationality—scarcely two weeks before the already inevitable defeat.

Hungarian Jews reacted to the twofold challenge of 1848—faced with calls for emancipation on one hand and the unprincipled policy of delay on the other—in a twofold manner. The anti-Semitic atmosphere of spring spawned bitterness and disillusion. An office was set up by Ede Horn, Adolf Dux and others encouraging Jews to emigrate to the United States, the land of freedom and equal rights. This reaction soon faded, however, and a significant number of Jews who had been pushed out of the national guard enlisted in the Hungarian army. The emigration office became a recruiting office.

Liberal efforts to secure emancipation and anti-Semitic moves to deny it; impulses towards both assimilation and dissimilation: this was the dilemma at the birth of modern Hungary.

## THE LIBERAL PROPOSAL: ASSIMILATION

For Hungarian liberals, the question equality before the law for Jews was not new: the Lower House had already raised it in the 1839–40 diet with a view to granting them parity with other groups outside the nobility. (The bill failed to overcome the resistance in the Upper House, but not without some gains. Act XXIX of 1840, entitled “On Jews,” allowed Jews to settle freely except in mining towns, and Ferdinand V’s decree of 27 July 1846 abolished the special tax levied on Jews, facetiously known as the “tolerance tax.”)

The liberal advocacy of emancipation will not be traced in chronological detail here. More interesting is what inspired them, since this was largely what determined the specifics of assimilation.

Valuable evidence is provided by the speech of Baron József Eötvös to the Upper House during the 1840 parliament, which he also published as an extended essay.<sup>5</sup>

Eötvös’s argument, fully expressing the view of Hungarian liberalism at that time, takes as its point of departure the view that,

the time has come when the legislature should extend its caring hand to this unfortunate section of the populace; it is the message of the time, calling for the embourgeoisement of the people, a new affirmation of our progress, shining evidence of the progress this House is proceeding towards liberty. In the firm conviction that a free constitution may only be built on justice applied equally to every class of people and on full respect for all human rights, and in the knowledge that the fate of this people hangs on the sense of justice of this House, I may perhaps make so bold as to declare that the time has come in which the Jews, too, may look to a better future within this realm.

It was a powerful argument, based on the formula of combining values and interests. Freedom and equality before the law were linked up to the notion of rational self-interest. Eötvös believed that the granting of equality before the law to Hungarian Jews would ultimately strengthen the position of the Hungarians, constituting as they did a minority in the country:

The objection is advanced that [the Jews] have until now shown no inclination to join the Hungarian nation. They do not consider themselves true citizens in a country where they have always been regarded as aliens; they have not become united with a nation which has treated them with contempt; and they have little zeal for a constitution known to them only as a burden. Reflecting upon this, my astonishment at those who raise such an objection is matched only by my pity for those against whom it is directed. Should we wonder that the downtrodden do not find common cause with the nation?...The German provinces of France, which in the course of a century have become French, and England, where so many different peoples have come together as a single great nation, stand as evidence, clearer than any argumentation, that the most diverse peoples can unite into one great whole whenever and wherever the same rights centralise separate parts. In Holland, France, England and the United States, nobody accuses the emancipated Jews of a lack of national identity. No one will be able to accuse them of this in our country either, as soon as their emancipation renders them full and free members of our nation, whereupon, by gaining a homeland, they will be capable of affection for that homeland.

Hungarians would thus be ethnically strengthened by the adoption of liberal values—the nation would increase in numbers and strength. The question remained, of course, as to what the new members of the nation would be like. Would they become Hungarian in character too?

Eötvös did not ignore this question, particularly because the opponents of emancipation cited the alleged negative characteristics of Jews, most of these connected with the commercial activity held in such contempt by the feudal order. Eötvös argued that offensive behavioral traits were linked to oppression, and would disappear along with it. On the question of commerce, he declared, “I dare say that the orientation of Jews towards commerce is rather a consequence of their persecution. Having been forced to take this direction they attained perfection in it. I would venture to assert that on becoming full citizens, Jews will find new routes open to them, so that this purely commercial inclination will

diminish rather than strengthen....” This did not, however, resolve the question of what emancipated Jews should be like, a question which grew more complex in the run-up to the emancipation act of 1849.

