

PAUL MAISTRE
VICE-CONSUL AND LATER CONSUL FOR FRANCE
IN VICTORIA, 1886-1898, 1901-1908

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The humiliating recall to France in 1908 of Paul Louis Philibert Maistre was the paradoxical culmination of his successful struggle to reform the Alliance Française de Victoria. This was a series of events in which sexism, snobbery, misunderstandings and sheer culture clash combined to defeat a determined and well-intentioned but somewhat tactless idealist. Being so well documented, it is worth a study in itself, albeit with occasional recourse to speculation.¹

Most of the details of his consular career may be traced in the *Annuaire diplomatique et consulaire de la République Française*, supplemented for his years in Australia by the *Victoria Government Gazette* and the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*.² His first consular posting at the age of 30 was in London as a "secrétaire-archiviste" from May 1881 until October 1885, when he was appointed a "chancelier de troisième classe" and later travelled to Melbourne. In March 1886 he was appointed vice-consul, and served as such under several different consuls or acting-consuls until early in June 1887, when he was appointed acting-consul pending the arrival of the new consul, M. Léon Dejardin, who was appointed at the same time but meanwhile had to serve as relieving consul at Shanghai. The Melbourne consulate still ranked officially as a vice-consulate under the control of the Sydney consul-general until, at the end of 1892 with Dejardin's elevation to consul-general, it achieved equal status, and at about the same time Maistre was promoted to "chancelier de seconde classe". In the following year he was promoted to vice-consul and was "chargé de la chancellerie", remaining as such, with some time as acting-consul, until a reposting to England from late 1898, after which he was reappointed to Melbourne as vice-consul in April 1901. Meanwhile, with Federation, Dejardin had left, as the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères had decided to relegate Melbourne to a vice-consulate under the control of Sydney, with Maistre being the sole consular representative in Melbourne until his own departure.

That he was a genuine career diplomat, unlike a number of his predecessors, is evidenced by the publication in 1901 of his *Notes*

pratiques à l'usage des consuls et des armateurs: naufrages et avaries; accidents en mer; abordages; jet de marchandises; emprunts à la grosse; hypothèques maritimes; achat et francisation de bâtiments à l'étranger; fret; ligne de charge, etc. (Paris, A. Challamel), and by his being called upon to act for other countries' consulates. That he was efficient at his work is evidenced by the comparatively orderly way in which he organized consular correspondence and kept comprehensive files of press clippings on matters involving French commercial interests and French people living in Victoria. During his two long stays in Australia, which covered the Centennial Exhibition of 1888, the economic slump and strikes of the nineties, the discovery of goldfields in Western Australia and the establishment of the new national Parliament in Melbourne, he was in a privileged position to observe the Australian scene and gather documentation for his own purposes as well.³

A brief glimpse of him in Oscar Comettant's *Au pays des kangourous et des mines d'or* (1890), where he is described as "un érudit, un écrivain et un poète quand il lui plaît de l'être" (p. 67), shows him also to have been a gregarious personality with a wide circle of friends.

The eventual establishment of the Alliance Française de Victoria in 1890 followed Maistre's arrival in Australia, with the Paris headquarters of the Alliance in 1889 having delegated Mr J. Woolf, a francophile lawyer who was legal adviser to the consulate, to form a *comité d'action*, and Mme Berthe Mouchette to form a *comité de dames*.⁴ A protracted illness prevented Woolf from going ahead, although he later produced a document suggesting the establishment of special prizes for the best secondary school pupils in French, including those at government schools. As Mme Mouchette had meanwhile formed her committee, Paris ratified this and withdrew the delegation of Woolf, who however remained the body's legal adviser.⁵ Thus it was that on the first committee, in what might have seemed to some a complete reversal of the normal order of things, the only male was the secretary, one M. Alibert. Janet, Lady Clarke, an active leader of Melbourne polite society as wife of the enormously wealthy and philanthropic Sir William Clarke, was Présidente d'honneur; the Présidente was Mrs Holroyd, wife of a Supreme Court judge who at some stage was president of the Athenaeum and Savage Clubs; there were three non-French Vice-Présidentes and of

the other eleven office-holders or committee members apart from the secretary, seven were non-French. In fact what had happened was that, because of the absence of a *comité d'hommes*, the Alliance had fallen into the pattern standard for the time, and not superseded for many years, whereby worthy causes, most frequently charities, were taken up by the wives of the social élite for no doubt laudable motives. However, the success of such bodies and incidentally the enhancement of these ladies' personal prestige were largely dependent upon the elevated rank of those persuaded to be patrons or honorary leaders of them. While Mme Mouchette had obviously formed her committee on this basis, she herself was an active teacher running a unique French school with her sister Mlle Lion at their home "Oberwyl" in St Kilda, where she quickly established Alliance French classes.

The statutes of the body were fairly simple and straightforward, but many of their provisions came to be disregarded, in particular that requiring an annual quota of new committee members, and this trend was accompanied by a decline in the very activities which were its real *raison d'être*. Mme Mouchette's classes had ended with her departure from Melbourne in 1892, and in 1894 the committee decided not to hold its usual examinations for school pupils, because of all the expense and unpleasantness of an unspecified nature involved the year before. Despite early plans to hold a number of literary soirées, very few of these took place, and in the years that followed the main activity of the Alliance was the holding of monthly soirées, mainly musical in character, organized by committee members on a roster basis. Eventually even this roster was found to be too exacting and the frequency was reduced; at one stage sheer lack of funds also caused some cancellations. It was the low ebb at which the Alliance was operating and the entrenched triviality of its activities which were to lead to future dissension.

The committee also seems to have been somewhat cavalier and even obfuscatory in what it chose to report to Alliance headquarters. Late in 1894 it had to be asked to send its 1893 balance sheet, which did provoke the sending of one quarterly report of activities, but in 1895, having been asked by Paris for a list of members, it decided to send only a list of committee members, while over the next few years there were other requests for information about either its activities or balance sheet. On the other hand, it had never been backward in asking Alliance headquarters to provide prize books for its examinations.

A more promising possibility of serious literary functions had emerged at the March 1893 meeting, with the reading of a letter from an ordinary member, Mlle Irma Dreyfus, offering to give a course of lectures on French literature under the patronage of the Alliance. It was decided to accept her offer, and Mesdames Crivelli and Dejardin (wife of the then consul-general) proposed to organize a soirée at which she would be asked to give an introductory lecture about her course. Three committee members were deputed to call upon her to make the request, but she obviously declined as there is nothing further about it in the minutes. Two months later Mlle Dreyfus wrote to the committee again, this time asking if, on the basis of taking full responsibility for any loss, she could send Alliance library books to a friend in Tasmania, but this request was refused on rather ungenerous bureaucratic grounds. Over the next four years there is no mention of Mlle Dreyfus's lectures, which certainly did not form part of the programme of soirées, and are not mentioned in Maistre's subsequent summary of the Alliance's activities over those years. One therefore has to presume that she was kept at arm's length by the Alliance committee, and gave her series of seventeen lectures from 1893 to 1895 under other auspices.⁶

1891-1898

From his own account, Maistre's first fleeting involvement with the Alliance was in May 1891, when through the press he asked for an extension and increase of Mme Mouchette's classes, St Kilda being too far away for many members to get there regularly. His proposal was endorsed in principle by the General Meeting of 24 July in the same year. Otherwise, although he and his wife were sent honorary members' cards in 1894, it seems from the copies of archives of the Melbourne French consulate held by ISFAR, and the minute books of the Alliance held at the La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria, that his active involvement resulted from a visit to Melbourne in December 1900, while he himself was still in England, by the Sydney consul-general, M. Biard d'Aunet, who already in *Le Courrier australien* of 17 June 1899 had remarked that the results of the Melbourne Alliance's "soirées amusantes", its sole remaining activity, "ne peuvent pas être considérables". This in turn suggests that he was acting on a commission from Paris to try to remedy the sluggish and misplaced activity of the

Melbourne Alliance. Having accepted to become a patron of it, he attended its committee meeting of 3 December and, according to the minutes, did not mince words about what he saw as its shortcomings: "[. . .] [i]l nous explique les vraies fonctions de l'Alliance française. Il regrette que nous ayons discontinué les examens et espère que nous essayerons de les tenir à l'avenir. C'est en enseignant la langue française aux enfants dans les écoles que la société ferait plus de bien que dans les soirées mensuelles". He followed this up with a letter read to the committee meeting of 5 March 1901, expressing the hope that this year examinations would be held and enclosing a copy of the catalogue of the Sydney Alliance's library and a report of its committee's activities. Given this further criticism by way of implicit unfavourable comparison, not to mention traditional Melbourne-Sydney rivalry particularly strong in this immediate pre-Federation period, it is hardly surprising that his proposal in yet another letter read at the meeting of 3 April, that the Alliances of Sydney and Melbourne be united in a single Alliance Française d'Australie, was to be rejected at the meeting of 1 May. Meanwhile though, the committee had decided to conduct examinations again, and the news that Mrs Holroyd was to be awarded a medal by the French Government for her work for the Alliance showed him to be offering a diplomatic carrot after wielding a stick.

