

to the Mosque with a stone pestle in her hand in search of the Prophet, who was sitting with Abū Bakr. She came up to Abū Bakr and said to him: “Where is thy companion?” He knew that she meant the Prophet who was there in front of her, and he was too amazed to speak. “I have heard,” she said, “that he hath lampooned me, and by God, if I had found him I would have shattered his mouth with this pestle.” Then she said: “As for me, I am a poetess indeed,” and she uttered a rhyme about the Prophet:

“We disobey the reprobate,
Flout the commands he doth dictate,
And his religion hate.”

When she had gone, Abū Bakr asked the Prophet if she had not seen him. “She saw me not,” he said. “God took away her sight from me.” As to “Reprobate” – in Arabic *mudhammam*, blamed, the exact opposite of *muḥammad*, praised, glorified – some of Quraysh had taken to calling him that by way of revilement. He would say to his companions: “Is it not wondrous how God turneth away from me the injuries of Quraysh? They revile Mudhammam, whereas I am Muḥammad.”¹

The ban on Hāshim and Muṭṭalib had lasted two years or more and showed no signs of having any of the desired effects. It had moreover the undesired and unforeseen effect of drawing further attention to the Prophet and of causing the new religion to be talked of more than ever throughout Arabia. But independently of these considerations, many of Quraysh began to have second thoughts about the ban, especially those who had close relatives amongst its victims. The time had come for a change of mind to take place, and the first man to act was that same Hishām who had so often sent his camel with food and clothes for the Hāshimites. But he knew that he could achieve nothing by himself, so he went to the Makhzūmite Zuhayr, one of the two sons of the Prophet’s aunt ‘Ātikah, and said to him: “Art thou content to eat food and wear clothes and marry women when thou knowest how it is with thy mother’s kinsmen. They can neither buy nor sell, neither marry nor give in marriage; and I swear by God that if they were the brethren of the mother of Abū l-Ḥakam” – he meant Abū Jahl – “and thou hadst called upon him to do what he hath called on thee to do, he would never have done it.” “Confound thee, Hishām,” said Zuhayr. “What can I do? I am but a single man. If I had with me another man, I would not rest until I had annulled it.” “I have found a man,” said Hishām. “Who is he?” “Myself.” “Find us a third,” said Zuhayr. So Hishām went to Muṭ‘im ibn ‘Adī, one of the leading men of the clan of Nawfal – a grandson of Nawfal himself, brother of Hāshim and Muṭṭalib. “Is it thy will,” he said, “that two of the sons of ‘Abdu Manāf should perish whilst thou lookest on in approval of Quraysh? By God, if ye enable them to do this ye will soon find them doing the like to you.” Muṭ‘im asked for a fourth man, so Hishām went to Abu l-Bakhtarī of Asad, the man who had struck Abū Jahl on account of Khadījah’s bag of flour, and when he asked for a fifth man Hishām went to

¹ I.I. 234.

another Asadite, Zam'ah ibn al-Aswad, who agreed to be the fifth without asking for a sixth. They all undertook to meet that night at the outskirts of Hajūn, above Mecca, and there they agreed on their plan of action and bound themselves not to let drop the matter of the document until they had had it annulled. "I am the most nearly concerned," said Zuhayr, "so I will be the first to speak."

Early the next day they joined the gathering of the people in the Mosque and Zuhayr, clad in a long robe, went round the Ka'bah seven times. Then he turned to face the assembly and said: "O people of Mecca, are we to eat food and wear clothes, while the sons of Hāshim perish, unable to buy and unable to sell? By God, I will not be seated until this iniquitous ban be torn up." "Thou liest!" said his cousin Abū Jahl. "It shall not be torn up." "Thou art the better liar," said Zam'ah. "We were not in favour of its being written, when it was written." "Zam'ah is right," said Abu l-Bakhtarī. "We are not in favour of what is written in it, neither do we hold with it." "Ye are both right," said Muṭ'im, "and he that saith no is a liar. We call God to witness our innocence of it and of what is written in it." Hishām said much the same, and when Abū Jahl began to accuse them of having plotted it all overnight, Muṭ'im cut him short by going into the Ka'bah to fetch the document. He came out in triumph with a small piece of vellum in his hand: the worms had eaten the ban, all but the opening words "In Thy Name, O God".

Most of Quraysh had been virtually won over already, and this unquestionable omen was a final and altogether decisive argument. Abū Jahl and one or two like-minded men knew that it would be vain to resist. The ban was formally revoked, and a body of Quraysh went to give the good news to the Bani Hāshim and the Bani l-Muṭṭalib.

There was much relief in Mecca after the ban was lifted, and for the moment hostilities against the Muslims were relaxed. Exaggerated reports of this soon reached Abyssinia, whereupon some of the exiles immediately set about making preparations to return to Mecca while others, Ja'far amongst them, decided to remain for a while where they were.

Meantime the leaders of Quraysh concentrated their efforts on trying to persuade the Prophet to agree to a compromise. This was the nearest approach they had yet made to him. Walid and other chiefs proposed that they should all practise both religions. The Prophet was saved the trouble of formulating his refusal by an immediate answer which came directly from Heaven in a *sūrah* of six verses:

*Say: O disbelievers, I shall not worship that which ye worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship, nor have I worshipped that which ye worship, nor have ye worshipped that which I worship. For you your religion and for me mine.*¹

As a result, the momentary good will had already much diminished by the time the returning exiles reached the edge of the sacred precinct.

¹ CIX.