The next day, according to plan, Lord Shaftesbury declared in a passionate speech that the only way to save the country was to dismiss the Duke of York from the Privy Council. In the following week, both Houses presented the King with addresses to that purpose. Bowing before the storm, King Charles gave in. The attack on the Duke was well under way. Now if only Sam Atkins would confess, the faction could accuse Mr. Pepys of murdering Justice Godfrey at the Duke’s instigation.

On the night of Sam Atkins’s arrest, Mr. Pepys, having heard nothing about the summons from a King’s Messenger, expected the clerk’s return after dark. At nine o’clock, when Sam had not appeared, the Secretary ordered Tom, the porter of Derby House, “to keep him out of doors in case he should come, and to tell him that his master had resolved that he should never come within his doors more.” Mr. Pepys was fond of Sam. but he ran a tight ship and insisted on strict obedience. The clerk had had a second chance: he would not get a third. Half angry and half sorry, Mr. Pepys went to bed.

On Saturday morning, November 2, he caused inquiries to be made. London was a small, closely knit city, and news and rumors traveled on clacking tongues from the galleries of Whitehall to public offices, taverns, and coffeehouses. Moreover, Captain Charles Atkins was already bragging about his triumph over Sam. As Mr. Pepys himself wrote, “It appeared upon inquiry after him
the next day that his absence from home overnight did not arise from any wilful failure of his, but from his being seized abroad by a messenger from Mr. Secretary Coventry upon the score of Captain Atkins's information and carried to Newgate."

When he finally had all the important facts (including, no doubt, the gist of Captain Atkins's Examination before Sir Philip Howard), Mr. Pepys was annoyed but not greatly disturbed. Captain Atkins's "information" was patently absurd: no sensible man could take it seriously. Clearly the captain was aiming at Mr. Pepys with his nonsense, but Mr. Pepys had the best alibi in the world: at the time of Godfrey's murder he had been with the King at Newmarket. Until now he had never heard of the sailor John Child.

Nevertheless, these were times of grief and fear, when no man was safe. The Secretary decided to do what he could to help his favorite clerk. With his usual vigor he set about collecting information and drawing up "An Account of Atkins' Birth, Education, and Profession as to Protestantism." In the present storm of anti-Catholic propaganda, it was important to show that Sam Atkins's "Protestancy" was a sturdy oak. Meanwhile, as insurance against charges of Popery, on Sunday, November 3, Mr. Pepys and his remaining clerks took the Anglican Sacrament at St. Margaret's Church.

In Newgate, Sam Atkins would have felt less miserable had he known of his master's concern for him. Unfortunately, Captain Richardson obeyed orders all too well; he allowed Sam no liberty, no visitors or messages, no books or writing materials. The prisoner could only pace his narrow room, gaze longingly out the window, and ruminate. He had an excellent memory. As he walked, he recalled every word spoken the night before at Winchester House, every gesture and tone of voice. He went over the dialogue again and again, searching for a way to convince the Secret Committee that he had told the truth. If he could only talk to Mr. Pepys! Wise Mr. Pepys could
tell him what to do. Sam had an almost child-like faith in his master.

In a sense, Sam Atkins had led a sheltered life. He had been content with his work, his friends, an occasional outing at Vauxhall, the Spring Garden, or on the river, and the stolen sweets of taverns, playhouses, and wenches to dally with—meaning no harm. His father, his teachers, his succession of masters, and most of the merchants and naval officers he had met in the course of his duties had been men of probity and good will. Of course, he knew that there were wicked men abroad, and at night he stepped warily, his hand on his sword-hilt, for fear of footpads. No doubt, like thousands of other Londoners, he had gone at least once to see an evil-doer carted to the gallows at Tyburn, where Jack Ketch, the hangman, pushed him off the cart with a rope around his neck and left him to kick and dangle until he died. Sam remembered hearing Mr. Pepys say, “There is no pain at all in hanging, for that it do stop the circulation of the blood, and so stops all sense and motion in an instant.” It was a comforting thought.