1901-1905

On returning from his English posting Maistre seems to have abandoned his creative writing, but took up the process started by M. Biard d'Aunet of trying to encourage the Melbourne Alliance into more effective action. The minutes of 6 August record that "Mme, Mlle et M. Maistre" have become members and at various stages in 1901 he was active in helping the treasurer, Mrs Sybil Maud Cave, in correspondence with Paris to obtain gifts of books as prizes for the Alliance examinations and to facilitate the securing of books for the library, while one letter from her thanks him for the donation of a copy of his charming book.⁷ Another encloses a letter to be forwarded by diplomatic bag to the Ministère de l'Instruction Publique. In the draft of a letter to accompany this, Maistre complains that the Alliance examinations and prizes, and its library, seem to be the only means it has of disseminating French, while in the schools living languages are taught like dead ones, but his

dissatisfaction was to go far deeper. Meanwhile, of the same date is a letter to Mrs Cave covering the same ground, thus establishing his *modus operandi*: local pressure combined with reports to Paris. It is worth noting also that it was Mrs Cave who was handling matters usually within the domain of the secretary and receiving a communication which would normally be addressed to the president.

Over the next three years Maistre was active in helping the Alliance acquire books from Paris and on one occasion made explicit his willingness to help it in any way possible. However, he was unsuccessful in his efforts to persuade the Alliance to follow some Sydney initiatives, one of which, suggested by the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, was to offer a special prize to the University of Melbourne for the study of French applied to commerce; another was to offer diplomas for advanced skill with French. By 1905 he was also advising the committee to approach the Victorian Government to make Alliance French examinations part of the Public Service examinations, as in New South Wales.

In mid-April 1905, by now eighth on the list of seniority of "Vice-consuls de première classe", Maistre was promoted to "Consul de deuxième classe", and later in the same year agreed to become a member of the committee. As such, he tried hard to enlist the help of M. Maurice-Carton, in charge of university teaching of French, in his efforts to bend the Alliance towards its avowed purpose. The latter had also been invited to join the committee and been made an honorary member, but explained that he was too busy to attend meetings. The copious correspondence between them shows Maurice-Carton to have been a testy and punctilious character, alert to anything which might seem to encroach upon his own ground, particularly as he felt that his own courses and the very active French Club which he ran for his students excluded their need of any other stimulus. He therefore tended to blow hot and cold about the help he could give, claiming towards the end of the year that both the Dean of Arts and the Registrar of the university had made it clear that his academic duties and particularly those as examiner prevented his participating in any other examining system; in any case, he suggested to Maistre, the present unsatisfactory situation resulted from the Alliance's not having accepted his offers of help in the past. In 1900 his offer to give a series of lectures on French literature and history had met with the rebuff that "l'Alliance ne donne jamais son patronage". This

was not true, there being a number of grantings of patronage recorded in the minutes, but it was indicative of the committee's unwillingness to become involved with a genuine educative activity.

What Maurice-Carton did do was make bullets for Maistre to fire, particularly in drafting a three-point programme for reform of the Alliance: there should be a series of annually planned monthly meetings, partly literary in character, with lectures and recitals of the sort to be found in Paris and the provinces, and in which teachers of French would play an active part; spoken French should be obligatory at meetings, which would cover French subjects or involve French music; thirdly, there should be "[u]n système d'examens moins fantaisiste et, *surtout plus secret* que celui qui existe à présent et qui permet à certains candidats de prédire infailliblement le résultat qu'ils ou qu'elles obtiendront—C'est surtout cette sorte de choses qui discrédite les examens de l'Alliance." (As the examinations were organized and conducted mainly by non-native speakers with no pedagogical experience, it is not surprising that they were open to criticism.) Maurice-Carton was later also to be exercised by the fact that the Alliance's German counterpart, the Deutsche Schulverein, was offering better examination prizes than was the Alliance, but he regarded the Alliance's examinations as fairly insignificant in any case, given that in 1905 only 18 candidates had presented, a trivial figure compared with those taking university-administered secondary examinations in various Australian capitals.

Maistre was eventually to send a letter to the Alliance committee making the above three points more tactfully, and outlining a system of examining which he had first shown in draft form to Maurice-Carton who endorsed it: "Avec tous mes remerciements. C'est parfait." Meanwhile he had been pressing the committee on two other fronts: on 10 August he asked Mrs Cave whether the Victorian Alliance was in the habit of sending copies of its annual report to the Paris headquarters, and asking that if not, she should suggest to the committee that this be done regularly in future through the vice-consulate, with the branch having every interest in seeing that its activities be made known in Paris; if the committee agreed, he would send a copy of the latest report on its behalf. From a letter he received from Mrs Cave, it is clear that he had also urged, not for the first time, that the Alliance's bank account be transferred to the local French bank, the Comptoir National d'Escompte, while its new manager, M. d'Orgeval, had made his membership of the

Alliance and assistance with its examinations conditional upon such a transfer. Mrs Cave pointed out that as this suggestion had been made and rejected before, it could hardly be raised again, and that in any case the previous managers of the CNE had been members and helped with examinations. References in the minute books show that some committee members at least were under the impression that, when the Melbourne Alliance was established, it had sought to place its account with the CNE, but was told that its funds were too small to be acceptable. Others, such as Mrs Cave, who joined the committee in April 1895, and Lady Holroyd ("Lady" since her husband's knighthood in 1903), must have deliberately fostered this impression rather than point out that on 3 August 1897 the committee had considered a letter from the manager of the CNE, M. Phalempin, saying that his bank was willing to hold the Alliance's account.⁸ The reason offered at this meeting for making no change was that the Alliance had meanwhile had good service from the Union Bank.⁹

1906

In the first half of 1906 the main preoccupations of the committee were the organization of the Alliance's first ball and the handling of objections to a certain laxity in the conditions of entry for recitation examinations: in particular it was felt that children of native speakers were enjoying an unfair advantage. Early in July Maistre went on leave, and M. Eugène Lucciardi, a vice-consul at Sydney, came down to replace him, so that at the end of the month it was he who forwarded materials from Alliance headquarters to the committee, which decided, presumably as the result of some persuasion, to send to Paris for copies of all the literature to do with the Alliance. That it felt itself to be under threat or pressure is shown by an addition to the letter requesting this material:

Dans l'intention de fortifier la position que l'Alliance a su conquérir dans cette ville et pour étouffer les bruits fâcheux qui ont été répandus à l'égard de son œuvre, on a incorporé l'opinion du comité dans une lettre qui a été lue avant de l'expédier au bureau à Paris, lui demandant un conseil dans ce but.

To deal with the matter of recitation entries, Mrs Cave was commissioned to draw up a list of conditions to be signed by the parent or teacher of each competing child and this was published as a letter in the daily papers, thus triggering a request by the vice-consul for a special meeting of the committee to discuss the business of the Alliance. To this meeting held on 23 August Lady Holroyd and the secretary sent apologies. Although Lucciardi was in all likelihood acting at the absent Maistre's instigation in initiating the meeting, his misplaced opening gambit seemed to lack any coherent rationale. When he claimed that Mrs Cave's letter had offended some French residents, "qui la trouvaient peu amicale envers une société faisant partie de l'Université", it had to be pointed out to him that the French Club had no official standing vis-à-vis the university and its courses. Then the attitudes of Maistre and the committee towards one another were brought into the open. Lucciardi claimed that the committee had been inconsiderate towards Maistre, which provoked a series of complaints in the other direction, that it was Maistre who had behaved very discourteously towards the committee: when he had first arrived, Mrs Cave had called on him to ask him to join it and help with the examinations, but he had refused; his wife had also refused to join; some months before going on leave he had expressed a wish to be elected to it, at the same time asking that Maurice-Carton be elected also, but the latter had declined pleading pressure of work; Maistre had never come to meetings, omitted to inform the committee of his coming leave, and had neither informed the Présidente nor taken his leave of her.

Lucciardi then mentioned the feeling of French residents that the committee contained too many English members and named six French ladies who he suggested should be invited to join it. Some of them apparently were teachers, as the reply was that the committee had a principle of not inviting teachers to join so as to avoid any suspicion of unfairness in the examinations. This bizarre reason for excluding the very people who could have helped it most, even if only in an advisory capacity as far as the examinations were concerned, seems to be more like a reluctance by ladies whose French was largely a genteel accomplishment to be confronted with professional practitioners of the language. It was also a far cry from the Melbourne Alliance's foundation, in which the prime mover was a practising teacher, but by this stage social distinctions may also have been operating against teachers.

Given all that had been said, the next meeting on 4 September was on the face of it strangely placatory. Mme Lucciardi and another French lady had agreed to join the committee; the secretary was to write to the vice-consul to tell him that he had been unanimously elected to it, while the response of a number of other French ladies invited to join was awaited. The carrying of Mrs Cave's motion that only French people could be examiners of recitations, apparently a step in the right direction, may also be seen as the passing on of an embarrassing burden to the newcomers, while Mme Lucciardi could not very well have declined the invitation to join, given the remarking of Mme Maistre's refusal to do so; in any case, the old hands on the committee were well aware that the Lucciardis would be present for only a few more months.

