

had been able to beat the "fighting Collinses," especially when his back was so desperately against the wall. There was intensified stress, therefore, when Emerson spoke again.

"One half-minute gone," said he gravely.

The ticking of the heat in the stove-pipe, like that of a dozen watches, could be distinctly heard in the pause that ensued. It intruded on Emerson's magisterial calm with the irrelevant suggestion that it was Morgan who built the fire for him that morning.

"One minute gone," said Emerson. "I advise you to obey!"

"Only half a minute more," he said, as the boy still stood mute. "I advise you to obey, sir!"

"I never will!" replied Morgan, now with a wail of protest in his voice. "You may kill me first!"

"Only a quarter of a minute more!" said Mr. Courtright after a pause. And then, as the watch told off the last of the fifteen seconds: "For the last time, will you take off that coat?"

The stocky, ill-clad figure was firm, now, and there was no protest, but only defiance, as he faced his dearest friend, now become his foe.

"I'll see you in hell first!" he snarled. "Come and take it off, if yeh think yeh can!"

Courtright, with that resentment men feel when some supposedly helpless creature girds itself up for resistance, stepped forward like a wrestler manœvering for a hold, when, to his astonishment, a little figure in brown sprang before him, and a pair of great, wide, black eyes gleamed widely into his. Two slender, girlish hands pressed against his breast, holding him back.