Sam knew that the world was full of evil, but until now it had not touched him; he had never walked in the way of the ungodly. By straining his imagination to the utmost he could understand how Captain Charles, pressed by his needs and tempted by the £500 reward, could become such a perfidious rogue. But how could the Secret Committee accept his lies as truth? Everyone knew that the Papists had murdered Godfrey. How could the lords believe that Sam Atkins, a true and faithful Protestant, could ever have had a part in a Jesuit plot? The lords were good, honorable gentlemen, peers of the realm—and one of them was a bishop! Surely they labored in the bog of error, and it was his duty to rescue them with the rope of reason.

The flaw in Captain Atkins’s testimony was his phrase “upon this occasion.” presumably the news that Godfrey was concerned in the discovery of the Popish Plot. Now if Sam could only make the lords realize that his meeting with the captain in mid-August was a good two weeks
before Mr. Oates discovered the Plot—well, surely they would let him go. He could hardly have been discussing the Plot with Captain Atkins before either of them had heard about it!

When he was certain that he had his arguments well in order, Sam asked Captain Richardson to notify the Secret Committee that he had something to say. On Wednesday, November 6, a warder, Mr. Lion, took Sam to the chamber of the Lord Privy Seal in the Parliament House, where the Committee was meeting. (The quickest way to Westminster was by Old Bailey Hill and Castle Lane to Blackfriars Stairs, and thence by boat around the great bend of the Thames to Parliament Stairs.)

The Privy Seal chamber was a dignified room with a fireplace, a long table covered with green cloth, stiff-backed chairs, and tapestried walls. The lords, seated at the table, greeted Sam warmly.

"Well," said Lord Halifax, "we hope, Sam Atkins, you have considered of this business and are ready to give us some light in it." The Great Trimmer was not happy with his extremist colleagues: unlike them he had a conscience, and he did not believe that the end justified the means.

"My lord," said Sam confidently, "I have well considered of it, and I hope I am prepared to show your lordships nothing is to be expected of me, and so my liberty will not be denied me."

"Nay, then," said Lord Halifax, "you must stay till we send for Charles Atkins if you have anything to say against him and his accusations."

"My lord, I hope I shall confute him in his circumstances, which I have better considered, and clear to you my innocence."

"Why," said Lord Shaftesbury, scowling, "Charles Atkins has said he'll overturn you by other circumstances and show you the worst man living."

Sam Atkins clung to his dignity. He would not be baited into losing his temper again. "My lord," he said stiffly, "I desire, if you please, he be sent for."
A messenger was sent for Charles Atkins, who was at Sir Philip Howard's lodgings. Sam and his warder left the chamber and went downstairs to wait in the entrance passageway. Half an hour later, Captain Charles arrived; he refused to meet his victim's eyes. Perhaps it was only Sam's imagination, but it seemed to him that the captain had suddenly turned pale.

"So," said the clerk, "you can't look me in the face. Truly, I don't wonder at it. I'm glad you conscience is not quite lost." Captain Charles turned away, with Sam in pursuit. "Mr. Atkins," he said (spitefully dropping the Captain")( "what, I wonder, has led you to this against me? Are you resolved to ruin me forever?"

"I? Not I," said Captain Charles, with an attempt at injured innocence.

"Do you think in your conscience I had any hand in the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey? Do I look as if I had any design in me?"

"No, faith," said Captain Charles, "I dare swear for you for that matter, you are innocent of it. Only you know those words passed between us."

"Well, you say 'twas between us, so 'tis impossible to contradict your oath, but God, you, and I know 'twas not so."

Captain Charles muttered something under his breath, then he said aloud, "My wife asked me how you did, whether you was like to come to any harm, and I told her no, unless he brings it on himself."

Before Sam could press the captain to explain his remark, the Secret Committee summoned both men. Captain Charles took his stand at one end of the long table, Sam near the other. Confronted by the lords in all their majesty, Sam Atkins drew a deep breath and summoned up his courage.

"My lords," he said, "I desire that Charles Atkins's accusation may be read over, or else I shall repair to my memory."
“Do repair to your memory,” said Lord Shaftesbury, mockingly.