The letter tabled at the October meeting from M. Foncin, president of the Alliance in Paris, in reply to the letter sent by the committee in July, was likewise placatory, with the committee recognized as the sole representative of the Alliance in Melbourne, effusively thanked for its help, and assured of his confidence that M. Maistre would kindly assist the committee in its task. However, it also noted that according to the statutes of the parent body, "le Consul se trouve de droit, Président d'honneur". In December, French repossession of the Alliance was apparently taken a step further when, M. Lucciardi having pointed out that according to the same statutes, "une française [*sic*] doit être représentée sur le bureau en qualité de présidente-adjointe", Mme Crivelli was elected to that position, but this in fact reinforced the position of the old guard. Mme Crivelli's father, Dr Duret, had arrived in Melbourne in 1869 and established a reputation as a skilled medical practitioner. Before retiring to France in 1888 he arranged for his practice to be taken over by Dr Crivelli, who married his youngest daughter in 1887 and became known as one of the most progressive doctors in Melbourne.¹⁰ Having grown up in Melbourne in a well-regarded family, Mme Crivelli naturally identified more easily with the non-French committee members and hers was one of the small number of homes at which committee meetings were frequently held.

1907

Maistre returned to Melbourne about the middle of January to resume charge not only of the French vice-consulate but of the Russian

Imperial consulate for which he was acting-consul; later in the year he was to act in a similar capacity for the Italian consulate-general. He was no doubt already aware of another placatory gesture by Paris announced at the April meeting, that Mrs Cave was to be awarded a medal for her services to the Alliance, but also no doubt fortified by discussion with Alliance headquarters as to what should be done to reanimate the Melbourne branch. If once again a medal was to be a carrot, Maistre was well prepared to wield a stick, the more so as Lucciardi would have informed him of the committee's attitude towards him. From then on he greatly increased his pressure upon it: in May he was enquiring about the number of active members (implying that there were some inactive ones) and vacancies on the committee, and in July pointed out that election of committee members should be according to the statutes of the Alliance in Paris, namely that their election by the committee was then ratified by the ordinary members. This produced a number of defensive reactions, first of all by Mme Crivelli, who protested that she had been elected according to the rules, but it emerged that given the difficulty of finding ladies to serve on the committee, the usual rules had been dispensed with. Although there was often a minimal male presence, no thought seems to have been specifically directed to finding suitable gentlemen to serve, while for selection of ladies the criteria, apart from an interest in French, must have been socially exclusivist in a way that ensured the perpetuation of a coterie. (The minutes do not record at what time of day committee meetings were usually held, but if it was during the working day, this would have prevented the membership of most men and of any women such as teachers earning their own living.) Significantly, it was Mme Aarons, one of the new French committee members and sister of Irma Dreyfus, who suggested that the soirées could be made more instructive and fulfil the basic aim of the Alliance if they consisted of literary readings followed by critical discussion—in other words what Maurice-Carton had been mooted through Maistre in 1905—and at a subsequent meeting it was decided to go ahead with these.

Maistre's awareness that the committee had frequently not followed its own statutes and that many of its members seemed to be ignorant both of them and of the very aims and proper activities of the Alliance itself, led him on 12 July to draft for its enlightenment a lengthy document entitled "Notes sur l'Alliance Française de Victoria: sa fondation, ses statuts; son but et ses moyens d'action". After giving a

detailed account of how the body was established, he outlined the statutes to do with the committee, which was to be elected for five years, but with a fifth of its number to be renewed annually at a General Meeting; from among its number the committee was to choose annually an executive consisting of a president, two vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer and a librarian, while the deployment of its funds in the association's best interests was to be approved by the General Meeting.

Then followed a long parenthesis which briefly mentioned slight and probably unwitting breaches of the rules, such as the failure of the committee to renew itself by a fifth annually, before the much more serious question was raised of the General Meetings, designed to ratify committee elections and the statement of accounts and balance sheet. For a General Meeting to be a valid one, it should be attended solely by members, who should have received due notice of it along with an agenda and a report of the committee's activities over the past year. However, the present practice of reading out a report of which only the committee had prior knowledge, during a musical or literary soirée, was not only inadequate but in complete contradiction of the spirit of the statutes. As long as this practice continued, it could be said that the committee of the Alliance of Victoria, free of all effective control by the members, would continue to be, as had already been pointed out to them, "une petite chapelle indépendante, autoritaire et irresponsable!"

He was similarly scathing about the discrepancy between the present activities of the Alliance and the "moyens d'action" listed under Article 10 of its statutes: "le Bulletin; les publications et mémoires, conférences et cours, sous-comités; création d'écoles, musées et expositions, bourses et pensions; concours, prix et récompenses; secours". In fact, nothing had come from either Mr Woolf's suggestion of prizes for school pupils or from the agreement in principle to extend Mme Mouchette's classes, which had meanwhile lapsed, so that all that remained were the "soi-disant 'soirées amusantes' où le français occupe la dernière place, et où, assez souvent, il brille par son absence!" This was not to forget the Alliance's examinations and recitation competitions, but he asked the committee members themselves whether they regarded these as contributing much to the propagation of French in Victoria, given that they were on set pieces which children spent weeks practising and ended up reciting reasonably well. There was no doubt that in recent times there had been a marked drop in the reputation of the Alliance in

teaching circles. If funds were lacking to establish bursaries, it seemed necessary to return to the other activities already suggested, such as readings, lessons and lectures by native French speakers which students wishing to improve their practice of the language would have every interest in attending. What is more, in time such activities would bring funds into the Alliance instead of being a drain on them; thus, the Paris Alliance's *Bulletin* of 15 January 1906 noted that the first series of French readings organized by the Sydney committee had brought in a profit of £14/19/6.

The last section of Maistre's draft consisted of a long extract from an article by M. Foncin on the history, ideals and worldwide achievements of the Alliance, followed by a concluding expression of hope that his notes on its aims, origins and activities would cast some light on the apparently very confused ideas which some members of the Victorian committee had on a subject which should have been familiar to them. It is not clear whether it was this conclusion which he used in the definitive document, or another one dated 20 July at the end of his long parenthesis, to the effect that his notes for the committee were in the interests of a body which, rightly or wrongly, struck him as having gone astray and lost sight of its proper activities and above all of its real purpose, which was to be an active and energetic means of propaganda for French language and literature, and not a pale imitation of the Austral Salon. Whichever he used, it was hardly calculated to persuade, still less to please, those at whom it was aimed. If the reference to the Austral Salon was used it would have been found particularly offensive and implicitly misogynist, as some ladies of the committee were likely to have been devotees of it.¹¹

When Maistre's "Notes" were read at the August meeting, the committee's response was recorded as: "[...] le Comité ne peut que dire, si dans les séances il y a eu des omissions ou s'il n'a pas observé strictement le règlement [*sic*], tous ont cherché toujours l'avancement de la Société". Mlle Bruggmann was elected as the new secretary and 33 new members were listed. Such an unprecedented number recorded at any one meeting presumably resulted from an unofficial membership drive in view of the General Meeting to be held on the following evening.

The meeting of 3 September was surprisingly mundane, but on 1 October another confrontation between Maistre and Mrs Cave was

provoked by his pointing out the desirability of transferring the Alliance's account to the CNE, this being standard practice whenever a French bank was available; it would also clear the way for the CNE's manager M. d'Orgeval and his wife to become members. Mrs Cave referred to previous discussions of the matter in 1905, but Maistre gained the assent of the Présidente for a vote on it, resulting in 7 votes for the CNE and 2 for the Union Bank, with 2 abstentions, so that the account was to be transferred. It was reported that the first soirée-lecture on 23 September seemed to arouse interest and was so well attended that a larger hall would be needed for the next one on 25 October.

Following what seem to have been instructions from Maistre, M. d'Orgeval opened an account for the Alliance at the CNE, paid into it £1/1/0 for his own and his wife's memberships, and sent the receipt to Mrs Cave. This pre-emptive bypassing of the treasurer would have been motivated by the two men's awareness of the real situation regarding past avoidance of transferring the account and their fears that some other attempt could be made to block it. They may even have thought this procedure preferable to directly challenging the committee's version of why the transfer had not taken place in the past. In a letter to M. d'Orgeval on 8 October Mrs Cave claimed to have taken his receipt to be a cheque and so had sent off membership cards, but now pointed out that until the account of the Alliance was formally withdrawn from the Union Bank, all moneys had to continue to be paid into this, stressing that "Toute autre façon d'agir est incorrecte, et même *illégal*", and asking him to send a cheque to regularize the matter.

On 9 October M. d'Orgeval wrote to Maistre enclosing Mrs Cave's "lettre ridicule" and announcing that

Je n'ai pas l'intention de servir de cible aux exercices antifrçais de Madame Cave. J'attendrai donc que vous puissiez mettre les choses en ordre. Si d'ici quelques jours Madame Cave ne bouge pas, je lui accuserai réception de sa lettre en lui retournant les cartes de sociétaires contre annulation du reçu du Comptoir qu'elle a en mains. Puis j'attendrai que l'Alliance soit purgée de ses éléments hostiles à l'idée française avant d'en faire partie.

He received a further letter from Mrs Cave on 16 October enclosing as requested a copy of her previous letter which he had passed on to

Maistre, and replied that if she had any worries about the legality of keeping his receipt as a valid payment of membership, she should refer the matter to "Monsieur le Consul de France". To Maistre he wrote that

Je crois que cette lettre remet la question à son point, c'est à dire forcera Madame Cave soit à se soumettre soit à montrer au plein jour les sentiments antifrçais qui malheureusement semblent avoir envahi dernièrement son admirable cerveau.