The pursuit of Hungarianization through emancipation found itself up against two major demands. The first arose from the specter of mass immigration. This was liable to slow down the process of making Hungarians out of Jews, if not render it impossible, especially if the process itself set off another great wave of immigration. Thus a demand arose for regulation, not to say curtailment of rights.

But there was another demand, which powerfully expressed the essence of Hungarian liberalism at that time: namely that the Jews, in order to be accepted into Hungarian society, should make changes in their religious practices and customs, the Jewish behavioral traits associated with these, and in the rules or standards which set Jews apart from the rest of society, i.e. if they wanted to get out of the ghetto, they should change their Jewishness too.

Acceptance of the Jews was thus—explicitly or implicitly—linked to conditions, which in turn were linked to the main point of acceptance, the strengthening of the Hungarian nation. To put it another way, the close interweaving of liberal values with perceived national interests resulted, by reaction, and from the very beginning, in the setting of decidedly antiliberal constraints.

This peculiar state of affairs acquired clear expression in the formulation of the symbolically important emancipation law adopted on 28 July 1849. The bill introduced by Bertalan Szemere states:

- Art. 1: As regards religious differences between citizens of Hungary, no distinction being made, the principle shall be applied that any resident of the Jewish faith who was born or has legally settled within the borders of the Hungarian state shall enjoy all political and civil rights pertaining to the citizens of any other religious faith.
- Art. 2: The conditions of settlement shall be defined by the government in a temporary decree.
- Art. 3: Marriages between persons of the Jewish and Christian faiths shall be declared valid in respect of their civil consequences. Such marriages shall be contracted before the

civil authorities and their procedure shall temporarily be defined in a decree.

Art. 4: The minister of internal office shall permanently be charged with the following:

- a) Citizens of the Jewish faith shall call an assembly made up of their clergy and representatives to consider reforms to their ecclesiastical apparatus in concordance with needs of the present age.
- b) This act renders obligatory that persons of the Jewish faith shall be directed by means of suitable rules to the practice of manual trades and agriculture.<sup>6</sup>

The implications of the act were twofold. Since civil equality before the law could only be complete if it includes religious acceptance, Jewish emancipation necessarily implied full-scale liberalism; the act thus went beyond civil and political equality to institute civil marriage, and so indirectly religious acceptance. On the other hand, articles two and four, although given as accessory considerations rather than pre-conditions, pointed in a different direction. The requirement for regulation of “legal settlement” in fact affected immigration policy, and could take effect only if the Hungarian government was sovereign and able to decide whom to admit into the country and whom to exclude from it. Such a sovereign decision was not possible if the Hungarian state was part of a larger empire. This consideration is worth noting because of the significance it took on in 1867.

Of more pressing relevance, however, was religious reform, or rather the resolution to restructure Jewish society. The latter implied that the liberal state, accepting civil and political equality, must in some way interfere in the free choices of its emancipated citizens. (Several twentieth century measures did just this, and not just to Jews; the higher education restrictions, the administrative constraints imposed through chambers of commerce, and the labor camp system are notable examples.) If the state was to steer a particular group of its supposedly free citizens along predetermined courses, it would no longer be liberal, having violated the principle of equality before the law. This section of the act was therefore illiberal—and indeed unenforceable if the state wished to maintain respect for the principle of equality before the law.

The requirement of religious reform was not unequivocally illiberal, however, because the law called for its promotion rather than for its imposition. If the representatives of the Jews wanted religious reform, then so be it. The law merely expressed the executive power's expectation that such reform should take place.

If we wish to interpret the aims both of those wishing to expand or to harmonize civil rights and of those who wanted to restrict them, it is not enough to view the Hungarian liberals simply as politicians struggling within the confines of preexisting prejudices.<sup>7</sup> The demands imposed on Jews—whether preconditions or auxiliary factors—were related to a prime issue in Hungarian liberalism, one that concerned not so much Jewish affairs as the status of the Hungarian nation.