Sam repeated the accusation without a slip. Then he launched into his defense. He had his arguments all in order. First he denied that there had ever been trouble between Mr. Pepys and Justice Godfrey.

“I never in my whole life heard Mr. Pepys mention Sir Edmund Godfrey’s name but on an occasion of our going before him about some money lost from Mr. Pepys’ house, and then they appeared as good friends as could be, and showed mutually great expressions of kindness and respect. As for Charles Atkins’ positive oath about the difference 'twixt Mr. Pepys and Sir Edmund Godfrey, that will admit of no more than my denying it and being ready and desirous, if you please, to swear to the truth of what I say.”

“No,” said Lord Shaftesbury curtly.

Sam took the expected blow without flinching and continued, denying that he had said anything about Godfrey not being a member of Parliament, insisting that “to this minute I don’t know whether he was so or no, and so could not make him that positive answer he says I did.” The lords lifted incredulous eyebrows.

“Then as to the rise of the difference to be (as he calls it) 'upon this occasion,' the last time I say Mr. Atkins before Sir Edmund Godfrey’s death was in August before Bartholomew Fair a little, and before the Plot was discovered, so what means he by ‘upon this occasion?’ Besides, I assure your lordships I did not know till after the death of Sir Edmund Godfrey that he took any depositions or was otherwise instrumental in discovering any part of the Plot.”

At this the lords cried out, “What! Impossible!—You lived in an office of business and did not hear of his taking the depositions?—Twas a whole month before the King went to Newmarket.—Aye, early in September, and carried to the Privy Council!” Taken aback by the angry chorus, Sam found himself wondering why the lords would never
believe him when he was telling the truth. Would they believe him if he lied, and admitted that he was lying?

"My lords," he said, "pray suppose (what is so utterly in fact untrue) I had said to Captain Atkins what he swears I did. I must now declare I had no ground to say so, and that it must arise purely from my own invention, and if I invented a lie, I must suffer for doing it; and pray, my lords, what will come on't?"

"Nay, nay," said Shaftesbury quickly, "leave us to make the use of it. Do you but confess it. You shall be safe and we'll apply it." The lords looked up hopefully. The foolish clerk was beginning to see reason at last. As a willing witness against Mr. Pepys he would be worth a dozen paid informers. But Sam had no intention of going along with the cheat. Now he had his answer, and now was the time to twist, turn, bargain, haggle, and perhaps out-wit the Secret Committee. But there was no guile in Sam Atkins. He flushed with anger.

"My lord," he cried, "I can't do it. I hope I never shall tell a lie to any man's prejudice, though I meet with ne'er so great a danger."

"Truly, Mr. Atkins," said Lord Shaftesbury with heavy sarcasm, "are you so innocent? You're very unfortunate, and Charles Atkins the greatest villain in the world. Pray, look one another in the face.—Come, Mr. Charles Atkins, confess truly, have you belied Samuel Atkins or no? It is the same thing as to belie an emperor, for every private man is a little emperor of himself. Maybe you are mistaken. Come. Come!"

Again Sam fancied that he saw the captain turn pale and his lips lose their color. "My lords," he cried, "pray, observe his countenance changes."

"Where? Where?", said Lord Winchester. "I don't see it."

"My lord, his very appearance, I humbly conceive."

"Aye? Aye? Where?" Lord Winchester turned away, carefully seeing nothing. The other lords refused to look. Captain Atkins, who had been rolling his long clay pipe between his fingers, suddenly smashed it upon the table.
“Why should I say so, my lords,” he cried, “if he had not told me?”

Sir Philip Howard spoke up warmly in his nephew’s defense. Captain Atkins was a gentleman, he said, son of Sir Jonathan Atkins and otherwise well allied, and “I examined him so strictly that it was not possible he should lie.”

The lords nodded gravely. Sam Atkins looked at their smug, pitiless faces and despaired. But there was the Bishop of London: perhaps he was more tender-hearted than the rest. While Captain Atkins talked to the lords at the other end of the table, Sam addressed himself to the prelate, talked about his Protestantism, and insisted that he had never seen a mass above once or twice—out of mere curiosity—and had never known a priest.