Thus, the confrontational attempt to force the issue of the transfer by an anticipatory *de facto* opening of a CNE account, also involving a certain understandable presumption on d'Orgeval's part that he and his wife would be accepted as members, was not only proving to be counter-productive, but was further polarizing the committee.

On the other hand, the non-French members of the committee, with second thoughts about the transfer decision that most of them must have voted for, were hardly acting in good faith. At the meeting of 13 November, the minutes including the treasurer's report for the 1 October meeting were read but not signed, the intention obviously being to keep the transfer question open. Mesdames Burke and Cave moved to annul the vote on the transfer at the previous meeting as it had not been on the agenda, a specious technicality given the lack of any such punctiliousness in the past. After lengthy discussion a vote was taken on an amendment that the previous vote be allowed to stand but the transfer not be made until another manager of the CNE branch was appointed, "lequel voudra bien se conduire d'une façon légale et correcte envers le comité". In other words, the transfer was to be indefinitely postponed, d'Orgeval was to be reprimanded and punished, and his eventual successor put on notice to behave himself. The amendment was carried unanimously. After a reading of the correspondence between Mrs Cave and M. d'Orgeval, a vote was taken on the membership of the d'Orgevals and this was rejected, 8 votes to 1, with 2 abstentions. In other words, d'Orgeval and his wife with him were blackballed. The discrepancy between the two votes is at first sight puzzling, but explainable on the basis that both sides agreed that d'Orgeval's action and attitude were unacceptably high-handed; when it became clear that the transfer motion could not be rescinded, the amendment which maintained the transfer but denied d'Orgeval any benefit from it was acceptable to all, while the issue of

the memberships was less clearcut. On 19 November the secretary wrote to Maistre regretting to inform him of this rejection and enclosing a copy of the minutes.

Maistre attended the meeting of 12 December, and after the minutes of the previous meeting had been read, he asked if those of 1 October had been signed by the Présidente, who replied that they had not. Maistre pointed out that according to committee rules, minutes could be discussed only as to their factual accuracy, and then had to be signed, whereupon Mrs Cave, who had opposed their being signed on 13 November, checked the rules and then told Lady Holroyd she could sign them, which was done. Mrs Cave's next gambit was to try to gag Maistre on the basis that the committee already had its full fifteen members, but he pointed out that as Président d'honneur he could take part in discussions, and that an absent member had notified Lady Holroyd that he had her proxy vote. Lady Holroyd had forgotten this letter as well as one from Maistre regarding a letter from Mme Crivelli which involved reopening the question of the conditions of transfer of funds to the CNE. Here again, Maistre's mastery of the rules enabled him to point out that a matter resolved by motion could not be reopened in the absence of that motion's proposer: as he had not attended the November meeting, his successful motion on the transfer at the October meeting must stand.

However, all this was a mere preliminary to the matter of the rejection of the candidature of the d'Orgevals for membership, with Maistre heatedly pointing out that the committee did not have the right to reject without serious cause, simply on the basis of personal differences, "deux des plus respectés notables de la colonie française", but pointing out that "[o]n peut et doit [. . .] repousser la candidature des gens tarés, de mauvaise vie ou de mœurs douteuses, des faillis ou des personnes ayant encouru des condamnations". Mrs Cave urged the committee to maintain the veto of 13 November, whereupon Maistre, now completely identifying his diplomatic with his reformist role, declared that as Consul de France and Président d'honneur, he would regard rejection of the candidature of two respected members of the French colony "comme un véritable scandale". Mrs Cave then twice asked Lady Holroyd to close the meeting, and, "conformément à cette injonction Lady Holroyd se lève et disant 'La séance est levée', quitte la salle suivie des dames anglaises du comité", leaving behind Maistre and

five French ladies. A PS in English to the minutes, signed by Lady Holroyd, reads: "Lady Holroyd said to Mrs Cave: 'If anything objectionable is being said during the meeting kindly let me know and I shall close the meeting.'"

On the face of it the PS, which must have been appended to the minutes by way of explanation of what had occurred, was intended to indicate Lady Holroyd's determination that committee members behave with decorum, especially in the case of a gentleman towards ladies, but as the committee's rules did not allow of any such mechanism for closing a meeting, it is impossible to determine whether the high-handed closure and walkout resulted from some disarray at the outspoken implacability of Maistre's challenge or from a prearranged strategy. In any case, there was obviously a determination to block Maistre, with Mrs Cave masterminding the moves and directing or manipulating Lady Holroyd, who seems to have been both absent-minded, at best, and either somewhat deaf or lacking an adequate command of French and of committee procedure.

The paradoxical situation had now been reached where all the French members present at a meeting of a committee whose aim was to foster knowledge of French language and literature had been abandoned by all the non-French members present, who would nevertheless have thought that the legitimate Alliance went with them, as their number included the *Présidente anglaise* and the treasurer, both holders of a medal for their services to it, and they knew that they could depend upon the support of the absent *Présidente française*, Mme Crivelli. Such a polarization along national lines could now end only with the victory of one or other faction.

Maistre's next move was to enclose a copy of his "Notes" addressed to the committee on 12 July with a long report dated 5 December to M. Léon Dufourmantelle, *Secrétaire-général* of the Alliance in Paris. In this, he was able to be much franker about what he saw as the basic problem of the Melbourne Alliance, its having fallen into the hands of a committee composed entirely of ladies, many of them English, who had gradually turned it from its true purpose to the level of "*ces sociétés mondaines australiennes, où, sous prétexte d'art et de belles-lettres, on s'occupe surtout de 'Thés', de 'soirées amusantes' et de bals!*" In these soirées, French played such a small part even at a conversational level that people were comparing it with the rival Dante Society in which

Italian was unknown. This is why he had lately begun attending meetings to try to change this state of affairs, while M. Lucciardi had strengthened the French membership of the committee during his own absence on leave. A few meetings were enough to convince Maistre that most of the ladies on the committee had only very vague ideas of the rules, activities and aims of the Alliance, which is why he drew up the "Notes" that he hoped would meet with M. Dufourmantelle's approval. Two of the soirées-lectures proposed by Mme Aarons had now taken place and been a great success, favourably commented upon in the press and attracting many new memberships; they also had the advantage of reaching a much larger group than the examinations, "sans distinction d'âge ou de condition sociale, et [. . .] elles instruisent en amusant!" Despite such progress, there was still a great deal to be done: firstly, "l'élément français travailleur" would have to be much more strongly represented on the committee, which should exert closer control over the society's funds, while these should be transferred to the local French bank; it was desirable to have some male members on the committee, to which they would bring "cette habitude des affaires, ce jugement reposé et cet esprit logique qui ne sont pas, en général, l'apanage du beau sexe!"; finally, the French colony in Victoria must take an active interest in the Alliance, but this would not happen until the Alliance itself became "nationale par l'esprit et par le cœur" and thus able to gather around it all French nationals, "quelles que soient leur situation et leur fortune".

The very clear egalitarian rhetoric of this document, which however excluded equality of the sexes, naturally did not envisage much of a future role for non-French female representatives of Melbourne's social élite, implicitly juxtaposed as the English idle rich against ordinary hard-working French people.

Although direct documentation is lacking, it is clear that at Maistre's instigation the secretary, Mlle Bruggmann, must have called a meeting for 23 December, which met with the following response from the two Présidentes in a letter to Maistre dated 20 December:

La présidente Anglaise [sic] et la présidente française ont l'honneur de vous faire savoir qu'elles ne sont pour rien dans la Convocation du meeting du 23 Décembre, et qu'elles s'opposent absolument à la réunion de ce Comité qu'elles refusent de présider.

Jusqu'à la réunion du prochain comité, en Mars 1908 dont nous vous fixerons la date par un avis ultérieur, nous vous prions instamment de considerer [sic] comme nulle et non avenue toute communication qui ne porterait pas la signature d'au moins l'une des deux présidentes.

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In the event, no meeting was held on 23 December. Instead, Maistre sought the counsel of the Alliance's legal adviser, Mr Woolf, as to the valid procedures for calling committee and general meetings in terms of the Alliance's statutes. The vital points of his reply dated 20 January were that: the President is obliged to call a committee meeting when requested to do so by a quarter of its members; more than one General Meeting may be called in the course of a year, and the President would be obliged to call one if requested to by a sufficient number of signatories; however, it was not even necessary that the request be made to the President, as the secretary as part of his duty may convene a meeting in response to a *bona fide* request, and cannot be laid open to censure for doing so. Woolf suggested that with some publicity a meeting (by which he seemed to mean a General Meeting) could be called, and concluded with the revealing comment: "As a delegate [sic] of the Association I have always mistrusted the bent of this Society and on that account I have declined to have any association with same and I shall be only too pleased to give any assistance with a view to placing matters on a proper basis."

Following this advice a special meeting of the committee was called on 31 January at the request of four of the five French ladies remaining after the walkout of 12 December, plus one other, and presided by Maistre. The minutes of this are much more businesslike than ever before, with agenda items listed, and show that a reforming spirit was in operation. Dates were set for the first two soirées-lectures of the year and arrangements made for ordering books and printing circulars for these, as well as for sending season tickets for the series to the university prize-winners in French. In the absence of the librarian, books awaiting delivery arrangements for a month were to be picked up as members had been asking for them. A retiring committee member was to be replaced by M. René Vanderkelen.¹² A petition signed by 35 members asking for the auditing and publication of the 1906-1907

accounts had been sent to Lady Holroyd, who had replied that it would be submitted to the committee, as it involved a special expense; the committee therefore voted the funds for this compulsory exercise to be carried out by Mr E. W. Smail, a chartered accountant, with the treasurer to be informed by the secretary that he would be contacting her. The minutes were signed by all those present.