The main purpose of emancipating the Jews was to strengthen the Hungarian nation. This was a particularly pressing consideration in a country where the majority of the population belonged to other ethnic groups. The fundamental, consciously-identified objective of Hungarian liberalism was to create, via equality before the law, a nation in the civil sense of the word. The creation of a nation was inextricable from liberalism, but this pursuit of modernity, by eroding the feudal concept of nationhood, inevitably highlighted and fuelled the issue of ethnic affiliation, since it might set off similar processes among the non-Hungarian national groups which constituted the numerical majority. The building of a modern nation also added further points of conflict to Habsburg-Hungarian relations, since the prospect of Germanization, already threatening feudal privileges, presented a danger to the whole extended nationhood concept, and conversely, the demand for a nation-state threw into doubt the unity of the Habsburg empire.

The development of the cultural nation concept (language reform, the Academy of Science, grammar, national literature, etc.) was gradually accompanied by a political nation concept based on liberal codes of law which, although offering no collective rights to the country's various national groups, promised—and where possible, conferred—broad individual rights. It was thought that individual rights would provide sufficient cohesion to counterbalance collective national movements.

In this context, Hungarian liberals could not base their national consciousness on a culturally integrative view of society. On the con-



trary: they wanted to impose a Hungarian mold on other groups so as to homogenize them with the nation. The liberal nation concept formulated in terms of homogenization rather than integration logically excluded the notion of cultural diversity, and its proponents did all they could to give Hungarian culture, or what they regarded to be so, an identifiable form. Since the Jews did not have a national identity of their own, they constituted an ideal subject for assimilation. (This had already been recognised in Vienna, where the Germanization policy forced Jews to assume German family names.) However, although they may have lacked a national consciousness, the Jews had a religion whose all-embracing nature posed a challenge to the notion of assimilation. Not confined to principles and guidelines, Judaism prescribed rules governing all aspects of life from eating habits to married life. It was an entire culture affecting everyday customs as well as religious life. This was somewhat incompatible with the concept of a historically-evolved Hungarian nation having a homogeneous, rather than an integrative, culture. And since this different culture was, or appeared to be, inextricable from the Jews' position in the division of labor, the latter was also called into question and became a target for change.

This serves to explain why liberalism demanded that Jews take on Hungarian identity in the cultural sense, as well as the political and linguistic, and why this demand was set into legislation. Furthermore, it is symbolic that the 1849 act linking emancipation to cultural assimilation was passed on the same day as the one granting only partial integration to ethnic minorities in the Hungarian state.<sup>8</sup> It is understandable that, after 1849, it was Kossuth who emerged from the ranks of the Hungarian liberals to espouse unconditional equality before the law, and who in 1851 committed to paper a draft for a new constitution envisaging an integrated society based upon cultural autonomy at the state executive level.<sup>9</sup> By then, of course, he was in exile.

Although liberal Hungarian politics even following the Compromise of 1867 did not change its concept of homogeneity, Jewish assimilation was not the subject of legislation. The law passed in December 1867 consisted of only two clauses. The first stated that "the country's Israelite residents shall henceforth be entitled to exercise all the civil and political rights enjoyed by Christian residents." The second stipu-

lated that “all laws, customs or decrees to the contrary are hereby abolished.”<sup>10</sup> No mention was made of immigration, religious reform or state direction of occupations. Their absence was not due to a liberal change of mind: a variety of causes played a part. The terms of the Compromise prevented the Hungarian parliament from ruling on immigration or inhibiting the movement of capital or labor within the empire.<sup>11</sup> As for state-enforced alterations to the occupational structure, the legislators of 1868 probably realized the impossibility of enacting them without taking entirely illiberal measures. There was an initiative on religious reform put forward by the minister of education, but this could not be formulated as a legislative principle.

It was by omission that the desire for full cultural assimilation was most clearly expressed. The 1867 law made no reference, even indirectly, to make Judaism a received religion (*religio recepta*), and the legislature postponed decision on civil marriages until the 1890s. The practical effect of this was that the main vehicle of Jewish culture was excluded from the emancipation process. This—taken together with the ministerial proposal for religious reform—again implied the linking of emancipation to cultural homogenization, i.e. assimilation.

Although the wording had changed, the proposal from Hungarian liberalism was therefore the same in 1867 as it had been in 1849: become Hungarian and you will be part of the nation. You must, however, give up your own cultural standards and habits. If you do this, we will do more than admit you, we will actually accept you.