“Truly,” said the bishop, “I believe you are a Protestant, but this oath is greatly against you, and Captain Atkins affirms it still positively.”

“My lord,” Sam protested, “’tis strange I should invent such a lie to tell Mr. Atkins of my master. ’Tis strange I should ask Mr. Atkins of the courage and secrecy of a man I never saw. and as strange to bid him send him to my master, who will, I suppose, declare whether I ever spoke to him about any such man, as I am sure I did not. My lord, I avow to you that Mr. Pepys never in his life committed any secret to me of any kind, nor ever mentioned upon any occasion one word about Sir Edmund Godfrey. And this you’d believe if you knew how totteringly I stand in his opinion, having been turned away from him, and kept at this moment, I believe, in his very ill apprehension.”

“Why,” said my Lord London, “are you given to drink or debauchery?”

The bishop had touched a tender spot in Sam’s conscience, but the word “given,” meaning “addicted,” left him room for an honest answer. “No my lord, I thank God not, but Mr. Pepys is the severest man in his house in the world, and whoever serves him laudably for seven years,
for an hour's absence from his business without his knowl-
edge shall lose his favor. Besides, I came very young to his
house, and was inclined through my boyishness to too
much desire of ease and liberty, and begot his very severe
hand over me at first, and he has since continued it."

Lord Shaftesbury broke in, "Why, you talk! 'Twill be
made appear you are the greatest favorite he has. You
read all his letters, read to him o' nights, and 'twill be
proved you are reputed a Catholic in your house."

"Do that," said Sam quickly, "and I'll plead no more."

Shaftesbury refused the gambit. "Pray," he said, "what
books used you to read to him?"

"Sir, I have not lately read to him at all, but I used to
read the Bible and other good books, sometimes history,
other times divinity."

"Never any Popish books?"

"Never in my life, I assure your lordship, never any.
But, as I remember one book containing several disputes
and confutations upon and to their doctrine and religion—
particularly about their error in the Doctrine of Transub-
stantiation—but I remember not the book's name."

There was no more to be said. The Committee had
gained nothing from Sam, nor Sam from the Committee,
in spite of his rope of reason. His plea for liberty on bail
was brusquely denied. The fly was in the web; let him
struggle and tire himself out. The Committee granted one
request: Sam Atkins's sister was given leave to visit him—
just once—with Captain Richardson present at the inter-
view.

Sam journeyed back to Newgate with a heavy heart.
Now he knew that the lords were not honorable gentle-
men; they were Godless men. Like Worldly Wiseman in
Mr. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, they dwelt in the town
of Carnal Policy. They actually wanted him to lie, to ac-
cuse his master, Mr. Pepys. Good God, what an age is this
and what a world is this, that a man cannot live without
playing the knave and dissimulation! Sam was too sunk in
his own misery to see that he was merely a pawn blocking Shaftesbury's scheme to checkmate the Duke of York.

On Thursday, November 7, Captain Richardson brought Sam's sister to him and stayed in his room for the "half a quarter of an hour" allowed for her visit. The Secret Committee was not being generous in permitting her visit. Captain Richardson took mental notes of everything the prisoner said, hoping that in his excitement he would let slip an admission of guilt, or say something which could be used to force a confession from him. But Sam had time only to reassure his sister about his health and explain his need for money to pay his daily charges in Newgate. In turn, his sister could only tell him that his friends were doing everything they could for him. Then the Keeper took her away, and Sam was alone again in his dreary cell.

Early the next morning, Friday, November 8, Captain Richardson brought Charles Atkins into Sam's room while the prisoner was still in bed. As the Keeper turned to leave Sam leaped out of bed in his shirt, crying, "Hold, captain, a word with you." At the door he begged, "For God's sake, don't leave me alone with this man. He'll possibly go and swear God knows what against me as he has already done."

"The lords have ordered he must be alone with you," said Captain Richardson.

