

The response was not immediate, and the creaking of the saddle, with sundry grunts and adjurations to the animal, indicated that the newcomer was dismounting. The operation was made difficult by the fact that he had a wooden leg, the left having been taken off at the knee. He puffed as he finally stood, but presently answered the soldier in a voice of much volume and with uncommon blandness and fluency.

"It is I,—that is, my solid parts. Of the rest, those volatile are volatilized; those meltable, melted and bedewing the grass along my trail. Thou seest but a parboiled residuum. Wilt hold my mule?"

"Hold thy mule!" replied the halberdier, with proper soldierly scorn. "Not I, by the fiend!"

"Nay! Keep thy temper, my lusty buck soldier," said the other, with suavity. "I meant no flattery."

"Flattery!"

"In offering thee the privilege.—Here, boy," he called to a half-breed urchin, "guard my steed. But keep in front of him, for he hath a twofold nature,—tender-hearted to a fault as far as the saddle-girth; behind it, maleficent as the powers of evil." He turned again to the soldier. "Is this thy recruiting office, *Señor Alabardero*?"

"Ah!" assented the halberdier. "But, *Sacramento*! Dost think to enlist, Pedro?"

"And why not?" demanded Pedro.

"Why, if I can count, thou hast legs too few by half."

"Then thou canst not count, for I have three. Two I have with me,—one mine by right of birth, the other by right of purchase, and of as good wood as that of which thy head is made. The third lieth in Italy, four feet under ground, but still mine, *nihilominus*,—which is Latin, my friend, and meaneth 'never-