

Famed French Negro Author Tells Scribe How He Defied Nazis In Paris

By EDWARD B. TOLES
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PARIS.—Last week the world knew that Rene Maran was alive. Buried for four years under Nazi rule in occupied Paris, this famous Negro writer, whose novel, "Batouala," won the highest honor in French literary circles, the Goncourt Prize of 1921, told me of life under Nazi rule.

I found him living simply and quietly with his French wife in a modest but comfortable five-room apartment high up on the fourth floor of an old courtyard building on Rue Bonaparte. Here, in this very room overlooking the river Seine, the beautiful Tuileries gardens and the neighboring Louvre, Maran did something which few have lived to tell the story. He defied Hitler!

It was sometime in 1941 when the Goebbels propaganda machine began flooding radio waves with distorted stories of life in America. Maran was asked by German officials to write a complete summary of the American Negro problem in the United States.

Request by Nazis

Said Maran, in his halting English, "This tall huge well-dressed officer very politely asked if I would write an exhaustive study of America and her Negro problem, with emphasis on inequalities, lynchings, and discriminations. I was shocked and for fully five minutes neither of us said anything when suddenly he leaned closer, saying softly, 'Surely, Monsieur, you, a black man and an author can but tell what all the world must know.'"

"I immediately stood up," continued Maran, "and told him as slowly as I could lest he fail to get all of its stinging import. 'Sir, I am described as being half-ape by your Fuehrer. Being half-ape, I can neither write nor think. I bid you, sir, good-day.'"

The Nazi officer did not protest and did not seem angry but he did bow and say, "You will, of course, think this over." By this time, said Maran, "I was so angry, I excitedly exclaimed, 'I am half-ape. I am half-ape. I cannot write. I cannot think.'"

Officer Returns

That interview left Maran and his wife worried for in those restricted days Nazis ordered the daily lives of all Frenchmen and woe be it unto those who disobeyed any request. But as we sat there beneath rows and rows of books in Maran's study, I could tell by the look in this aging author's face that in every man's life comes some time when he must stand up for those things he believes in, no matter what the cost.

"Two days later," said Maran, "this officer whom I later learned was similar in rank to that of the German, Otto Abetz, Hitler's minister to France, came again."

This time the German's words were polite but there was a sneer on his lips. "You, Monsieur, will write this article as directed. You have one week to prepare it. De-

liver your manuscript in duplicate to my courier at the end of the week."

Faced with concentration camp detention or maybe death to himself and wife, Maran wrote one of the most remarkable records of achievements by the American Negro that I have ever seen. Not only did he write one copy but he made many of which he sent to friends with the understanding that should he disappear, the facts would be known.

User Hughes Poem

Entitled, *La Situation des Negres Aux Etats-Unis*, Maran began his treatise with Defender Columnist Langston Hughes' poem, "I, Too, Sing America." Listing the achievements of the American Negro in the arts, sciences and his acceptance into American life, Maran illustrated with such striking examples as Booker T. Washington, Roland Hayes, George W. Carver, W. E. B. DuBois, Alain Locke, Robert S. Abbott, the late editor of the Chicago Defender, and many other famed Negro leaders.

Of lynchings he wrote that they were declining, using, as his reference, "The Negro Year Book," by Monroe Work. Of discrimination, he cited the achievements of Hayes and Paul Robeson and others in spite of laws and customs.

Climaxing this laudatory resume of Negro progress in America, Maran, after pointing out that the paintings of an American Negro, Henry Ossawa Tanner, graced the walls of the Luxembourg Museum in Paris, he closed with the following statement:

Lauds Roosevelt

"Therefore, you have not to be astonished that President Roosevelt himself has taken it upon himself to ignore major discriminations. When the Association of Daughters of the American Revolution refused Marian Anderson the use of Constitution Hall, the President's wife, Mrs. Roosevelt, invited the great Negro singer to

give in March, 1940, on the steps of Lincoln's Memorial, a recital to which more than 75,000 people attended.

"One must truthfully conclude that: (1) The American Negro is proud to be an American. He glorifies in being one and will never attempt anything which risks jeopardizing the significance his country assumes in the eyes of foreign nations.

"(2) The American Negro has the religion of France and has succeeded by following this principle of freedom, not only to improve his position but also to have great leaders and artists recognized by the American people themselves."

Publishes Five Books

Maran never heard any more from the Nazis and continued to write during the Nazi occupation. Oddly enough, after his command performance for Hitler, he published five books, one of which, "Beetes de la Brousse," (Jungle Beasts) won the Grand Prix in 1942. His other works were "Brazza et la fondation de l'A.E.F.," a biography of a French colonial for whom the town of Brazzaville, in French equatorial Africa, is named; (The Pioneers of Empire), "Les Pionniers de l'Empire"; "Peines de Coeur" (Heart Aches); and "Mbala L'Elephant." The latter work was illustrated in full color by the famed artist, Andre Collet, and is a tale of the jungle beasts talking animatedly in Disney fashion.

Hard at work on his latest book, "A Man Like Another," which is a history of French Negro colonies, Rene Maran continues to write in spite of Nazis, in spite of shorn royalties, in spite of no sales to starving people.

Pointing to copies of "Batouala" in eight different languages and one huge copy of "L'ivre de la Brousse," with wood-cuts by Paul Jouve, which could not be purchased now for 22,000 francs, Rene Maran smiles contentedly and says, "Tis the life of a writer."