"Oh? Pray, don't suffer it. I won't speak a word to him alone."

"I'll come up to you immediately," said the Keeper. He closed the door, and Sam heard his descending footsteps.

Captain Atkins was the picture of woe. Tears stood in his eyes and he wrung his hands. "Oh, Sam Atkins," he moaned, "we are both undone."

"How undone?"

"There's a man came last night who was examined two hours by the King and has sworn positively against you, that you were at the murder of Sir Edmund Godfrey."
"Well, God bless him," said Sam wearily. "But how are you undone? 'Tis I am so, if this be true."

"Why," said Captain Charles, weeping and laying his hand on his breast, "I am undone."

"That's true; your guilt has undone you. But, pray, who is this man? Do you know him?"

"I don't know his name nor ever saw him but once, and that was in Essex building. The woman of a house was arrested where we were, and he and I rescued her from the bailiffs."

"Well, I can't help what he has done. I thank you for all this. I don't doubt if twenty swear against me, I shall appear innocent in the last moment of my life."

"Pray, Sam Atkins, consider of it," the captain pleaded. "My uncle, Phil Howard, bid me come to tell you of it, and pray confess before 'tis too late and you regret you did not. There is nothing can hurt you, but your fortune may be made by it. And what need you care for your master?"

"Ask me to forego my salvation. A thousand deaths shall not extort a lie from me, and you know I can say nothing." Once more Sam went over old ground; he did not know Child, and he had never said a word to Captain Charles about Mr. Pepys and Justice Godfrey.

"You did not tell me neither," said Captain Charles viciously, "that your master had a house at Rouen in France, did you?" The implication that Mr. Pepys was a crypto-Catholic was obvious.

"Oh, God! Why, have you sworn that too?"

"No, not I. What should I swear it for?" The threat was thinly veiled. "But you told me so. You know you desired me to impeach your master about this murder because he should keep it off from the Duke of York."

"Oh, Lord of Heaven!" Sam was overwhelmed. "And have you sworn that too?"

"No, not I. I shan't swear it. What for? But you know you told me so."
For a moment Sam was close to an understanding of Lord Shaftesbury’s plot against the Duke, but he was too overcome to follow up the captain’s leads and get the whole story. He could hardly believe his ears. Like the foul fiend, the captain told his atrocious lies with a perfectly straight face. “This is the greatest wonder and miracle of wickedness that ever I saw,” Sam groaned, sinking back against the side of his bed.

Again Captain Charles urged him to confess, promising that if he joined in the captain’s “information” he would have a great reward. “Being young men,” he said, “we ought to lay hold on this fair occasion of making our fortunes.”

“Mr. Atkins,” said Sam, “you are the greatest villain and worst man in the world—”

Captain Charles interrupted him. “Consider of it against the afternoon,” he said gloomily, “when you’ll be called for, I believe, to the Committee of Lords.” He left the room without a farewell, and Sam Atkins could only guess about his villainous designs.

Almost hidden among Captain Atkins’s lies was a single fact: an informer had been examined the day before. At Bristol, an old acquaintance of Titus Oates, “Captain” William Bedloe, a swindler, imposter, thief, and sharper, had heard about the reward for the discovery of Godfrey’s killers and had hurried to London. On Thursday afternoon, before the King and the two Secretaries of State, he had deposed that he knew nothing about the Popish Plot, but that in October two Jesuits, named Le Faire and Pritchard, had offered him £4,000 to help murder Godfrey. Of course he had refused, indignantly. He learned later, he said, that on the night of October 14, Godfrey had been smothered with a pillow in the Queen’s residence, Somerset House. The murderers were Le Faire, another Jesuit named Walsh, a gentleman in the service of the Catholic Lord Bellasis, “and the youngest of the waiters in the Queen’s Chapel, in a purple gown.” Bedloe had not named Sam Atkins.
But on Friday morning, even while Captain Charles was browbeating his victim in Newgate, Captain Bedloe was repeating his sensational story at the bar of the House of Lords, with additions and changes so significant that the King mused, “Surely this man has received a new lesson during the last twenty-four hours.” He had indeed. Now Bedloe knew almost as much about the Popish Plot as Oates himself—enough so that he could serve as the necessary second witness in trials for high treason. Having learned overnight that Godfrey had been strangled, he changed his information: Godfrey, he said, was first stifled with a pillow and then strangled with a long cravat.