A significant number of Jews took up this offer.<sup>12</sup> They made a political commitment to the Hungarian nation, took to speaking Hungarian, and progressively molded themselves to Hungarianness in terms of customs, lifestyle and principles. The Jewish burgher wanted to be a Hungarian gentleman, and regaling himself in the trappings of Hungarianness was not an uncomfortable imposition but longed-for goal. The choice was made easier by the fact that the secular process of embourgeoisement, even without pressure towards assimilation, came into increasing conflict with the regulations of religious traditionalism. The liberal offer was consciously aimed at encouraging Jews not merely to modernize their cultural identity along secular lines, but to renounce it. Jews at various stages along this route responded by vigorously declaring their Hungarianness in terms that went beyond lan-

guage or loyalty to the homeland. They affirmed that Hungarian culture was their own.

Hungarian liberalism's fear of the Germanizing power of Habsburg rule and of the predominance of other nationalities, and the concept of homogeneous culture and national identity it gave rise to, put such a pressure on the Jews that a large segment of them appeared willing to abandon gradually their own cultural identity in order to become Hungarian citizens. They thought that if they remained only symbolically Jewish, they could and would be Hungarian citizens of equal status.

#### THE ANTI-SEMITIC PROPOSAL: DISSIMILATION

At the birth of modern Hungary in the spring of 1848, the movement towards political emancipation and assimilation was accompanied by the appearance of anti-Semitism, an ideology seeking to exclude Jews from full citizenship.

In its 1848 form, however, it had no intellectual strength; it was not yet a modern ideology that could form a worldview. This had to wait for international influences, mainly German and Austrian, and indeed for the commencement and increasing momentum of the assimilation process.

In Hungary, anti-Semitism as a fully-fledged political ideology started to make itself felt in the mid-1870s.<sup>13</sup> A separate political party formed up around it and gained representation in the Hungarian parliament. The issue from which it drew the most attention—even from abroad—was the Tiszaeszlár ritual murder indictment of 1882. Several Jews were charged with ritual murder of a young Hungarian girl, and the initial verdict of guilty was ultimately overturned by the Royal Supreme Court on 10 May 1884. However, I would contend that the medieval anti-Judaism manifested in this infamous affair was not the key factor. Anti-Semitism drew its new power from the novelty of functioning as a political ideology, and as it confronted the process of emancipation, it formed up around the pursuit of dissimulation. It is thus worthwhile taking a look at the views it expressed—views which were repudiated at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

The modern incarnation of anti-Semitism was troubled principally by the successes of assimilation, coupled with an aversion to the social and material restructuring caused by industrialization and embourgeoisement.

Its point of departure was that Jews were not capable of assimilation because of ingrained racial characteristics. This implies at the outset that Hungarians formed an ethnic-racial category which excluded absorption of any group that did not “originally” belong to it. The Jews—invading the body of the nation through emancipation—lived like parasites (in the anti-Semitic jargon, practicing “stock market liberalism”) and debilitated the nation (the reasoning here was based on the Austrian Professor August Rohling’s Talmud forgeries). Spurred on by radical German anti-Semitism of Wilhelm Marr and Karl E. Dühring, they claimed that the racial qualities of the Jews—“greed,” “duplicity” and “lack of patriotism”—were irreconcilably opposed to the essential characteristics of the Hungarian nation: “chivalry,” “openness,” and “an honest personality.” The Jews grew rich through the pursuit of unproductive forms of business, such as trade and finance: it was rare indeed to find a Jewish brakeman or train conductor. A favorite simile used to portray the relationship between the Jews and the Hungarians was that of “marauding wasps who rob the industrious bees of their honey.”

Liberalism presented an opportunity for the “wasps”—Jews—to prevail and so, following this logic, liberal politics favored only the Jews. But not even that was enough for the Jews, whose destructive nature gave rise to other schemes. Jews were inducing morally pure Hungarians to “rum drinking, cigar smoking, and other kinds of extravagance.” By means of the economic power they had acquired, they were corruptly seizing control of the judiciary, public administration, parliament and government.

