

A Spokesman for the "New Negro"

MARCHING BLACKS. By Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. 218 pp. New York: The Dial Press. \$2.50.

By FRANK S. ADAMS

AS a boy of 10, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. stood on a chair and traced on his grandfather's back the P branded into his flesh in the days of slavery. It left him with a fierce resolve not to rest until he had wiped that brand from his memory, and from the conscience of white America. This angry volume, which he calls "An Interpretive History of the Black Common Man," is dedicated to that purpose.

"I am a radical and a fighter," he says of himself. His book and his record both bear witness to the truth of that characterization. This is no calm, dispassionate study of America's most difficult problem, but the battle cry of an embittered man, who avows his hope that his cause will triumph without bloodshed, but warns that only the conscience of white America can prevent another civil war from being fought with all the fury of the war that freed the slaves.

Despite—or perhaps because of—his highly emotional approach to the problem Dr. Powell has become in recent years one of the leading spokesmen for what he calls "the new Negro." His record of achievement and his demonstrated popularity among his people make worthwhile a careful examination of the goal to

rouser." Some of his own statements make it understandable how such charges could gain currency. To him one of the great contributions of the Scottsboro case was the emergence of communism as a power fighting for the rights of poor people. "Today there is no group in America, including the Christian Church, that practices racial brotherhood one-tenth as much as the Communist party," he writes.

A Doctor of Divinity himself, Dr. Powell says that at the time of Pearl Harbor "Christianity had been abolished" among 15,000,000 brown Americans, who "pitied the white folks' Christianity, their class system and decadent politics, their fears born of self-indulgence, injustice and oppression." "The great wedge that keeps America split asunder is the hypocrisy of the Christian church," he says, and the black people "will not stop until out of the rubble of present day religion there rises an edifice that includes all races, all creeds and all classes."

A MEMBER of Congress, bound by oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, Dr. Powell nevertheless warns that the Negroes will not stop "until a people's democracy is born out of the rotten, decaying political life of America," and "from the confusion created by enemies within the working class movement there comes a workers' society predicated upon a people's democracy." If America reverts to "normal, peace-time pseudo-democracy," then America is doomed.

The American Federation of Labor, he says, is the greatest drawback to a developing democracy, and is "a disgrace to the working class movement." He believes the hour is rapidly approaching when the Negro is going to ask the Congress of Industrial Organizations to have a showdown fight with the A. F. of L., for until the controlling clique of the A. F. of L. has been driven from power democracy will suffer.

"Both the black and the white Socialist would rather see the Negro continue as a second-class serf than cooperate with any movement with which Communists were associated, regardless of how insignificant was the role that the Communist played," Dr. Powell sneers, ignoring the historical background for the reluctance of Socialists to allow themselves to be used to pull Communist chestnuts out of the fire.

Dr. Powell does not limit his hatreds to white men and their organizations. One of his principal targets is the slave caste system that developed among the Negroes, under which the house Negroes spied upon and betrayed the field Negroes. Today the field Negro is in the ascendancy and means to stay there, he writes, while the house Negroes, except for a few "Uncle Toms," are trying to ingratiate themselves with the Negro masses.

Even more vicious than the

divisions of the caste system, he declares, was the separation of light-skinned and dark-skinned Negroes. The taboo against intraracial marriages between light and dark Negroes was more rigorous in some communities than that against interracial marriages, Dr. Powell tells us. The light-skinned Negroes and mulattoes established an upper class that retained its dominant position until the depression years of the last decade.

Harlem was a cesspool before the riots of March 19, 1937—the first race riot ever started by Negroes, Dr. Powell says. But, he avers, the Negro has never lost a race riot; some progress, some token improvement, has always followed, and this was no exception. Out of the Harlem riot a new Negro was born, who came to learn and practice the power of nonviolent social action.

The picket line, the boycott and the ballot are the weapons for such action, he says. In the four years before Pearl Harbor the picket line and the boycott were used to support the slogan, "Don't buy where you can't work," directed against Harlem merchants who refused to employ Negroes. The campaign brought 10,000 jobs and \$10,000,000 in pay to Harlem Negroes, Dr. Powell says; he envisions its application on a nation-wide scale.

Even a group as poor as the Negroes, if it controls its mass purchasing power, can force the mightiest of corporations to reconsider its policy. True, we are only 10 per cent of the population, but the margin of profit today is under 10 per cent. The Negroes can smash that margin of profit, or at least so cut it that the strongest corporation will be willing to talk to their representatives.

But the South, Dr. Powell says bitterly, is hopeless. Negroes aren't wanted in the South. Five to eight million Negroes must migrate from the South in the immediate post-war years, he believes; 1,000,000 to New York, 500,000 to Philadelphia, 250,000 to Boston, 750,000 to Detroit and Chicago, and 2,000,000 to Los



Robert Gwathmey.

The Town Within a Town.

Angeles and San Diego, until the backbone of the Southern economy has disappeared and a profound change in the South's philosophy has been brought about.

Six possible solutions to the Negro problem—eradication, isolation, deportation, separation, integration and assimilation—have all been supported by Negroes at various times, Dr. Powell says. But today all but a handful of Negroes are convinced that the only solution is integration. Taking cognizance of Dr. Myrdal's finding that the chief cause of discrimination is the white fear of intermarriage, he says that to the black man social equality means equality in health, housing and recreational and cultural facilities. His answer will not still the fears of

those who believe that the ultimate result of social equality, regardless of the present desires of black people, is bound to be intermarriage—a view that does not justify continued discrimination but does cast doubt on the possibility of any completely satisfactory solution of the problem.

Many good causes have had intemperate advocates. Whether such intemperance, in the long run, advances or retards the cause in which it is exerted is not susceptible to precise determination. Dr. Powell, like William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown, would brook no compromise. It is greatly to be hoped that his intransigence will have a happier outcome than did theirs.



Robert Gwathmey.
"Masks."

which he seeks to take them, and the methods and tactics by which he plans to reach it.

At the age of 37 he is already a national figure. He is the pastor of the largest Negro church in the world, with more than 10,000 adherents. So idolized is he in Harlem that he was elected to Congress without opposition—the first member of his race to be elected from New York State—after he had won the Democratic, Republican and American Labor party nominations. He is the publisher of a Harlem newspaper, "The People's Voice."

Master of a fiery eloquence that visibly stirs his Harlem audiences to peaks of emotion, he has been called by his enemies "a Communist-controlled rabble-