

III. Historical Tradition

Thus far, our readings have informed us of how a well organized nomadic tribal confederation of predominantly Hungarian-speaking warriors populated the Carpathian Basin in the late 9th century. In more recent times of romantic mythmaking, several nationalities, later independent countries around Hungary, accused Hungarians of conquering and subjugating their ancestors (who were, of course, assumed to be peaceful peoples of a higher civilization). Such have been, notably, the claims of Romanian and Slovak chauvinist historicism.

Gyula Illyés was no historian, yet he summarized succinctly the "secret" of Hungary's creation: the proclivity for persuasion and tolerance, and talent for organizing and nationbuilding. There is no objective proof for the assertion that the Hungarians may have conquered existing high civilizations. Instead, they found a geographic and power vacuum in a land which they populated, civilized, and politically stabilized. Illyés's emphasis on the multiethnic origins of the Hungarian nation is worth noting. Such separation of political and cultural aspects was a key principle of the Hungarian definition of a nation, making it possible for individuals to reconcile their loyalty to their country with loyalty to their culture. Hungarian historiography has confirmed Illyés's interpretation of the process and the results of forming a modern European country.

Document 1. GYULA ILLYÉS: *Who Is a Hungarian?*

In the Carpathian Basin, not a single nation could find permanent dwelling before the Hungarians arrived. This was a dangerous area, just like a crossroads: migrating peoples met and clashed here, fighting battles and chasing each other.

In the course of history, few peoples created a country for themselves in such a short time and in such a dangerous region as the Hungarians. What explains this?

This, too, can be explained by the unparalleled composition of the Hungarians. The two halves of the people that had merged long before retained their basic characteristics. The Hun warriors fought as ferociously as no other nation did at that time in Europe, and soon conquered what became their country. The offspring of the humble fishermen conquered the soil and pacified the vanquished peoples. Árpád's descendants were soldiers and colonizers at the same time.

The kinsfolk of the Huns were not only brave and good at organizing, they were also tolerant towards the defeated peoples. Neither the Huns nor the Avars, not even the Turks in later times, meddled with the traditions, religions, or trades of the conquered ones. Árpád's warriors did the same. They did not drive away the defeated peoples, nor did they want to assimilate them against their will. That is precisely why these eventually intermingled with the Hungarians voluntarily.

The number of Hungarians increased tremendously by these additions to the population. Upon receiving the news about the good and permanent homeland, smaller and larger groups of peoples started arriving from the East: relatives of Árpád's tribe, Cumanians, Jazygi-ans, and Pechenegs.¹

Then came settlers from the West, too. They didn't weaken the Hungarians but, rather, enriched them. The Hungarian people were already a strong unified nation by then, and their country a securely established state. It accommodated all those who accepted its tradition, who became Hungarian in heart and soul and made the Hungarian language and way of thinking their own.

Almost exactly a century after the arrival of the Hungarians, the still pagan ruler Géza realized that his country could not survive on a Christian continent whose military might the Hungarians had experienced. He converted to Christianity, invited foreign missionaries, and arranged for his adolescent son, Vajk, to inherit the rule over Hungary. In 1000 A.D., this young man became Hungary's first Christian king, assuming the name István (Stephen). He ruled the country for thirty-eight years, and was canonized forty-five years after his death. The strong and influential medieval Catholic country that Hungary was for half a millennium, was Stephen's work.

As we read the translation of his *Admonitions* written to his son prince Imre, we are struck by the consistency of the principles of government, from Árpád's confederation to Stephen's centralized kingdom. Tolerance towards other cultures, and respect of the national tradition as the source of continuity and stability, are two principles that the medieval Hungarian state inherited from its pre-Christian founders. At the same time, authenticating the admonitions by Biblical and classical examples shows the ambition to embrace Europe's two underlying cultural traditions. With regard to Hungary's later tribulations, however, the thesis on the desirable attitude towards "foreigners" was cardinal. As opposed to the much later, intolerant Romantic principle of monolingual and monocultural nation states, Stephen defined his kingdom in the spirit of medieval statehood as one accommodating different peoples as long as they subject themselves to royal authority. As other rulers of his age, king Stephen too appreciated the variety of skills and talents by which foreign guests made the country greater and stronger. Indeed, until the last year of the Second World War no citizens of the country who represented other cultures were expelled, as were the Moslems and Jews from late 15th century Spain, or the Acadian French from Nova Scotia in the 18th century — just to mention two examples from the yet unwritten history of such abominable mass expulsions.