As if control of the entire state apparatus was not enough, Jews were trying to seduce the whole of society to take up the same kind of infamy. It was liberal freedom of the press that they exploited for this end. There were basically two kinds of newspapers: Jewish or “Jew-friendly.” “The Jewish press exercises tyranny over public opinion, the crushing of which is the duty and right of every honest patriot,” they wrote.

The Jews were effective in their foreignness, repugnance, and destructiveness because they had a power structure, partly open and

partly secret, whose hierarchical cohesion amplified the power of their efforts. (The operation of this organization was conceived along the lines of the autonomous Jewish communities in Russia, the Kahal.)

The assimilation process—a phenomenon theoretically impossible under the anti-Semites' basic premise—was explained as being nothing more than a sham. The total alienness of the Jews therefore had to be exposed. A good example was the Jews' use of the Hungarian language. It was true that more and more Jews were speaking Hungarian, but the result was “degradation” of the language—urban people were speaking differently from rural people, and this was all due to the Jews.

The conclusion was the same as the initial premise: Jews had not and, indeed, could not become Hungarian. They were no more than foreign bodies built into the nation, parasites by nature. Their assimilation was merely a mask behind which they were establishing their own positions of power in the Hungarian state. And their own religious and cultural rules prevented them from seeking true acceptance, they were determined to stay separate. They were drawn by their coreligionists around the world, and were thus irredeemably cosmopolitan and entirely incapable of Hungarian patriotism.

What could be done to stop this contagion? Modern political anti-Semitism offered several recipes which could be applied in parallel. Their favorite proposals were those aimed at restricting or stripping away civil rights. Above all they demanded the revocation of emancipation. Immigration also had to be stopped, and Jews were to be encouraged to emigrate. Laws were also needed to prevent “racial intermingling.” These might be supplemented by a *numerus clausus* (legislating the number of Jews admitted to university, for example) and a *numerus nullus* (admitting none at all). Anti-Jewish laws on money changing and usury were also considered useful, and the withdrawal of moving rights also seemed like a good idea. Christian social campaigns might supplement legislative initiatives, such as the “Don't buy from the Jews” drive, and it was of course essential to set up a dedicated press.

The logical conclusion of this race-based, antiassimilation Hungarian anti-Semitism was Jewish emigration and the expunging of Jewish influence. Hungarian anti-Semites addressed the question of what the subsequent fate of these outcast Jews should be. Győző Istóczy, at the

24 June 1878 session of the Hungarian parliament, stated that the medieval solution to the Jewish question—mass executions—was not really practicable, and called upon the government to do all it could towards the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, to which Hungarian Jews could be deported. The Hungarian anti-Semites were ahead of almost everybody else in the world with this idea, flatly contradicting, of course, their assertion that the Jews' racial characteristics rendered them incapable of statehood.

The anti-Semites thus worked on the premise of ethnically-racially determined cultural homogeneity, in contrast with the liberals, who also based their views on homogeneity, but of a kind that could be learned and adopted. They both rejected integration; their differences stemmed from their respective aims of assimilation and dissimilation. Both basic positions, with all their internal contradictions, rested on exceptionally powerful frameworks of ideology, consciousness and language. One might even say they constituted a polar field in Hungarian consciousness and self-expression. Someone alluding to the separateness of Jewish culture might either face the accusation of anti-Semitism or be a target of the anti-Semites. But a Jew who disavowed—and cut himself off from—any kind of Jewish cultural affinity, although fulfilling the requirements of Hungarian liberals, was forced to deny any cultural heritage in religion or some kind of secularized form, sometimes at the price of lying to himself and to others.

