

Peeps At Pittsburgh

THESE HILLS! Uneven, jagged humps in the land, rising to dizzy heights and plunging down to narrow, twisted thoroughfares before they rise again, these hills of **Pittsburgh** cause a vague uneasiness in the heart of the new-comer. It's an uneasiness made tangible to us only after we had walked on them.

Then we knew it wasn't our heart speaking. It was our feet. And they talked loudly and pathetically for a while about all the pleasant level places they had ever visited.

Walking in **Pittsburgh** has its advantages as well as its discomforts, though, for the scope of a pedestrian is limitless. The streets of any town afford for the observation of the foibles of mankind and the curiosities of civilization a vantage point which is unequalled.

And it is inevitable that the Ethiopian **newcomer** should perambulate sooner or later into that thoroughfare known as Wylie Avenue and should be allured to explore further its ins and outs, its ups and downs, its varied and ever-fascinating manifestations.

A boulevard of broken dreams, a street of sorrows where hope and despair, joy and despondency, mingle endlessly with the smaller details of everyday living, the avenue is infinite in its implications.

It is an area of vice in some sections. In others it fairly flowers with religious edifices. It is the street of the small shop owner, dealing in cheap merchandise, it is the street of the prosperous doctor, lawyer and mortician.

It is a community of old-fashioned tenements, leaning over the pavements, crowded within by immediate family, relatives and lodgers. It also boasts many a comfortable home, set in attractive surroundings.

On its lower levels, in the vicinity of Townsend and Fullerton streets, Wylie seethes with activity of divers shady sorts.

As night comes on, "numbers" men, smoothly attired, haunt the numerous rendezvous, their brightly-colored automobiles parked at the curb. Painted sisters of sin linger in hallways, lean from windows, sway sophisticated hips on the sidewalks. Strains of talk, laughter and radio music drift up from the innumerable little dark alleyways which honeycomb the section.

Around the corner, the garish lights of the Golden movie house twinkle gaily, beckoning the gullible to the cheap delights of the cinema. Children play on the streets until all hours, blithely unconscious of the shadows of their surroundings.

The Avenue at its upper extremity presents a contrast to Deep Wylie. The houses here are better cared for, less populous, and present a certain holier-than-thou aspect as one achieves the first uphill grade from Herron Avenue. But the street here lacks the color and life of its less pretentious other end, and loses interest thereby.

A custom which is popular among the merchants of Wylie and which we've encountered in no other city except **Pittsburgh** is that of displaying live poultry in crates on the sidewalks and then confining the feathered creatures to shop windows at eventide. And there they stand throughout the long night hours, blinking forlornly in the cruel glare of the street lamps.

Once we remarked to a companion that the shopkeepers might at least have window shades to produce a darkness more conducive to slumber for the hapless fowls, but he quaintly rebuked us for being chicken-hearted . . . He said they didn't stay there that long, anyway.

Smilovits' meat market has little wooden stools ranged alongside its main counter. Relics possibly of a soda fountain in the same store in other days, they doubtless offer an added attraction to the tired housewife who comes to shop at Smilovits' . . . What, we wonder, is Genuine Panhandle Coal? We saw it advertised somewhere near Dinwiddie, but our only acquaintance with the second adjective has to do with unemployed persons who solicit nickels for cups of coffee on the streets . . . Refreshing to view are the vegetable and fruit displays here and there along Wylie. . . . Crisp, verdant lettuce, green cabbage, orange carrots, pink potatoes, crimson cherries and apples, oranges and bananas in bright tropical array, all please the eye and tempt the palate of the passer-by . . . Curious sample of the waywardness of human nature was a certain house we recall passing the other afternoon . . . The steps and front were crowded with loiterers, but two of them chanced to move aside and we saw painted on the wall the legend: "Do Not Park on Steps or in Front of House" . . . To the right and left of the building were other houses whose fronts

were signless and vacant of human decoration entirely.

The duo of Center and Wylie suggests a comparison with Seventh Avenue and Lenox or Eighth Avenue in Harlem, but the comparison is faulty. The latter highways have a smartness and a sophistication beside which these two streets of Smoketown seem tame and almost rural.

The streets of Manhattan are wider, the buildings higher and less revealing, the informality of the denizens there never quite attains the homely simplicity of front-porch gatherings and street-corner conferences along Wylie.

The difference is probably not due to any variation in the innate character of the inhabitants so much as to the contrast in general environment.

Harlem, like any other section of New York, assumes the glamorous tradition of the wonder-city and dons a borrowed high hat in nearly all its activities. It displays a bright hardness, a clever callousness, and a calculated indifference toward the world at large. Thus almost never does it present the friendly domestic tranquility which can pervade less hard-boiled cities.

But twilight and early evening can cast a certain delusive spell over Wylie and soften a bitter reality or two beyond the observer's awareness. A kind of haze descends, obscuring some of Wylie's rougher points and filling it with a mysterious peace.

And at such times there seems to be nothing more startling along the Avenue than tired men resting in doorways after the day's work, quiet mothers rocking brown babies to sleep near open windows, and a devoted couple or so strolling carelessly down another kind of lovers' lane.