Document 2. THE ADMONITIONS OF KING STEPHEN

V. About the practice of fair judgment and patience

The practice of patience and fair judgment is the fifth ornament of the crown. David the King and prophet says: "Give your judgments to the King, God". And elsewhere: "The king's righteousness favours the sincere judgment." Paul the Apostle says the following about patience: "Be patient with everyone." God in the Gospel says: "You win your soul by your forbearance." Keep these in mind, my son: if you want to gain respect for your kingdom, worship the right judgment. If you want to keep your soul in your possession, be patient. Whenever you encounter a case worthy of your judgment, or a defendant accused with a major crime, do not behave in an impatient manner, nor make promises on oath to punish the culprit. This would be irresolute and fleeting because man tends to break the foolish pledge. Do not be inclined to bring judgment alone, lest your royal dignity may be

tainted by busying yourself with a petty case. Leave such matters to the judges: it is their job to settle things according to the law. Beware of being a judge but be happy to be a king and be called one. Patient kings rule their country while the impatient ones tyrannize theirs. If at some time you encounter something that is worthy of your royal judgment, bring this judgment with patience and mercy but without making promises on oath. In this way, your crown will be praiseworthy and adorned.

VI. About welcoming and protecting guests

Guests and newcomers bring such profit that their appreciation deserves to be called the sixth royal virtue. At the beginning of the Roman Empire many noble and wise people moved there in great numbers from various regions. This is why the empire grew and its rulers were hailed and became glorious. Indeed, Rome would still be a bond servant if the descendants of Aeneas had not liberated it. As guests come from different regions and provinces, they bring various languages and manners, virtues and weapons, by which they enrich the country and increase the grandeur of the court. The unilingual and unicultural country is weak and perishable. Therefore, I order you, my son, to benevolently protect and respect the newcomers so they would rather stay with you than elsewhere. If you wanted to destroy what I have built or disperse what I have collected, no doubt your country would suffer a great deal. So that this would not happen, increase your country day-by-day, which will make people hold your crown glorious. [...]

VIII. Sons should follow their forefathers

Following in our ancestors' footsteps is the eighth most important royal virtue. The greatest royal ornament, as far as I know, is to follow the royal ancestors and one's parents. Namely, he who despises the rules of his forefathers will not obey the laws of the Lord either. Fathers are fathers so that they guard their sons, and the sons are sons so that they obey their parents. He who opposes his father joins the enemies of God. That is, all those who are disobedient stand against God. The breeze of disobedience scatters the flowers of the crown. Disobedience is a plague upon the entire kingdom. Therefore, my dear son, your father's regulations, that is my rules, should always be on your mind so your luck would always be guided by the royal rein. Follow without scepticism those habits of mine which can be reconciled with royal

dignity. Unless you follow the habits of those who ruled before your time, it will be difficult to keep your monarchy together in this part of the world. Which Greek governed the Romans according to Greek rules, and which Roman ruled the Greeks by Roman rules? None. This is why you should follow my customs. This is how you will rise above your dependents and this is how you will earn the praise of the foreigners.

Almost a whole millennium later, after such great historical blows were suffered by Hungary that would have destroyed other nations, Count Pál Teleki enhanced the inherited governmental principles, yet the ancient foundation is recognizable. Teleki was one of the few great political thinkers of 20th century Hungary. While pointing out the tribulations and injustices brought upon his country, he emphasized the need for responsibility and the avoidance of conquest to guide Hungarian political action.