The committee meeting foreshadowed by the two *Présidentes* in their letter to Maistre took place on 17 March with Lady Holroyd presiding, and with an agenda aimed at restoring the status quo ante. Thus, the first item was: "Discussion sur les questions laissées en suspens depuis la dernière réunion du Comité du 12 Décembre 1907", which implicitly passed over the special meeting of 31 January; this was made explicit by Mme Crivelli, who challenged the presence of M. Vanderkelen, elected at a meeting not officially recognized, and asked him to withdraw. When it was made clear that the previous meeting had been perfectly legal, his membership was accepted. Lady Holroyd then declared that given the differences on the committee regarding the administration and orientation of the Alliance, she had written to Paris about the situation, but that meanwhile one must not let the work of the Alliance suffer, but think only of the future, at which "Ces sages observations sont approuvées par le Comité tout entier".

The second agenda item, "Vacance du Secrétariat", was presumably intended to support a contention that Mlle Bruggmann had voided her position by calling a special meeting without reference to either of the *Présidentes*, but it was passed over without discussion. Regarding the petition to do with auditing of the accounts, it was explained that Mrs Cave had consulted a lawyer named Madden who had given the opinion that the accounts did not need further checking after being passed by the "réunion de fin d'année".¹³ The connection with the consulate would have precluded Mrs Cave from consulting the Alliance's own honorary legal adviser, Mr Woolf, whose advice would have been very different, while the tenor of Madden's advice would have depended very much upon the terms in which questions were put to him. Mrs Cave added that in the interest of reducing costs, and at the suggestion of Lady Holroyd, for several years she had employed her husband to check the accounts. This was an unwise admission indicating not only a certain opportunism, but again an ignorance of the statutes, according to which all functions carried out for the Alliance including scrutiny of accounts

should be honorary. Mrs Cave was claiming to have saved the Alliance money by having done cheaply what should have been done for nothing. (As there had obviously been no arrangement in place for an honorary auditor, the special meeting would have had no choice but to engage Mr Smail on a paid basis.) With a proper audit now completed, the committee voted funds for the printing of the 1906-1907 balance sheet, and, at the request of Lady Holroyd, for the payment of a consultation with Mr Madden by Mrs Cave regarding an article on the society's funds in *Table Talk*.¹⁴

Item 4 on the agenda, "Lettre de l'Alliance Française de Paris", in fact involved two letters, the more sensational dated 29 February being from M. Dufourmantelle to Lady Holroyd in response to hers of 16 and 23 December; it informed her quite curtly that the executive of the board of directors of the Alliance entirely approved of the measures taken by M. Maistre and regretted that she too did not do so. A second letter read out, of which there is no copy in the archives, was sent by M. Dufourmantelle on 14 January in response to Maistre's report of 5 December, giving complete approval of the measures he proposed taking "pour assurer à l'Alliance Française de Melbourne une réelle prospérité", including scrutiny of accounts and transfer of funds to the CNE. In a third letter dated 29 February from M. Dufourmantelle, enclosing a copy of the reply of the same date to Lady Holroyd, Maistre was assured that approval of his actions had been endorsed by the executive of the board of directors, was thanked for his help, and told that a letter from Lady Holroyd, also signed by Mme Crivelli, had requested an inquiry into the situation on the committee and tendered their conditional resignations. Maistre's reason for not revealing the third letter at this stage was presumably that he still hoped to avoid the resignation of the whole non-French faction, which would certainly have taken place had they realized that the two Présidentes had implicitly resigned already; he may even have been hoping that the latter would accept the judgment of Paris and remain in the Alliance, given Lady Holroyd's "sages observations" of 17 March. The final business of the meeting was to authorize Mme Aarons to go ahead with organization of the new programme of soirées-lectures.

Maistre wrote to the Secrétaire-général again on 30 March, enclosing clippings from the *Argus*, *Age* and *Herald* of favourable comments about the third of the soirées-lectures. He regretted to report that none of these gatherings, in which he had taken an active part in

order to give them "une sorte de consécration officielle", had been attended by the two Présidentes, the treasurer or the librarian, and concluded that: "Cette abstention, évidemment voulue, est un indice remarquable de l'état d'esprit de ces dames du Comité dont trois sont anglaises, et une, j'ai le regret de le dire, française!"

On 6 April Maistre and the reformist members of the committee sent "Lady Holroyd, Présidente de l'Alliance Française de Victoria à Melbourne" a letter pointing out that the reply she had received from Paris left no doubt about the views of the central committee regarding the modest reforms they wished to introduce, and expressing the hope that she would use her influence on the committee members who, for lack of proper information, had opposed these reforms to now accept them in full. She was assured that the changes would be gradual, with a spirit of reconciliation enabling the Alliance to emerge stronger and revived from the crisis; it was hoped that her spirit of fairness would enable her to accept the views of the parent body, and that with the good of the Alliance uppermost in her mind, she would continue to give it her support and help. However, Lady Holroyd was not mollified by this, understandably, as Paris had fully endorsed Maistre's actions which implied a thoroughgoing rejection of her presidency and the policies of her committee, and before mid-April she had sent him for transmission to Paris a letter containing the resignations of herself and seven others including Mme Crivelli. The basic weakness of the position of this group had at last caught up with them: Paris refused to disavow Maistre for turning back the Melbourne Alliance to its true purpose against their determined opposition. However, given Maistre's forceful methods and her undoubted feeling that he had misrepresented the situation to Paris, on 18 April she also sent a circular letter to members of the Alliance explaining her resignation.

Apart from the inherent strength of his position during this period of struggle, Maistre was fortunate in having in Paris an agent active on his behalf in the person of Mlle Irma Dreyfus. While there were a number of reasons for her trip, the main one seems to have been her involvement in the organization of the Australian stand at the London Exposition Franco-Britannique, one of the fruits of the Entente Cordiale of 1904.¹⁵ In the files which Maistre left at the Melbourne consulate are two letters to him from Mme Aarons, and her transcription of part of one to her from her sister, which show that the latter was a frequent visitor

to Alliance headquarters and had informed officials there of the situation which Maistre had to deal with. In turn, she had been told that Maistre had been given full powers to resolve it and that the ladies of the committee were to receive a letter to this effect. In an undated letter, the comment of Mme Aarons on this news is: "Voilà qui est parfait — mais démarreront-elles?", which suggests that the real aim of the reformists was eviction rather than reconciliation. Mlle Dreyfus was also told of a visit at an earlier stage to Alliance headquarters by Mme Crivelli, who also had a contact there to whom she had so maligned Maistre that this person was proposing to report him to the ministry, but Mlle Dreyfus had been able to circumvent this, and also correct the report of Mme Crivelli, which particularly incensed her, that "on avait fait entrer des perruquiers comme membres du Comité, des corsetières et que sais-je encore", whereupon the Governor's wife (Lady Talbot), who was to attend the first soirée-lecture, instead sent her chambermaid as being more in her place there. All this, plus the fact that Mme Aarons had received some unpleasant letters from Mme Crivelli, led her to exclaim to Maistre: "Quels mauvais patriotes, que ces Crivelli!!!"¹⁶

On 22 April Maistre wrote to "Madame A. Holroyd" to tell her that he had notified Paris of the resignation of six (not eight) members of the committee, pointing out, inconsistently with the mode of address of his previous letter, that her resignation and Mme Crivelli's had already been implicitly accepted by Paris through the terms of the letter to her of 29 February; he had also forwarded her own letter, along with corrections to a number of inaccuracies in it, and had advised the board of directors that the new committee would take over the funds, registers and files from the retiring Présidentes, treasurer and librarian. On the next day, at a meeting called and presided over by him of the remaining committee members, he announced the resignations. Five new members were then elected, one female and four male, including M. d'Orgeval and Maistre himself who was to be temporary president. As Lady Holroyd had sent a circular letter to members of the Alliance explaining the resignations "d'une façon ambiguë", the committee resolved to issue a corrective circular publishing various documents. Other decisions were: the outgoing office-holders were to be asked to hand over all Alliance materials in their possession to M. Maistre; M. Maurice-Carton was again to be made the offer of half-price entry to the soirées for his

students, and M. Félix Levey was to be asked if he was still willing to be honorary auditor.

The corrective circular seems to have been prepared in advance of the meeting, as it bears the date of the meeting itself. Although issued by the secretary, the draft of it for the printer in the ISFAR archives is in Maistre's hand, with indications of the sequence in which various letters were to appear. Beneath the heading "*Alliance Française de Victoria*" is an introductory note:

SIR OR MADAM,

In reference to the Circular Letter of 18th April, sent by the late President of our Society, and concerning the collective resignation of eight (*not ten*) members of our former Committee, we beg to submit, for your appreciation, the following *Official Documents* which will show you the situation in its true light.

(The significance of the corrective "eight (*not ten*)" was that the ten included two French ladies who had resigned at about the same time for personal reasons, yet we have seen Maistre argue in one of the letters already quoted that two resignations, those of the two *Présidentes*, had preceded those of the other six.)

