

Wylie Avenue

PITTSBURGH

By John L. Clark

ABOUT three o'clock in the morning, in the alley-way next to the Star Theatre, between Townsend and Fullerton Streets, two city Policemen beat invisible, ONE Negro, and then arrested him. We are reliably informed that the unfortunate victim could not appear for a hearing the next morning.

ALMOST any time after twelve o'clock noon until one in the morning one can hear the last word in vulgar dissertations by two familiar female characters in this same block and on either side of the street. And they are seldom arrested.

THE treatment of these two characters brings to mind the query as to the cause of some wrong impressions formed by people of Wylie Avenue, who, in a sense, have never seen this interesting thoroughfare in its glory or in its sins. The police say that they must resort to clubs and guns in making arrests because most of the offenders against the law are southerners. And that southerners are bad people. The writer remembers Wylie Avenue of 25 years ago. The population, temporary or permanent, then was made up of migrants from the south, railroad section hands, roustabouts and deckhands of the many boats plying the Ohio—and a few westerners. These men were used to rough treatment, had lived under conditions where the quickest man to the trigger was the longest liver. They came to Pittsburgh, lived here and in the evenings spent a great deal of the time in the section still known as the **hill district**. They worked, drank freely and gambled when they felt like it, as most of us do now. Sometimes they fought and fought to kill. They were dangerous when provoked or imposed upon. There were not as many families as now, but the nightly traffic up and down the avenue was just as great or greater than now. And one lone policeman patrolled the beat on each shift and kept order and made friends. He made friends in such a way that these dangerous characters refrained from their boisterous talk on the streets. They would not tolerate our girls and matrons being approached by strangers and insulted—and yet they were a dangerous lot, and from the south. The police department has analyzed the Negro wrongly when they apply that "white horse leading mules" theory to Negroes en masse. And the sooner we insist upon having it changed, the better off we will be—not the white man. It is almost ridiculous to believe that it is necessary for two armed policemen to resort to clubs and blackjacks to arrest one normal individual with nothing exposed, but the weapons which Nature gave him, whether he be a **newcomer** or a citizen. We could overlook this had and brutal judgement if it happened only now and then—but it's almost a nightly act and getting worse, and no one knows what it will lead up to. Apparently these birds have been trained to extreme action or no action at all. For there are any number of punishable offenses committed right under the noses of these same officers by members of other races. The fruit stand at the corner of Fullerton and Wylie occupies all but three or four feet on the Wylie Avenue side for display of their wares and the police will tell you to "keep moving" when you approach the corner. The Jewish merchantman strings his goods out on the side-

walk as far as he chooses, year in and year out and one bird has parked his car between the Star Theatre and Haney's Barber Shop for the last two years (he happens to be an Assyrian). A group of people may loiter in front of John Crampion's Drug Store window, but try it in front of Sam Prelutsky's Store. Spitting on the sidewalks, vulgarity and profanity are winked at — and apparently they believe that we like this sort of program for they sometimes take part. This negligence and indifference on the part of the police are blamed on the **newcomer**—the southerner. But we beg to differ as we have seen the uncouth, the untrained, the give-a-dam southerner under the same condition, with an entirely different effect. The solution is not to rid the hill of southerners, for they make good neighbors, good workmen, good businessmen, good consumers and when they have adapted themselves to this new condition, good citizens, willing to co-operate in any undertaking that will benefit the race or nation. It's in the policeman; he who is supposed to safeguard the interests of all citizens. His mental mechanism isn't right. A new design or one of the old ones rebuilt. A Negro policeman will serve best, but if it's possible to mould one from the pattern of Andrew Terry, Tallman Hughes, John Reed, Old Man Allen or the venerable old gentleman who directed traffic at Sixth and Wylie — why it won't make any difference whether he be black or white.

JIM FRATERNAL and Jim 400 are having some kind of a wrangle up at Mrs. Gray's Bath House for Colored people. It SEEMS that Jim 400 is superintendent of the bath house and physical director at the "Y"—two authorized jobs. Jim Fraternal is an employe of the bath house under Jim 400, and has engaged in another undertaking which will net him more per month than Jim 400 can make out of his two authorized jobs. Both Jims are borrowing a little time from the bath house, but both are borrowing at the same time and Jim 400 says that the bath house cannot afford to let out so much time at the current rate of interest and accordingly laid down some rules for Jim 400 and Mr. Brooks, but like Emperor Jones, they didn't apply to him. Jim Fraternal objected to this and Jim 400 called in Mrs. Gray as arbiter and made it a point to be there himself, while Jim Fraternal was at his other undertaking. Now, as everybody knows, Jim Fraternal and Mrs. Gray are very good friends (for did she not have him moved from recreation work to make him superintendent of a bath house equipped with automatic heaters) and we feel sorry for Jim Fraternal and compliment Jim 400 in applying this strategy. From a co-operative standpoint it is the biggest bone of the year.