Bedloe repeated the story that he had been offered £4,000 to help murder Godfrey. Then he deposed that, at about half past eight on the night of Monday, October 14, he had met Le Faire at Somerset House and learned that Godfrey was dead. Now Le Faire offered him £2,000 to help dispose of the body. His helpers would be Le Faire, Walsh, Lord Bellasis’s servant, an unnamed servant of the Chapel whom Bedloe had often seen, and “Mr. Atkins, Pepys’s clerk.”

Le Faire led Bedloe into a room in sprawling Somerset House. There, revealed by a shaft of light from a dark lantern, lay Godfrey’s body, and about it stood his slayers, one of whom owned himself to be “Mr. Atkins, Pepys’s clerk.” Clearly someone had told Bedloe to include Sam Atkins in his lurid testimony.

Captain Charles must have known in advance what Bedloe was going to say Friday morning to the House of Lords. An easy explanation is that the two rogues, Captain Charles and Bedloe, cooked up the story between them. In spite of the captain’s disclaimer, they were old acquaintances, and since coming to London Bedloe lodged where Captain Charles lived, near Wild House. But this theory ignores Captain Charles’s heartfelt “Why, I am undone,” and his desperate attempt to get Sam to go along with his own “information.”
Surely Lord Shaftesbury, or someone else on the Secret Committee, told Bedloe to bring Sam Atkins into his fantastic yarn. Sir Philip Howard, almost constantly with the Committee, would have warned his nephew that Bedloe was about to steal his thunder and his chance at a goodly share of the £500 reward. Captain Charles, a mere dabbler as an informer, hastened to Newgate to try to persuade Sam, with a mixture of pleas and threats, to confess before it was too late—too late, that is, for Captain Charles’s hopes of the reward.

Certainly Bedloe’s new “information” was just what Lord Shaftesbury needed. Now he could squeeze Sam Atkins dry and bully him into indicting Mr. Pepys. Then (as Roger North said), “through Mr. Pepys, by like process of threats and promises (for he was an elderly gentleman [he was forty-five!] who had known softness and the pleasures of life), they might have that murder charged on the Duke of York. For Mr. Pepys, in desperate circumstances, might be as likely to accuse the Duke as his man Atkins was to accuse him.”

Lord Shaftesbury conjured up delightful pictures of Mr. Pepys in irons, cowering before the Secret Committee and incriminating the Duke of York in Godfrey’s murder. With an accessory charge against him, the Duke would be lucky to escape with permanent exile. King Charles would have to name a new heir—his oldest natural son, James Duke of Monmouth, or his nephew, William of Orange—and Shaftesbury would become the power behind the throne. The fate of nations depended on the weakness or strength of an Admiralty clerk.

Of course, Sam Atkins had no inkling of the dark designs and stratagems of the Secret Committee. On Friday afternoon, as Captain Charles had predicted, Sam was loaded with irons, thrust into a coach, and carried along Fleet Street, the Strand, and King Street to the Parliament House. The day was foggy and cold, and the coach shutters were closed; but Sam could hear the familiar clatter of traffic, the jingling of carriers’ bells, and the cries of
street vendors: "Mackerel, four for sixpence"—"Oysters
twelve pence a peck"—"New River Water"—"Small coals,
small coals!" A wave of nostalgia and self-pity overcame
him. He longed for his tavern friends, his fellow clerks,
even the scolding of Mr. Pepys and Mr. Hewer. Tears
fell upon his manacles.

After a long wait, Sam was called up to the Lord Privy
Seal's chamber, where he found the Secret Committee in
full force, with John Wildman, the famous republican, as
secretary. The high gothic windows were tightly closed
against the fog; candles and the glow of a sea-coal fire
brightened the room.