Then followed full copies in French of four letters referred to above, viz.:

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (PARIS) TO THE FRENCH CONSUL
Paris, le 29 Février, 1908.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (PARIS) TO MDME. HOLROYD
Paris, 29 Février, 1908.

MEMBERS OF THE MELBOURNE COMMITTEE TO LADY HOLROYD
Melbourne, le 6 Avril, 1908.

THE FRENCH CONSUL TO LADY HOLROYD
Melbourne, le 22 Avril, 1908.

At the end of the reverse side of the circular is a concluding note for members in the same type as the initial material:

As you see, the decision of the Paris Board of directors of the *Alliance Française*, taken in full "connaissance de cause", fully approved the measures (very modest reforms in themselves) which we intend to carry out for the benefit of our Society, and which our respected, *but ill-advised, late President*, opposed to the last.

Under the direction of the new Committee, our working programme shall be carried out in a thorough manner.

The next *Soirée Lecture* will take place at the Independent Hall, on the 1st of May, (as already advertised), and the Oral Competitions on the 14th of the same month.

For the Committee,

The Hon. Secretary,

M. BRUGGMANN.

On Maistre's draft, the underlinings are made heavily in pencil, as though passionately intended (one will already have noted his liking for exclamation marks). The "*but ill-advised*" may have been meant simply as a last hit at Mrs Cave, but was itself ill-advised in that Lady Holroyd would certainly have been regarded as having taken counsel with her husband. Maistre was rashly and unwittingly widening his struggle to reform the committee of the Melbourne Alliance into something like a confrontation with the Melbourne Establishment.

The next committee meeting, held at the consulate itself only six days later, on 28 April, unanimously elected "le consul en fonction" as president, on the nomination of M. d'Orgeval, who himself had been accepted as a member of the Alliance and elected to the committee at the same meeting. In support of the nomination he said: "[. . .] la présence du Consul de France à la tête du Comité empêchera tout retour aux errements du passé, et assurera, dans la mesure du possible, une direction franchement utilitaire, et surtout française, à la Société". Also elected were two female vice-presidents, a male treasurer, Mme Aarons as librarian, two female and two male committee members (in addition to M. d'Orgeval), and as honorary members with a consultative voice, Mr J. Woolf, the legal adviser, and M. F. Levey, the auditor. As Mrs Cave had left two boxes full of documents at the consulate, it was decided to have Mr Smail check these before the new treasurer became responsible for the funds and answerable to M. Levey. M. Maurice-Carton having refused the latest offer of the committee regarding the

soirées-lectures, it was decided that Mme Aarons should obtain a membership list of the Club Français so that the same offer could be made to students individually.

Soon after what seemed like complete victory for Maistre and the new committee, on 30 April, he received a brief letter from his superior, M. Albert Pinard, the Consul-General in Sydney, saying it was his duty to inform him that he had received from the former Présidente of the Melbourne Alliance and several other former committee members a letter protesting at the consul's attitude towards them within this committee; the signatories asked him to send their protest to the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères and he did not think he should refuse their request; he was informing Maistre so as to spare him any surprise in the matter. This coldly correct communication could be seen as implying that a surprise was to be expected; certainly, the letter M. Pinard had recently received would not have been his first word of troubles in the Melbourne Alliance, about which he would have formed an opinion duly communicated to the ministry in Paris.

On 6 May Maistre wrote a long letter to M. Dufourmantelle informing him first of all of the establishment of the new committee at the meeting of 29 April (28 April according to the minutes), then expressing confidence in its having put the Alliance on the right track for the future, but also sounding a warning:

Il aura malheureusement à vaincre la résistance sourde, mais obstinée, de certains des anciens membres du Comité, qui, mal conseillés, ne craignent pas, nous le savons, de recourir à de basses manœuvres pour discréditer leurs successeurs, et désorganiser une Société pour laquelle leur intérêt paraît avoir cessé du jour où ils n'en ont plus eu la direction!

The mention of "basses manœuvres" by former members may well have been provoked by the contents of the warning letter from the Consul-General, but Maistre also knew that Mme Crivelli had sent Mme Aarons a number of unpleasant letters and that she had been maligning him at Alliance headquarters.

He again enclosed clippings of favourable reports of the soirées-lectures, the attendance at which of secondary school pupils held the promise of future Alliance members, as did some interesting statistics

supplied to him by M. Maurice-Carton: at the Public Examinations in December 1907, there were 696 candidates and 165 in German, while at the university in 1908, there were 33 students in French and 8 in German. It was likewise gratifying for him to be able to report that Lady Clarke remained as *Présidente d'honneur*, although whether this could be interpreted as even a passive dissociation from Lady Holroyd and her followers is open to question in the light of what was to come.

Whether in reaction to the corrective circular, or more belatedly to previous events, "Sir Holroyd" sent a letter of resignation from the Alliance which is recorded in the minutes of the committee meeting of 8 May. After all the previous dissension generated by the question of the transfer of the Alliance's funds, Maistre now suggested that the main account be left with the Union Bank until the end of the financial year, and that the separate library account stay with the Savings Bank earning interest of 3% per annum. Apart from any consideration of clerical or financial convenience, it was presumably now in his interest to downplay the transfer of the account as being the central point at issue.

As a sort of reinforcement of the "new broom" message of the corrective circular, just four weeks later there appeared in the *Herald* a lengthy item entitled "L'Alliance Française / Its Work in Melbourne / A Brief Description / Madame Aarons Interviewed".¹⁷ After giving an outline of the ideals and aims of the Alliance Française movement, the new honorary librarian proudly pointed to the Melbourne Alliance's library, with its 2000 volumes of the best material available in French history and literature close at hand in the heart of the city, as still being in its early stages. Mention of the initial benefaction to the library of the *Présidente d'honneur* led her to stress the munificence of her own sister's contribution to it, some of which was still to be spent. However it would have been her view of the past and future of the Melbourne Alliance which rankled in some quarters:

The society has been established here some 16 or 17 years. It has done good work in the past, but it will do better in the future, for it will devote itself more seriously to attaining its proper ends and less to social amenities.

During the whole struggle for control of the Alliance nothing had been heard from the *Présidente d'honneur*, but the new committee was

understandably keen that she remain as a valued figurehead. At the meeting of 12 June there were tabled a letter from Maistre to Lady Clarke, offering to explain to her the real causes of the dispute on the committee, and her reply expressing the regret this caused her. A ball was to be organized for 15 July, or 14 July if possible. A new record for any one meeting was set by the listing of 51 new members. Four days later, on 16 June, a special meeting was called to postpone the ball because Lady Clarke was ill; in its place, Maistre was to give a soirée for 14 July in collaboration with the Alliance, a decision which would have closely associated the two in the eyes of Melbourne society.

At the end of June Maistre received a decoration from the Russian government, which would have been in recognition of his services to the Russian consulate until the arrival in September 1907 of the new Russian consul, Mathieu Hedenström, who was to become consul-general in October 1908. Maurice-Carton sent him a letter of congratulations to which he could not forbear to add, with underlining: "*Au moins voilà une distinction que certains intrigants de notre connaissance ne pourront pas accaparer.*" He seems to be referring to the fact that the Crivellis, with whom he was at daggers drawn for some reason, had both been soliciting a decoration in the Légion d'Honneur at about this time.

Some time after the June meeting, Maistre had word, as he and others were certainly intended to, that a presentation had been made to Lady Holroyd in the drawing-room of Lady Talbot by the other ladies who had resigned from the committee. The meaning of the gesture was very clear and Maistre would have been best advised to let the matter rest. He may well have done so but for his knowledge of what Lady Talbot was reported to have said about sending her chambermaid to the first soirée-lecture. Instead, he took it upon himself to send a letter to the Governor pointing out that this little ceremony could give rise to misunderstanding and be interpreted as a criticism of the present committee by the Governor. Once again, Maistre was exercising his consular role purely in terms of Alliance matters, to the exclusion of any consideration of diplomacy, and in a situation where he had nothing to gain. This was after all a very small toad for a French diplomat to swallow, rather than try to take the King's representative to task over what had taken place in the privacy of his own home but not in his own presence. The Governor replied that the presentation was of a purely

private nature and that he had not intended either intruding into Alliance matters or being critical of them. This was the only sort of reply that could reasonably be expected, and even if Maistre felt satisfied by it, the Governor would have been far from satisfied with Maistre and would doubtless have said a word of a purely private nature in the right quarters.

The Governor's reply to Maistre was tabled at the meeting of 10 July, but it is not recorded whether other committee members found it reassuring. One of the new members suggested that the committee refute the legend, as recorded in the minutes for 3 October 1905, that the CNE had refused to open an account for the Alliance because its funds were too small, when in fact the bank was not handling such accounts; it was decided that a note in the minutes would be sufficient refutation. As Lady Clarke was still ill, it was decided to send flowers and a card of good wishes to reach her on 14 July. Another 33 new members were listed, including "Baron et baronne de Hedenström".

