

The final *Declaration of Indulgence* came at last, bringing with it the privilege for which Bunyan had fought and suffered. Charles II. cared as little for liberty as his father or his brother, but he wished to set free the Catholics, and as a step towards it he conceded a general toleration to the Protestant Dissenters. Within two years of the passing of the Conventicle Act of 1670, this and every other penal law against Nonconformists was suspended. They were allowed to open their "meeting-houses" for "worship and devotion," subject only to a few easy conditions. The localities were to be specified in which chapels were required, and the ministers were to receive their licenses from the Crown. To prevent suspicions, the Roman Catholics were for the present excluded from the benefit of the concession. Mass could be said, as before, only in private houses. A year later, the Proclamation was confirmed by Act of Parliament.

Thus Bunyan's long imprisonment was ended. The cause was won. He had been its foremost representative and champion, and was one of the first persons to receive the benefit of the change of policy. He was now forty-four years old. The order for his release was signed on May 8, 1672. His license as pastor of the Baptist chapel at Bedford was issued on the 9th. He established himself in a small house in the town. "When he came abroad," says one, "he found his temporal affairs were gone to wreck, and he had, as to them, to begin again as if he had newly come into the world. But yet he was not destitute of friends who had all along supported him with necessities, and had been very good to his family; so that by their assistance, getting things a little about him again, he resolved, as much as possible, to decline worldly business, and give himself wholly up to the service of God." As