Behind the lords at the table stood a tall, dignified
gentleman with a military coat, a basket-hilted sword, and
a black periwig. He had a harsh, deeply lined face, heavy
black brows, and a protruding nether lip. He came for­
ward, saluted Sam, and returned to his place.

"Do you know this gentleman?" asked Lord Shaftes­
bury.

"No, my lord," Sam replied, "I never saw him in my
life that I remember."

"I believe I have seen you somewhere," the gentleman
said, "but I can't tell where. I don't know; I can't remem­
ber where."

"Is this the man?" barked the Duke of Buckingham,
pointing at Sam Atkins.

"My lord, I can't swear this is he." The informer was
cautious; he was a newcomer to the game and, out of
sheer ignorance, he had already made some bad mistakes.
It was always possible that his victim might have an alibi.
" 'Twas a young man, and he told me his name was At­
kins, a clerk belonging to Derby House. He is in all things
very like the person I saw in the room with Sir Edmund
Bury Godfrey's dead body, and I do verily believe it was
he that owned himself to be Pepys' clerk, but because I
never saw him before that time, I can't positively swear it."

Before Sam could recover from the shock of the accu­
sation, the Secret Committee turned on him, demanding to
know where he had been on Monday, October 14, between
nine and ten o'clock at night. Still dazed, Sam confessed
that he did not know, he could not remember. "I suppose
at home, for I am seldom out at that time of night."

"Were you in the Pall Mall, or that way, that you re­
member?" St. James's Palace was at the end of Pall Mall.

"No, my lord, I believe verily not." On the spur of the
moment, who can remember where he has been a month
ago?

Shaftesbury dismissed the informer and turned grimly
to Sam Atkins. "Mr. Atkins," he said, "if you are inno­
cent you are the most unfortunate wretch alive. I'll tell
you what—here is good news for you—here's but one way
to save your life, and you may now have it. Confess all
you know and make a discovery in this matter, and your
life will be saved."

Sam protested his innocence at length—brevity was not
one of his virtues—and concluded with a ringing defiance,
"I would rather suffer a thousand deaths than tell a solemn
lie to the prejudice of anybody."

Lord Shaftesbury heard him out. He was wise in the
weaknesses of men and could tolerate foolish heroics. But
it was time to let this irritating clerk know what was in
store for him.

"I'll tell you what," he said sharply, "you'll be hanged—
which I never told you before—or knighted. If the Papists
rise and cut our throats, you'll be knighted; if not, you'll
be hanged. Here's first what you said to Captain Atkins, and
now this man's oath against you, which, though not positive,
is so circumstantial as I doubt whether a jury in this case
won't find you guilty. Consider what collateral circum­
stances may be brought in. And another thing, here are
other persons who are known to this Mr. Bedloe to have
been concerned in it—"

"And who are in the house," said Buckingham.

"—and if one of them swears you were in it, all the world
can't save you."
Sam Atkins's body was weak with fear, but his spirit was still strong. "My lord," he said unsteadily, "my prayers are and shall be to God Almighty that but one person may be detected who was really accessory, and I am sure I shall be acquitted, and I cannot suffer but from the matter's being misplaced."

"Oh, he'll confess nothing," Buckingham sneered. "He expects a pardon."

Lord Shaftesbury, thinking of the Opposition power in Parliament, said confidently, "I'll secure him from that. There's three hundred to one." Only the King could pardon a convicted felon, and with revolution in the air, and his people mad with fear, the King was helpless.

Sam Atkins had the last word. "My lord, I expect no pardon, but desire death when I am found to deserve it. I have nothing to trust to but my innocence and the goodness of God Almighty, to whom I commit myself."

Sam traveled the long cold road back to prison, convinced that he was as good as dead. The God-fearing members of the Secret Committee sent word to Captain Richardson to keep the clerk in irons and to throw him in with other prisoners for greater security and the full flavor of Newgate. If that failed—well, there was always the condemned hole, a dark, freezing, airless cell, deep underground. Sooner or later Sam Atkins would break.