



MEDĤAT PASHA

MEDĤAT PASHA, a liberal Ottoman statesman of the 19th century, who served both as provincial governor and grand vizier (b. Istanbul, 18 October 1822; d. Ṭā'ef, 8 May 1884).

Medĥat, whose real name was Ahmed Şefik (Aĥmad Šafiq), was called “father of the liberals.” He displayed tolerance toward other religions on several occasions, as in the case of the Bahais and the Noşayris. For instance, while passing through Mosul in the beginning of his governorship of Baghdad (1869-72), he set free seventy exiled Bahais who had been subject to maltreatment (Māzandarāni, p. 62; Alkan, p. 109). Later, when Nāşer-al-Din Shah intended to visit the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf in 1870 (Medĥat Pasha, 1325, I, pp. 95-96), the Persian foreign minister, considering security, asked the Ottoman authorities for the removal of the Babis from Baghdad (Medĥat Pasha, I, pp. 95-96). The acting British consul in Baghdad at that time, having heard the rumour that the order had been issued for the imprisonment of the Babis in Baghdad, asked Medĥat Pasha about the situation. The latter wrote that he had received orders from Istanbul to take measures in order to prevent any occurrence that might endanger the safety of the shah. Therefore, he asked the Babis to leave the city for some time, and he also offered financial assistance to those who might be without the means of traveling. He added that he himself was reluctant to persecute good subjects of the empire and did not have problems with their religious ideas (Momen, p. 267; Alkan, p. 110).

Medĥat Pasha was governor of the Syrian province (1878-80) when he met



‘Abd-al-Bahā’ ‘Abbās Effendi in ‘Akkā, Palestine in May 1880. ‘Abd-al-Bahā’ had been in contact with like-minded Ottoman reformers, and it was probably through them that Medĥat had heard about him. Medĥat Pasha, apparently impressed by ‘Abd-al-Bahā’'s character and erudition, invited him to Beirut, the provincial capital, which the latter then visited in June 1880. The contact with Medĥat Pasha is regarded from the Bahai viewpoint as beneficial to the prestige of the Bahai faith (Shoghi Effendi, p. 242; Balyuzi, 1971, pp. 37-38; idem, 1991, p. 378; Alkan, pp. 111-14).

Medĥat was also one of the few Ottoman officials who seemed to have cared for the oppressed Noşayris during his governorship in Syria. For instance, in the petitions presented to the Sublime Porte, he mentioned the Noşayris and the measure to be taken in order to pacify them peacefully (Medĥat Pasha, 1908; Gedikli, pp. 169-89). Unlike governors before him who had used military force to pacify the Noşayris, he summoned their leaders, notables and sheikhs from all over Syria and promised them that they would be treated with justice like other subjects of the Empire and that he would help to put an end to their harsh living conditions. He established schools in their areas and began building roads so their isolation would come to an end (Tawil, pp. 454-59; Moosa, pp. 278-79). His project did not materialize, however; Sultan ‘Abd-al-Ĥamid II removed him as governor, fearing that Medĥat was trying to create an autonomous Syria with himself as the ruler.

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