On 26 July Maurice-Carton sent a two-page letter to Maistre on "Club Français" notepaper, rather grudgingly acceding to Maistre's request that he join the Alliance, although not seeing the necessity given the influx of new members. However he warned that he would remain a member only as long as Maistre was consul and president of the Alliance, because "[a]ussitôt votre départ, certaines personnes ne manqueront pas de reprendre l'ascendant qu'elles viennent de perdre et avec elles je n'aurai rien à démêler". Maistre has underlined these words in pencil. The rest of the letter was a response to Maistre's remonstrances about his seeing the Alliance as a rival of the French Club and his lack of patriotism in making a fleeting, purely formal appearance at the 14 July reception. Maurice-Carton rejected both imputations, and though obviously hurt by them, assured Maistre that "Je tiens à conserver votre estime". Although we have only one side of this correspondence by which to judge, it would seem that Maistre had by now made acceptance of the Alliance as reshaped by him a determining factor in his attitude to others, but that he had retained a charm and persuasiveness that could get the better of his touchy academic compatriot.

Another letter from Maurice-Carton on 1 August was much more conciliatory and constructive, although it contained the assertion that "comme jusqu'à présent tout ce qu'elle [l'Alliance] a fait semble être plutôt dirigé contre l'Université, celle-ci naturellement ne peut que lui

être hostile". The means of overcoming this situation would be firstly for the Alliance to make its examinations identical with the Public Examinations in French and to hold them in October as a rehearsal for these. Secondly, the Alliance should offer the university an annual prize of £4 for French (the Deutsche Schulverein was offering a prize of £3/3/0 for German), and thus secure for itself the university's approval and support. Enclosed was a detailed outline of the content and the rules for conduct of such examinations.

Maurice-Carton attended the next committee meeting on 14 August and commented at length on his letter to Maistre about the examinations. His guidelines and suggested date were accepted, and the committee decided to offer an annual prize of £4/4/0 for French at the university. He had one more request, which was that the Alliance collaborate with him in publishing a small periodical called *Le Français Classique* which he had just established, but a decision on this was adjourned to the next meeting. Another letter received from Alliance headquarters expressed satisfaction and gratitude to Maistre and the new committee for what had been achieved.

Meanwhile Lord Carmichael had become Governor, so that at the 11 September meeting it was decided to send a letter of welcome to Lady Carmichael. French was apparently still regarded as a specifically feminine area of interest and it was no doubt deemed prudent to show good will to the new Governor's wife as a way of making clear that her predecessor's partisanship was not regarded as going with the office. Miss Vera Clarke was to be asked if her mother was well enough to sign this letter, to be composed by Maistre.

On 15 September Maistre received the following letter written on 12 August:

Le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères
à Monsieur Maistre, consul de 2ème classe
au vice-consulat de France à Melbourne

Mon attention vient d'être officieusement appelée par l'ambassade de Grande Bretagne à Paris sur les difficultés qui se sont élevées entre vous et le Comité de l'Alliance Française à Melbourne et qui ont provoqué la démission de sa présidente Lady Holroyd et de la plupart de ses collaboratrices.

Je ne puis que regretter vivement l'attitude que vous avez prise à l'égard des personnalités dont il était de votre devoir de ménager les susceptibilités afin de conserver leurs sympathies et leur appui à l'œuvre qu'elles avaient accepté de patronner et dont la réussite ne pouvaient que favoriser le développement des rapports de cordialité que le Gouvernement de la République tient à entretenir avec les colonies britanniques comme avec leur métropole.

Par vos démêlés avec les dames anglaises membres du Comité de l'Alliance française de Melbourne vous avez, au contraire, non seulement compromis votre situation dans la société de cette ville, mais encore indisposé les autorités locales, auprès desquelles elles ont porté la plainte dont l'écho vient de me parvenir.

J'estime que, dans ces conditions, votre maintien à Melbourne est impossible et je vous invite, en conséquence, à faire vos préparatifs pour rentrer en France fournir les explications nécessaires au Département, aussitôt après avoir remis le service du vice-consulat à M. Pigeonneau, vice-consul chancelier à Cardiff, que j'ai désigné pour en assurer la gérance en attendant que votre nomination à un autre poste me permette de l'appeler définitivement à vous succéder à Melbourne./.

[signature] S. Pichon

(The underlinings in M. Stephen Pichon's letter are Maistre's, with the third paragraph also sidelined, presumably to focus attention upon the mechanism of his downfall.)

While Maistre had won the battle for the Melbourne Alliance, he was to be given no credit for this and indeed be reprimanded for it, as in so doing he had lost the war as far as the viability of his role as consul at Melbourne was concerned. He had failed to realize that although in a number of ways the Alliance movement was regarded as an arm of French diplomacy, the latter had a far wider function than to be an arm of the Alliance. It is significant that his summary recall was ultimately provoked by an unofficial approach at a very high official level: had there been, *per impossibile*, some sort of official communication, this storm in a number of ladies' teacups would have become a serious diplomatic matter, and by the same token could have afforded him more chance of due process. Coming from the level of the British Embassy in Paris, the approach could no longer be ignored or simply noted, as the complaint of Lady Holroyd and her followers directed to the Ministry

would have been. With the *Entente Cordiale* only four years old, the French Foreign Minister was not willing to see even a minor squabble in distant Victoria prejudice the process of *rapprochement*. His apparent ignorance of the fact that Federation had turned the former colonies into states may be at least partly excused given the continued presence of Governors in each of them and the continued dependence of Australia upon Britain to represent it in diplomatic matters, which meant that consuls in Australia were not entitled to the full diplomatic status which they would have had in Britain itself. It could also have led him to see the Governor as the actual head of government rather than as the King's delegated and largely ceremonial head of state.¹⁸ In any case, much of the public side of the consular life was concerned with social ceremonies, and the Governor was at the pinnacle of the "société" to which the minister was referring.

Maistre had also offended socially in a more subtle way. From his perspective, the minister considered that the English ladies deserved every consideration for having "accepté de patronner" the Melbourne Alliance, but at close hand Maistre could see that they were patronizing in another sense, genuinely convinced that their participation was in itself a great favour, showing both self-satisfied, largely WASPish "born to rule" attitudes made all the stronger by their distance from the centre of things and an irksome lack of any genuine intellectual distinction. To break their stranglehold, he had to look beyond the social establishment and its few acceptable French people with lengthy presence in Melbourne like the Crivellis and call upon other compatriots and francophones who had had neither the time nor the inclination to find a place on the Melbourne social ladder. What is more, given the diffuse, low-level social anti-Semitism of the Establishment, he would have offended by recruiting a number of Jews to his cause, like M. Levey, the honorary auditor, Mme Aarons and her sister Mlle Irma Dreyfus, whose very name, in the light of the recent resolution of the famous Dreyfus Case, carried a large emotional charge.

Maistre's primary error from which a number of others flowed was to underestimate the retaliatory capacity of his opponents. He had taken every care to have his reformist campaign approved and even praised by Alliance headquarters, and endorsed locally by the press with no doubt inspired reports on the results achieved by the reformist movement, sometimes operating without encouragement from some

quarters.¹⁹ However, he does not seem to have kept his own Ministry informed of what was happening, possibly because he presumed too much upon the initial impetus given by Biard d'Aunet, who had meanwhile gone to another posting, and then became more and more preoccupied with the ways in which the exclusivist clique of the Melbourne committee was deliberately hindering his attempts at reform. On the way to victory he made a number of tactical errors which were to reflect badly upon him, such as the forthrightness of his "Notes sur l'Alliance Française de Victoria" of 12 July 1907, the commissioning of an inadequately briefed Lucciardi to carry on the campaign while he was on leave, the unnecessary connection of the opening of the CNE account with the membership of the d'Orgevals, his reaction to their blackballing, his delayed invocation of his powers as Consul vis-à-vis the Alliance, and his leading of Lady Holroyd to believe that she still retained the presidency when in fact he regarded her as having already resigned. In particular, it was the creation of a nexus between the transfer to a CNE account and the d'Orgeval memberships which bedevilled everything; without this, Maistre would still have saved his transfer motion from rescission and there would then have been no grounds either for amendments or for making an issue of the memberships. At the moment of victory he pressed his advantage too hard, neglecting the principle of diplomacy that it is always better to leave one's adversaries some room for manoeuvre or shred of dignity, although it is difficult to imagine what he could have devised which would not have been further exploited by them. The corrective circular of 23 April 1908, although ostensibly respectful in its terms of address, must have been profoundly humiliating for Lady Holroyd and her group, containing as it did implications of avoidance of scrutiny to do with the handling of funds, of unwillingness to adhere to the basic principles of the Alliance movement, and of a general ineffectuality which the new committee was energetically remedying.

However, these ladies were, after all, far from ineffectual in defending themselves; once threatened or even queried in any way, they used a variety of responses ranging from evasiveness with the Paris Alliance through ladylike susceptibility to sheer vindictiveness: when Maistre expressed himself with ungentlemanly vehemence, they reacted with outraged dignity; when correspondence with Alliance headquarters met with a usually polite rebuff, Maistre's superiors were written to;

when this did not seem to produce any result, words were dropped in high places, all the more effective in that they were fighting on their home ground and exploiting their connections to the full.

