CHAPTER VI

SWABIAN VIEWS ON
THE MAGYAR STATE IDEA –
POLITICAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL TEXTURE
OF THE SWABIANS IN THE
PRE-HITLER PERIOD

In contrast with the Magyar attitude which was pretty much unified in favor of assimilating the nationalities, the German one toward the Hungarian State idea and toward Magyar efforts for assimilation was rather complex. As is customary among minorities, different German individuals and groups were seeking different avenues in their endeavor to establish their status and improve their lot. Since to analyze all these approaches would far extend the volume of this study the writer is forced, rather reluctantly, to report in terms somewhat general.

The contribution of the pre-eighteenth century German settlers to Hungarian values has already been discussed earlier in this study. The great eighteenth century immigration wave brought an almost entirely peasant class of Germans to Hungary who continued farming in their new environs, which soon became their Heimat (homeland), cherished and beloved just as much as or even more than those left behind. Whether farmer, artisan, white collar worker, creative artist or intellectual, their contributions, as has often been repeated in this study, were truly massive and invaluable to Hungary’s growth. That they contributed not as Germans, members of a particular non-Magyar ethnic group, not even as constituents of the great and – to many of the faithful – even mystical body of the German folk, but as Hungarians, irrelevant as it may seem, is most significant. In this respect there was practically no ethnic German in Hun-

1 The term Hungarian in the language of the ethnologists and anthropologists stands for all citizens of Hungary irrespective of ethnic distinction, as distinct from Magyar which refers to both the ethnically Magyar citizens of that country and the Magyars (minorities and/or resident-aliens) outside Hungary.

G. C. Paikert, The Danube Swabians
© Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands 1967
HUNGARY

...not counting those relatively few who devoted their lives to the preservation of the German identity of their peoples—who preferred being distinct from the majority nation. In other words, this writer could find no evidence that out of those countless individuals of German origin who accomplished something outstanding in Hungary, any substantial number would insist on going down in history not as Hungarians, but as Germans, or say, German-Hungarians. They were accounted and accounted themselves Hungarians and the laurels they gathered in their respective fields adorned ultimately Hungary, which was, after all, their ancestral country. Were these people already assimilated, sucked into Magyarrindom and lost in turn to Germandom, known as renegades to the militant Germanists, or could they still pass for Germans? A most intricate and debatable question indeed. Yet the answer to it, whatever it may be, would not change the essence of the foregoing.

It must be stressed that assimilation appeared by no means in its coercive form all the time; it was also voluntarily adopted by a massive part of the Volksdeutsche, since, as indicated earlier, it proved to be the most feasible avenue to social and economic success. This process, incidentally, is a rather well-known phenomenon that occurs in many other international immigrations and ethnic minority groups. The majority of those who succeed in rising on the socio-economic ladder soon detach themselves from their closed communities and mix with the superior stratum which they have managed to reach. This situation, by no means a common feature among all the German minorities in Europe, was very much the case in Hungary in the period before the German national reawakening. Once on top, be it a small office or priesthood in a remote village or an executive position in government or business, forgotten was the loyalty to the old stock, kindred spirit and all the earlier bonds, and the Swabian more often than not underwent a metamorphosis that would put a butterfly freshly emerging from its pupa to shame. He usually became more Magyar than any racially pure Magyar and often outdid in ethnic intolerance the most impatient ones.

1 By no means was this type of German necessarily anti-Magyar, or anti-Hungarian State, let alone a bellicose Germanist.