Document 3. PÁL TELEKI: *Hungarian Political Thoughts*

The Hungarian nation lives under Saint Stephen's legacy. What is the secret of the fact, it is asked by almost all foreigners and some Hungarians, that kings with Hungarian and foreign blood lines, great statesmen, and a self-respecting and freedom-loving nation with the penchant for disagreement, were able to hold on to Saint Stephen's ideals for nine hundred years?

Saint Stephen's state does not strive for unlimited power, and never yearns to conquer beyond the Danubian Basin. On its land inside the Danubian Basin it is not power but the concepts of dedication and duty that prevail in the acts of our great personalities, in the memory of king Saint Stephen, and in the living thesis of the Holy Crown, this symbol of Saint Stephen's legacy. Its calling and duty is to bring peace, unity, and understanding to the Danubian basin. [...]

One of the tribulations that count Teleki referred to elsewhere dates back to 1541 when the independent and united kingdom of Hungary ended. The country fell into three parts, trying to cling to its tradition and re-establish itself amidst a formidable, extended power struggle of the Muslim East and the Catholic West: the Turkish Empire and the Holy Roman Empire (in practical terms, meaning Austria and the German principalities). After a nightmarish century and a half, which reduced the Hungarian population to one third of the original size, a united Europe

expelled the Turks, and Austria laid claim to the whole country. Repopulation by Austrian initiative started, bringing many German, Slavic, and Vlach-speaking settlers to Hungary and making the decreased indigenous population a minority in its own homeland. Most of the foreign settlers became Hungarian by free choice, appreciating the same tolerance and good qualities of the native people that King Stephen, Count Teleki, and Illyés described. Others, however, decided to side with various nationalist ideologies during the era of Romanticism. When in 1848 Hungary was forced into armed conflict with her Austrian (Habsburg) rulers to preserve her constitutional rights, part of the newly settled ethnic population turned against the national movement and supported the Austrian oligarchy, hoping for a dubious spoil.

Lajos Kossuth, leader of the War of Independence of 1848-49 (which eventually failed) developed, during his subsequent Italian exile, a blueprint for the future political system in the Danubian area. Having recognized the force of nationalistic sentiments of Hungary's various minorities, Kossuth attempted to offer them an alternative to the Habsburgs whose rule eventually disappointed the aforementioned groups as well.

Kossuth's plan for a Danubian Confederation is not flawless if read from the perspective of more than a century. Yet, it was a sincere and feasible attempt that would have provided peace and stability to a region which was, instead, turning more and more turbulent. The plan fell through since the emigre Kossuth's person no longer carried any weight in the eyes of those concerned. Since then, the Danubian area has been a powderkeg of conflicts that would take long pages to list. It should suffice to refer to the most recent bloody wars among the peoples of one-time Yugoslavia. One cannot help but ask: what if reason had prevailed in the 1860s?

Document 4. LAJOS KOSSUTH: *The Danubian Confederation*

In so far as the countries which are situated among the Carpathian Mountains, the Danube, the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea have their respective individual characteristics, it would be very difficult to establish a unified state. It is, however, desirable that these historic countries enter into an alliance, which may be called "Danubian Confederation." Other than matters of shared interest, which the confederated authorities would manage, each country would have its

own sovereign legislature, justice system, and administration. As a result of the greatest decentralization possible, each community and province would have ample freedom; all inhabitants of the confederation could enjoy unhampered progress; and each unique people could occupy its respective position in mankind's large family.

The basis for the new constitutional law would have to be agreed to by each country, either through a legislative assembly or by general vote. In this way, the inhabitants of Transylvania, for example, could determine whether their homeland should be part of Hungary; or, whether it should be only politically united with Hungary but administratively separate; or, finally, whether it should be only allied with Hungary and the other countries, while remaining autonomous just like the rest. As far as I am concerned, there is only one major condition that I would stipulate if Transylvania should choose to become an autonomous state and a member of the confederacy: that there should be a personal union between her and Hungary, that is, the sharing of the head of state. It does not matter what the title of their ruler will be. Mutual understanding between the Magyars and the Romanians is my most fervent wish, since it would ensure the welfare and freedom of both peoples. I sincerely hope that we will achieve this noble goal.