The effect of this absorption-rejection polarity, based on different kinds of homogenization and homogeneity, on the consciousness of the time is illustrated by the following passage about Tivadar (Theodor) Herzl, who trod the path of assimilation first with the Hungarians and then the Germans (or “Austrians,” as referred to here). The author was Stefan Zweig, a Jewish writer looking back during the Nazi era. Through his own experiences and times, he evokes the world of the 1890s, the period following the Dreyfus affair, a phenomenon which affected Jews throughout the Habsburg empire:

Indeed in his upright and manly pride Theodor Herzl had already suffered under the Jewish lot when he was a student; moreover by his prophetic instinct he had foreseen the entire tragedy of his race at a time when it had not appeared to be an inevitable fate. With the

feeling of being born to leadership, which his imposing presence no less than his grandiose thinking and his worldly knowledge seemed to confirm, he had then formulated the fantastic plan to end the Jewish problem once and for all: Jewry was to unite itself with Christianity by means of a mass baptism. Always thinking dramatically, he had pictured to himself how he would lead the thousands and thousands of Jews of Austria, in an exemplary symbolic act, in long procession to the Cathedral of St. Stephen, there to absolve the persecuted, homeless people of the curse of separation and hatred for all time. Soon he realized the unfeasibility of this plan, and years of his own work diverted him from the original problem of his life, the solution of which he had recognized as his true task. But now at the moment of Dreyfus's degradation the thought of the eternal exile of his people entered his breast like the thrust of a dagger. If separation was inevitable, he said to himself, then let it be a complete one. If humiliation is to be our constant fate, then let us face it with pride. If we suffer because of our homelessness, then let us build our own homeland! And so he published his pamphlet, "The Jewish State," in which he proclaimed that all attempts at assimilation and all hope for total tolerance were impossible for the Jewish people. They had to create a new homeland of their own in their old home, Palestine.

I was still in the *Gymnasium* when this short pamphlet, penetrating as a steel shaft, appeared: but I can still remember the general astonishment and annoyance of the bourgeois Jewish circles of Vienna. What has happened, they said angrily, to this otherwise intelligent, witty and cultivated writer? What foolishness is this that he has thought up and writes about? Why should we go to Palestine? Our language is German and Hebrew and not Hebrew, and beautiful Austria is our homeland. Are we not well off under the good Emperor Franz Josef? Do we not make a decent living, and is our position not secured? Are we not equal subjects, inhabitants and loyal citizens of our beloved Vienna? Do we not live in a progressive era in which in a few decades all sectarian prejudices will be abolished? Why does he, who speaks as a Jew and who wishes to help Judaism, place arguments in the hands of our worst enemies and attempt to separate us, when every day brings us more

closely and intimately into the German world? The rabbits thundered passionately from the pulpits, the head of the *Neue Freie Presse* forbade the very mention of the world Zionism in his “progressive” newspaper. Karl Kraus, the Thersites of Viennese literature, the master of invective, wrote a pamphlet called “The King of Zion,” and when Theodore Herzl entered a theater, people whispered sneeringly: “His Majesty has Arrived!”

At first Herzl could rightly feel himself misunderstood—Vienna, where he thought himself most secure because he had been beloved there for so many years, not only deserted him but even laughed at him. But then the answer roared suddenly back with such force and such ecstasy that he was almost frightened to see how mighty a movement, already growing beyond his control, he had brought into being with his few dozen pages. true, it did not come from the well-situated, comfortable bourgeois Jews of the West but from the gigantic masses of the East, from the Galician, the Polish, the Russian proletariat of the Ghetto. Without realizing it, Herzl with his pamphlet had brought to flame the glowing coal of Judaism, long smoldering in the ashes, the thousand-year-old messianic dream, confirmed in the Holy Books, of the return to the Promised land. This is the hope and the religious certainty which have made life worth living for the persecuted and enslaved millions. Whenever anyone—prophet or deceiver—throughout the two thousand years of exile plucked this string, the entire soul of the people was brought into vibration, but never as forcefully as upon this occasion, never with such a roaring and rushing echo. By means of a few dozen pages a single person had united a dispersed and confused mass.

The first moment, while the idea was still a dream of vague outline, was decidedly the happiest in Herzl’s short life. As soon as he began to fix his aims in actual space, and to unite the forces, he was made to realize how divided his people had become among various race and destinies—the religious on the one hand, the free thinkers on the other, here the socialist, there the capitalistic Jews—all competing eagerly with one another in all languages, and all unwilling to submit to a unified authority. <sup>15</sup>



## THE UNSPEAKABLE DISTINCTIVENESS: INTEGRATION

There can be no disputing that the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jews during the nineteenth century moved towards assimilation, and this can be attributed to the Hungarian liberals' desire to make the Jews feel at home on top of granting them equal rights. The liberals, motivated by the potential threat of Germanization from Habsburg power and the only gradually diminishing preponderance of national minorities (Jewish assimilation accounting for a large part of the improvement), vigorously demanded Hungarianization of the Jews. In addition to linguistic Hungarianization and loyalty to the Hungarian state and people, Jews were called on to assume full cultural identification. Set against this, the anti-Semites rejected such cultural merger, maintaining its impossibility and necessary artificiality, and thus attacked the very notion of emancipation.

