

There were three gaols in Bedford, and no evidence has been found to show in which of the three Bunyan was confined. Two of them, the county gaol and the town gaol, were large, roomy buildings. Tradition has chosen the third, a small lock-up, fourteen feet square, which stood over the river between the central arches of the old bridge; and as it appears from the story that he had at times fifty or sixty fellow-prisoners, and as he admits himself that he was treated at first with exceptional kindness, it may be inferred that tradition, in selecting the prison on the bridge, was merely desiring to exhibit the sufferings of the Non-conformist martyr in a sensational form, and that he was never in this prison at all. When it was pulled down in 1811, a gold ring was found in the rubbish, with the initials "J. B." upon it. This is one of the "trifles light as air" which carry conviction to the "jealous" only, and is too slight a foundation on which to assert a fact so inherently improbable.

When the three months were over, the course of law would have brought him again to the bar, when he would have had to choose between conformity and exile. There was still the same desire to avoid extremities, and as the day approached, the clerk of the peace was sent to persuade him into some kind of compliance. Various insurrections had broken out since his arrest, and must have shown him, if he could have reflected, that there was real reason for the temporary enforcement of the Act. He was not asked to give up preaching. He was asked only to give up public preaching. It was well known that he had no disposition to rebellion. Even the going to church was not insisted on. The clerk of the peace told him that he might "exhort his neighbours in private discourse," if only he would not bring the people together in numbers,