In the event that the Eastern question will be solved through the Christian peoples' independence,² it would be desirable if Serbia and the other Southern Slavic countries also joined the Danubian Confederation. In this case, the Confederation would stretch from the Carpathians to the Balkans, and would include Hungary, Transylvania, Romania, Croatia, and maybe some Serbian territories. With respect to those delicate issues which the countries may not be able to settle, friendly powers could be requested to mediate and render a decision.

The confederate treaty would be drawn up at a legislative assembly based upon certain principles, a number of which I shall outline.

1. Matters of shared interest would be the following: the Confederation's territorial defense, foreign affairs, foreign representation, and the commercial system, including commercial legislation, customs, the major traffic lines, currency, weights and measurements.

2. Everything in connection with land and naval forces, forts, and naval ports would be regulated by the confederate authorities.

3. States of the confederation would not have individual foreign representation; instead, the confederate diplomacy would be one and joint.

4. Import duties would also be joint. The revenue would be distributed among the different states as fixed by the legislation. Commercial legislation would be joint: one currency, one weight and measurement system for the entire confederation.

5. The legislative assembly would also determine whether the parliament (that is, the executive authority) would consist of only one chamber or two, like in the United States of America. In the latter case, the House of Representatives would be elected in proportion to the population of each individual state. All states, large and small, would have equal representation in the Senate - this is an excellent guarantee for the small states.

6. The ultimate executive power would be practised by a confederate council elected by the chamber, or chambers, of the parliament. The confederate council would also set direction to foreign politics as well as control legislature.

7. The confederation's official language would be determined by the legislative assembly. In practice, the executive and legislative authorities could use their own mother tongue.

8. The seat of the confederation would alternate among Pest, Bucharest, Zagreb, and Belgrade.

9. The head of that state in which the confederate seat happens to be located would act as head of the confederate council as well as temporary president of the confederation.

10. Each state would design for itself a constitution which best served its interests, provided that its constitutional principles did not oppose the ratified principles of the confederation.

11. The interrelation of the different nationalities and denominations would be settled on the basis of principles that the Hungarian delegation in Turin has already included in their memorandum of September 15, 1860.

Notably:

a.) Every community will decide upon an official language. This language should be used at all oral conferences, in correspondence and reports to the county head, petitions to the government and the parliament. In addition, each community will determine which language will be used for teaching in schools.

b.) Each county will determine by majority vote which language would be used in administrative matters. Oral negotiations would take place in this language, as would minutes of meetings, and government correspondence. Similarly, the government would answer and draft all departmental orders in the same language.

c.) In parliamentary negotiations each representative could use any language spoken in the country.

d.) The laws would be set forth in the communities and counties in the languages spoken there.

e.) The inhabitants of the country could associate freely. In the interest of their nationality, large national leagues could be organized. Furthermore, they could hold meetings at regular intervals to settle their religious affairs. At the same time, they could elect a leader for their nationality, who could be called a *voivod*, *hospodar*, something of this sort.³

f.) Nationality associations could manage their own churches and schools. Also, they could freely elect their prelates who might be titled a *patriarch*, *metropolitan*, something of this sort.

g.) These associations could enact statutes to benefit their organization, their nationality, and their religion.

h.) The state expects only one thing from these associations: that their decisions and actions be made a matter of public knowledge.

I trust that the Danubian territories will accept the above recommendations, because these fulfil their desires and interests, and ensure their future. In this way, internal understanding would be achieved among the states. As a result, autocracy would be defeated, and decadent states such as Austria or Turkey, which currently hold the Danubian countries in a position of servitude and prevent them from attaining their noble aspirations, would disintegrate. In the name of Heaven, I implore the Hungarian, Slavic, and Romanian brothers to put a veil on the past and extend a helping hand to each other. Thus, we can rise and stand united for freedom. [...] In the name of Heaven, accept this plan, which is not a concession but a mutual and free pact. Each Lower Danubian nation, even if it could gather all its kinsmen who live elsewhere, could form a second-rate state at best. Its independence would always be in jeopardy, and by necessity it would be subordinated to foreign influence. However, if the Hungarians, Southern Slavs and Romanians embraced the plan stated above, then a first-rate, prosperous and powerful state of thirty million inhabitants could be created. This would weigh heavily on the European scale.

