

A DOG OF THE STREETS

BY ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH



HE glass was brimmed with an amber liquid, refreshing to the throat and delightful to the soul; his lips were at the rim when the earthquake came; and Mateo woke to become conscious of a stiff toe being driven vigorously against his side.

He gulped the last drop of the dream-drink, scrambled into a sitting posture, and looked up into the pin-head eyes of Racca, the innkeeper.

Mateo had learned by long travail that when Racca's face was mottled, a wrathful condition of the innkeeper's soul was signified.

"*Carrambos!*" the innkeeper exclaimed in a hoarse monotone, and went on to say in a mixture of Mexican patois and bad Spanish: "Sleep! You do nothing but sleep! Listen!" He stopped. "The coughing Englishman, Marston, with the beautiful daughter, is here. He's in a hurry. He wants a man for his hacienda on the Quivino Road. I tell him—you. Watch out. If there's a chance to rob, watch for it; let me know, and I will tell José, see? Come!"

Mateo was fifty years old, bloated by much drink and long loafing; his head was bald; one leg was three inches shorter than the other; and his eyes were bleary; but he obeyed the command as if youth were still upon him.

He followed the rolling innkeeper through the dirty, greasy areas of the kitchen to the front of the inn, where, under the wide plaster arch, the Englishman sat in a drooping, lifeless attitude.

The tall gray-haired man shoved his glass from him, turned a thin face toward Mateo that was empty of all joy of living, gave him but a glance from dull eyes, and beckoned him to follow.

Mateo was willing. Racca nudged him with an elbow, and Mateo nodded. He had played in many a dark game with the innkeeper, with the thin, vile José and the oily Mendel. The Englishman was a "lunger", fighting for life against consumption; he had purchased, so rumour had it, the tumble-down hacienda, and was planning to live there with his daughter, who had followed him from their northern home to help him fight the grim battle. It was whispered abroad, also, that Marston had been an easy mark in his trading. He would be an easy mark for Racca's scheming. Mateo knew what he was to do.

He would have preferred to sleep until the heat lessened; only a foolish Englishman would walk the streets until the sun was far down. But Mateo shrugged his shoulders, and the dim sense of objection passed. He never really objected; scorn and blows and kicks since boyhood had taught him better.

As Mateo went down the street behind the stooping Englishman, the little *niños*, beginning to appear for play, hailed him with taunts and nick-names, and he dropped his head and slunk on. All his life he had been a joke in Andres, the butt of fun and farce for old and young. In all the years he could remember, he