Put most simply, this led to the emergence of two narratives of identity and self-expression frameworks. One declared that Jews were equal with others because they were Hungarian. The other took the position that the Jews should have their rights restricted or even removed precisely because they were not Hungarian and could never become so. This is how it was, how it always had been and how it always would be.

The ideological field generated between these two poles spread through the entire scope of popular thinking. One result was a constant attempt by some Hungarian Jews to prove their complete and perfect assimilation, their unassailable Hungarianness. (This continues to the present day.) It was not a surprising reaction. To have asserted any aspect of Jewish culture would have led to confrontation with the homogenizing efforts of Hungarian liberals and provided grist to the anti-Semitic mill.

In his way—on the conscious level—it was more or less impossible for Jews to attach themselves to Hungary in a way which was integrative, i.e. both retaining and modernizing their own cultural identity. Consciousness of this cultural identity might have revealed itself in the more secular aspects of religion—for instance, by celebrating religious festivals in a form acceptable to Hungarians—but also in secu-

larized standards separate from religion, or to be more precise, in the open popularization of these norms. Or in other words, the possibility of being Hungarian differently. It cannot be said that dissimilarities did not exist, since the assimilation process itself was envisaged in stages, with identification being achieved by gradual erosion of differences. Neither can it be said that the preservation of otherness is the only way. This is a preconception which would obscure understanding of history. All we can say is that integration cannot become a conscious ambition if the person who might somehow seek it finds no willing partner. The only options remaining are either the ideological overemphasis of assimilation, or the pursuit of dissimilation, made into a consistent scheme by a search for historical precursors. (Anti-Semitism does not derive its strength from the validity of its claims but in its determination to stifle self-expression, and so penetrate the popular consciousness.)

It became difficult for religious or even secularized cultural identity to assume an autonomous articulation and thus establish itself as an idea which could inspire the requisite cultural—and, where required, political—organization. It became difficult to be Hungarian in another way, difficult for diverging dimensions of consciousness to develop in juxtaposition and equal value.

Another consequence was the effect this polarization of consciousness had on Jewish and non-Jewish writers dealing with the history and destiny of the Hungarian Jews. Instead of objectively appraising and interpreting events, they became prisoners of the language and concepts of an ideological tangle they were caught up in themselves.<sup>16</sup>

This is particularly striking in the problem of integration. No one denied, either directly or indirectly, that the Jews represented a living culture and that certain religious or secular standards played an important role in their lives. But because scholarly approaches fell into only two categories—homogeneous acceptance and homogeneous rejection—integration could not be consciously formulated as the subject of historical research. (That this is more than just a methodological dilemma is proved by historians' universal practice of mentioning the Jewish origins of protagonists in historical and cultural developments. If the subtle, multi-level "integrative" factor did not exist, then why mention this aspect so consistently?)

My conclusion is that in search of objectivity and fullness of explanation, we must rethink the history of the Hungarian Jews—like so much else—and give expression to something that was permitted to exist by our history, but was prevented from attaining a conscious, expressible form.

Of course, this is more than a matter of subjective resolve, intellectual thoroughness, or accumulating facts. There is a far more vital preliminary condition. Just as the Hungarian national consciousness—guided by liberal thinking—became capable of regeneration, the same ability today, and—in some ways building on the legacy of Kossuth—the Hungarian nation, both as concept and reality, must be interpreted in terms of cultural integration as well as homogeneity alone. It was a change in Hungarian national consciousness that afforded Hungarian Jews opportunities for self-definition in the past, and a similar scenario is called for today. Only a transformation of such magnitude could put an end to an ideological dichotomy which has already exhausted its resources.