Unity, concordance, and brotherhood among Hungarians, Slavs, and Romanians! Behold, this is my most fervent desire, my most sincere advice!

World War I erupted from a political murder in Sarajevo, Bosnia — an area which could have been stabilized by a Kossuthian federation. In 1920, the victors meted out "justice" to the losers. On June 4, in the

small castle of Trianon in the vast park of Versailles near Paris, Hungary was deprived of seventy-three percent of its historical territory, sixty-four percent of its population, and about eighty percent of its natural and cultural resources by dictates of a peace treaty.

Ever since then, Hungarians have not managed to cope with these losses. We need to consider whether we would have coped better had our own country suffered the same trauma. Pain makes one revengeful — however, far-sighted thinkers knew this and wanted to prevent repercussions. In 1938 and 1940, when, by international consent, small areas of the old homeland were returned to Hungary, count Teleki had some useful advice for his countrymen. The degree of institutionalized tolerance that he advocated (comprising censorship of cultural products so that they don't hurt the sensibility of national minorities) was unprecedented in his time. Only modern multiculturalism in a few countries (like Canada) has been resolute enough to face the necessity of curtailing certain freedoms like those of the media and the arts — by censorship, if necessary — in order to assert the human dignity of all groups and traditions.

Document 5. PÁL TELEKI: *Hungarian Political Thoughts*

The question arises in frequent thoughts of my leisure time: can we create history? This is the most important question of our time, because today everybody is a history builder: through his behaviour, work and deed. Shortly after the reannexation of Subcarpathia,⁴ I visited Munkács. The town was burning with excitement that day. A young person visited a newly appointed official of high rank, whoever he was, and said: "Me no speak Hungarian, sir, would you speak with me in Ruthenian, please".⁵ "What? That lingo? Go to hell!" - was the answer. Such a response could completely ruin public opinion and could set catastrophic nationality policy for large areas. One needs to be careful with such statements. One should watch his tongue whatever his thoughts are, because to make up for such a mistake takes weeks or months and the diligent effort of many people. Indeed, what does the question mean: can we create history?

Some parts of Saint Stephen's kingdom were returned to us,⁶ populated by a mix of Hungarians and other nationalities. To govern them is a historical task. On the basis of my experience I have to state that today's generation has not fully matured to this task. But we have to mature. We have to promote this idea. We have to draw conclusions

quickly and resolutely. We have to rely on direct experiences. We have to educate ourselves in order to fulfil the tasks. [...]

I concede that it is everyone's undebatable right to cultivate his mother tongue, customs, and traditions. It is the duty of the Hungarian State, nay, of all states, to support their citizens in their efforts by promoting education in various existing mother tongues. Safeguarding the cultural equality of minorities is part of Saint Stephen's legacy. This is why I keep emphasizing that we should learn the languages of the national minorities. We have to use these languages for communication with these minorities, because Saint Stephen's idea does not mean a forcible Hungarianization in either language or appearance. Coexistence and a shared form of life may mean, however, true adoption of Hungarianness, if it is sincere and stems from free will, because otherwise it carries no value. This is the only path leading people of different religions and world outlook to find unity so that they can live united and strive for shared prosperity. Of course, such community is needed by those who are confined to one land, breathing the same air, eating the same food, living the same way and, moreover, are led by the traditions of the past and the common will of the future. [...]

In the schools, children are to be taught in their own language to be loyal to the state. What does loyalty to the state mean? It means loyalty to the state principle and its individualized embodiment. [...] For centuries the Hungarian state has been, and is, the state of a multilingual, multi-rooted Hungarian nation. Loyalty to the state means loyalty to this nation, including the loyalty of various nationalities to each other as a duty of loyal patriots.

We have to assure the teaching of the mother tongue not only in elementary school, but also in secondary schools. Respecting paternal rights means allowing parents to decide which school their child should attend. We have to do our best to ensure the free prevalence of this decision.

The Hungarianization of names shall be demanded under no circumstances. I have never supported this movement because the Hungarianization of names in itself has no significance. It does not express feelings. It is a hoax and nothing else. Changing names can only be the final result of a longer assimilation process. If someone crosses over to another nationality — no matter for what family considerations — and later would fully associate himself with the new nationality, he may then ask the question, why should he preserve his foreign sounding name? Then he can change his name too. But earlier and otherwise such a thing serves no purpose. I would also add that

the free practice of any ethnic activity shall be allowed, including cinema and theatrical shows. At any rate, we shall be careful that the movie or play should not insult any ethnic group, nor human feelings in general.

Perhaps Hungarians expected too much from other countries: help against the Turks in the 16th and 17th centuries, against the Habsburgs in 1849, and fair peace agreement from the victors after World War I. Monarchs and countries did indeed render support to other monarchs and countries — yet, such support could never be taken for granted. This sobering recognition was, actually, the basis for a new kind of national self-reliance that some outstanding military leaders advocated. The first among these was count Miklós Zrínyi who was equally brilliant as a poet and as a statesman. Already in the mid-17th century he called for the establishment of a strong national army and for the study of military strategy by the leaders of this army. His conclusion is clear: no nation can exist without modern and efficient defense based on reliable internal resources. If it reads like a banality in its starkly stated form, why did, even in the 20th century, certain governments hope so naively for foreign (nowadays called "international") help once they themselves could obviously not resist armed intervention? Illusions die hard; therefore, Zrínyi's 300 year old rational patriotism seems so much more timely.

Document 6. MIKLÓS ZRÍNYI

God forbid that my pen should shame any foreign nation. That is not my intention, because I could prove the glory of every nation with historical accounts any time. But I would like to conclude that we Hungarians should not put our faith in the heroism of anyone else, but as long as God gives us strength and ability, we must strive so that the foreigners should not be our main helpers, but should only render accessory help. For surely, our wounds don't hurt anyone else as much as us, no-one else feels our misery as we do. Therefore, it follows that no-one reaches so briskly for the medicine as we should, especially if the medicine is associated with danger.

At this point someone may stop me to inquire: what are you trying to say by all this? What is your advice? It is easy for anyone to declaim and preach, but the sick need medication and the wounded a patch. I will answer these questions shortly, repeating my cry: arms, arms are needed, and a good heroic resolution! Besides this, I don't

know, nor will say, anything. We Hungarians either protect ourselves in this manner or die a heroic death, because there is no other choice. Should we flee? There is nowhere to go! We won't find Hungary anywhere else, and no other people will leave their country voluntarily so we can settle in it. Our noble freedom is to be found nowhere but in Pannonia. We must triumph or die here. [...]

If our complaints and prayers are all in vain, let us reach for the remedy if there is one - and there is one if we want one. Although I have portrayed our people critically in their present state, if you ask me, who and what kind of nation do I wish for patronage, I will say: the Hungarians. Why? Because this is the most suitable, strongest, and if it so wishes, the most valiant nation. The Hungarians have battled with the Turks for nearly two hundred years now. How often did the Turkish emperors come into our country with hundreds of thousands of men! Even Sultan Suleiman, the most gallant emperor of the Ottoman nation, led five expeditions into our country,⁷ yet God did not let us perish. When we lost something, it was mostly in peacetime, and due to false alliances, rather than in battles. This is why I desire Hungarians for my protectors, not [any other nation]. We should just improve ourselves, set a different course for our actions, reinstate military discipline to its former worthy place, and we won't be inferior to any other nation. Even if we are small in number, we are not so small that we could not make the Turks regret that they considered us to be next to nothing. [...]

It can surely be seen from this discourse that even if we have a great multitude of brave troops, they won't be of much use unless they study the art of fighting. Military skills do not only entail that soldiers fight any which way, but that they fight wisely. The bear is stronger than man, the panther faster, the lion more efficient, but nonetheless man conquers all of them with his cunning. Man forces horses, oxen, and elephants to serve him, which would not be possible if only strength and bravery were used instead of wisdom. It is even more desirable to possess wisdom when people fight against other people, particularly against such people as the Turks, who did not conquer us with strength or bravery, but with cunning and superior numbers. Thus, if victory goes to the best trained army, then there is no doubt that it will not be ours if we do not learn the art of warfare. It is true that the Turks are cunning and disciplined; however, their military tactics are not so perfect that they could not be better. When they find someone worse than they are, however, it is certain that the smaller prowess yields to the bigger one. Therefore, we must be better, more valiant, more educated, if we want to beat the Turks. [...]

Let us look at our present wretched situation and consider it well. Nowadays, if something as much as rustles on the Turkish side, we frantically run here and there, through waters and across mountains, to plead for help from others. We do not have people who could face the dangers, we do not even have one person who could lead us.

Blessed God, this is indeed a great vileness! Are we Hungarians? We do not deserve to be called by this name. If we cannot get Várad back,⁸ if we lose Transylvania, there is no use fighting any more. It is now or never: we can just as well run out of our country if we don't succeed. I heard that there is enough uncultivated land in Brazil: let us ask the Spanish king⁹ for a province, establish a colony, and become its citizens. But if you trust God, love your motherland, and have just one drop of Hungarian blood flowing in your veins, cry to God in Heaven!

Yet another historical delusion stems from the over-cultivation of history itself. This has been, and is, a major Hungarian fallacy. The nation's history is full of exciting, glorious events to look back at with nostalgia — even the struggles that failed developed their own uplifting ethos. The same history has also given rise to self-pity ("we defended Europe, yet it doesn't care about us!"), paranoia ("everybody was always against Hungary!"), and a tendency to isolation, cultivating this dubious attitude as some kind of merit.

Count István Széchenyi did not show much sympathy toward these fallacies of his country. It is impossible to call this widely travelled, enlightened aristocrat who sacrificed so much for the betterment of his nation anything but a patriot. Yet for many Hungarians it was difficult to cope with Széchenyi's blunt critique of his beloved nation's weaknesses. They found his great rival, the master orator Kossuth, more alluring. Excerpts from Széchenyi's most famous works, here and in other chapters, probably explain why. One cannot be lost in the past and fail to do one's best for a brighter future — that is Széchenyi's message. A word against self-pity and against laziness.

Document 7. ISTVÁN SZÉCHENYI: *On Credit*

Some people sadly whistle the melody of the peril of Mohács, since they believe that the casket of ancient glory is buried there. And it might be so, although I do not believe it. The wise man does not look

back as much as he looks forward, and instead of crying over lost treasure, he rather examines what has been saved, is satisfied with it, and strives to gain more gradually.

A great many people cry for the good old times, while they totally forget about the present, and therefore they are not able to use it wisely. However, if not the *charm of antiquity*, surely nothing else can make the time of our forefathers more desirable than the days of our own lives. We cannot deceive others with glorious tales, because history speaks aloud, and self-deception is sheer madness. Many people respect antiquity so much that they consider an unwrought rock magnificent if perhaps at some time Cicero sat on it, and marvel more at a few thin fallen columns - since they are many centuries old - than, for instance, at the Waterloo stone bridge of London or the Simplon Tunnel, since these are only a few years old. But this weakness also arises from the attraction to perfection. In some countries, so much occurred in the distant past that bears the appearance of greatness, so much that is worthy of mankind's pride, that nothing is more natural than that these amazing phenomena captivate the impressionable people to the extent that they even admire the old rust more than the new shine. In our country such greatness that one could mourn has not yet existed. And thank Heaven for this, because it may still come. Let us rejoice that we did not live in olden time, and that our days are still before us.

As indicated in the preceding chapter, our readings on Hungarian history have given us more advice on how one should interpret and shape history than factual information. The uncompromising self-analysis of the thinkers and statesmen not only pointed out some confusion and inconsistencies in the national psyche but also offered guidance towards a more rational future that people cannot help but hope for. The thoughts of these eminent Hungarian authors still preoccupy us, perhaps because they touch on still unsolved dilemmas of collective human history and experience.