One is led to ask who were the "autorités locales" to whom the group complained with such effect. They were hardly likely to have been either municipal or state government authorities, who would have been profoundly uninterested unless spurred to action from a higher level. This leaves the Governor and his wife, whose attitude to the matter was made perfectly clear by the private function in Lady Talbot's drawing-room. If the Governor had not already decided to complain about Maistre, the latter's letter to him would certainly have guaranteed it. In effect Maistre was indicating that he would not brook even an implied criticism of his already successful reformist campaign by calling upon the Governor to explain himself; as ladies' business was involved, he was also showing himself to be continuing something like a process of harassment in a most ungentlemanly manner. After receiving such a letter, the Governor would have felt himself to be perfectly justified in complaining about Maistre and even indicating that he would be *persona non grata* at Government House, hence the Minister's accusation: "vous avez [. . .] compromis votre situation dans la société de cette ville".²⁰ Given that the complaint received by the Minister was an unofficial "écho", it is unlikely that the whole of his letter drew from this source. He also had the benefit of the letter of protest sent to him by Lady Holroyd and her group, and accepted their version of the situation. He did not even need to establish whether they had presented the true facts of the case, as Maistre had obviously compromised himself diplomatically, beside which, whatever good work he may have done for the Alliance was of little consequence.

Maistre seems to have delayed revealing the news of his recall for some time, as the committee meeting on 9 October, following his receipt of the Minister's letter, was taken up with fairly mundane matters: letters were received from Lady Carmichael, agreeing to become an "amie" of the society, and from the Secrétaire-général of the Alliance acknowledging receipt of a letter sent on 16 July and sending best wishes to Lady Clarke; a letter was sent to Paris on 30 June with the annual report, balance sheet, and list of committee members ratified by the Annual General Meeting which only members could attend; the proposal

that *Le Français Classique* become an organ of the Alliance was finally rejected on the basis of cost.

Meanwhile back in Paris the Alliance did not seem to have been informed by the Ministry of the recall of Maistre, who must have found it ironic to receive on 14 October a letter on behalf of the president of the Alliance indicating "notre entière approbation" of the measures he had taken in Melbourne, which were certain to bring the Alliance its due importance, "qu'elle aurait dû atteindre depuis longtemps déjà", these words being doubly underlined by Maistre.

The meeting of 13 November, again taken up with normal business matters, was followed by the arrival on 16 November of a letter to Maistre from the Secrétaire-général expressing gratitude and congratulations regarding the initiative he was proposing for the greater good of the Melbourne Alliance. Unfortunately, there is nothing available to show what this initiative was.

The meeting of 11 December considered three items of correspondence: a letter from the Paris Alliance acknowledging receipt of the annual report and congratulating the committee on the present prosperity of the branch; a letter to Mrs Cave asking if she could provide a list of objects and furniture belonging to the Alliance; and a letter from Maistre to Lady Clarke, signed by all the committee members, wishing her the compliments of the season and good health, and informing her of the present state of the society.

1909

It must have been some time after the last committee meeting of 1908 that Maistre finally revealed that he had been recalled. He attributed this to the letter of complaint by Lady Holroyd and Mme Crivelli to the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. On 11 January a special committee meeting presided over by Mme de Hedenström was called as a matter of urgency:

[. . .] pour prendre connaissance d'une lettre au Ministère des Affaires Etrangères en réfutation d'une plainte diffamatoire portée par les deux ex-Présidentes Lady Holroyd et Mme Crivelli contre M. Maistre Président du Comité.

La lettre dont la copie est restée aux archives du Secrétariat a été lue et approuvée par le Comité à l'unanimité.

It was also decided to offer a farewell soirée for M. and Mme Maistre on 23 February at the Independent Hall, and to present a bouquet to Mme Maistre both at the soirée and on the boat.²¹

There is nothing in the minutes to suggest who had composed the letter. Maistre himself would have realized that his recall was beyond appeal, while certainly wishing to have his defence put on record at the Ministry in the most effective terms possible. In any case, the whole committee would have been incensed at his recall as the result of what could only be seen as malicious misrepresentation of his successful activity in reforming and revitalizing the Melbourne Alliance.

A week later, a brief report appeared in one of the Melbourne dailies:

Monsieur P. Maistre, the consul for France, has been invited by the French Foreign Office to go to Paris, and will, accordingly, leave Melbourne on February 25. It is understood that his trip has some reference to a dispute that arose some months ago amongst two sections of the Alliance Française of Victoria. M. Maistre was president d'honneur of the alliance, and trouble arose over certain candidates for membership being refused admission. A great deal of feeling was shown in the matter. M. Maistre supported the party in the Alliance which desired to see the new members admitted. The then president, Lady Holroyd, and the treasurer, Mrs Cave, retired from office. It is understood that M. Maistre will give a full explanation of the facts in Paris, where the headquarters of the Alliance are situated. (*Argus*, 18 January 1909, p. 5)

Some of what may appear to be inaccuracies of the reporter could have been the result of discretion; thus, the idea that Maistre is going to Paris by invitation (M. Pichon's own term) is maintained, without the qualification that it was the sort of invitation that one could not refuse, and the possibility that he might return is left open. While the implication that he would have to do his explaining at Alliance headquarters is clearly erroneous, the central issue in the dispute, the refusal of membership of the unnamed d'Orgevals, is correctly identified, as are the two leaders of the other "party": not both Présidentes, but Lady Holroyd and Mrs Cave.

That Maistre did not wait to reach Paris to start defending himself is shown by the clerical copperplate copy of a letter received from Maurice-Carton in reaction to the item in the *Argus*. At the top of the copy, in Maistre's hand, is the annotation: "Annexe à la lettre du 19-1-09 Cabinet du Ministre Personnel". Unfortunately there is no copy available of Maistre's letter, but Maurice-Carton's is so revealing of the situation and of himself that it is worth quoting in full; it reads:

The University of Melbourne

le 18 Janvier -09

Mon cher Consul,

Le paragraphe que je viens de lire dans l'*Argus* de ce matin me fait craindre que vous ne soyez encore victime des manigances de certains intrigants. Si la notification est de vous, vous l'avez probablement faite dans un certain but, mais il se peut aussi qu'elle provienne d'une autre source et, dans ce cas, j'y lis la réalisation de mes craintes à votre sujet. Non pas que je doute un seul instant que vous ne puissiez justifier entièrement votre conduite au Comité Général de l'Alliance à Paris, mais vos ennemis sont des intrigants de première force et qui ne reculeront devant rien pour recouvrer leur influence ici. C'est une engeance méchante, vindicative et que les scrupules n'étouffent pas.

Il est vrai que vous avez le bon droit et les honnêtes gens avec vous. Malheureusement ces qualités ne suffisent pas toujours. Si le Gouvernement français pouvait seulement se rendre compte des intrigues et des turpitudes de quelques-uns de nos compatriotes — est-ce là bien le mot, dans le cas qui nous occupe, car il y a beaucoup de sang-mêlé —; si le gouvernement et l'Alliance de Paris avaient pu assister en personne à une des fameuses soirées des temps passés, s'il était possible de leur faire voir la manière dont se conduisaient les examens à cette époque, tout irait bien. Mais cela est impossible, et il faut que nous, les véritables Français, nous qui n'avons en vue que la gloire de notre pays et le progrès de notre langue, nous, enfin, qui sommes du mêlé, restions simples spectateurs de ces honteuses machinations et de ces mascarades littéraires qui font pouffer de rire et discréditent la nation.

Inutile d'en écrire plus; cela m'éceüre rien que d'y penser.

Laissez-moi savoir ce que vous comptez faire avant votre départ et croyez bien que mes services sont entièrement à votre disposition.

Cette nouvelle me fait encore plus regretter de ne pouvoir être des vôtres mardi.

Rappelez-moi aux bons souvenirs de Madame et de Mademoiselle Maistre

Toujours à vous

[signé] F.I. Maurice-Carton

P.S. Il se peut que vous entendiez parler de ma décoration. Il paraîtrait que des protestations à son sujet ont été reçues à Paris de la part des mêmes personnes qui m'accablaient ici de leurs félicitations! Cela les peint admirablement.

The minutes of the next committee meeting on 12 March begin with the tabling of two letters from Maistre to do with the farewell soirée and his departure, and end with a brief mention of the soirée itself: "Salle comble, très bon programme —avec l'orchestre des Zingara, Liquorice Boy, M. Boffard et deux petites saynètes".²² Other items of correspondence show the committee encountering new problems and adapting to Maistre's departure; letters were received from: the secretary of the Austral Salon, who had written to Mrs Cave asking for the payment of £2/10/0 outstanding for the past two years and been referred to the new treasurer; M. Maurice-Carton, warning the committee not to count on him to give a lecture this year as he was completely taken up with his work at the university; Lady Clarke sending her best wishes to the Alliance; M. Pigeonneau, vice-consul de France, passing on two prizes donated by the Paris Alliance. Finally, a letter was sent to Mme Pigeonneau inviting her to join the committee. Given recent events, one can imagine that M. Pigeonneau would not have been rushing to assert himself as Président d'honneur, while the invitation to his wife, along with the presence of a Présidente once again, may reflect a consensus that the Alliance was best left to ladies after all.

Meanwhile, Alliance headquarters remained steadfast in support of the new committee, which at its meeting on 9 May resolved to send a letter to the Secrétaire-général to thank him for his latest letter of complete approval and to announce the death of Janet, Lady Clarke, the Présidente d'honneur, on 27 April. A letter from him dated 15 February, which seems to have taken its time arriving, acknowledged receipt of the

committee's letter of 12 January from the special meeting of the previous day and advised that it had been sent on to the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères. A further letter of 17 March, written in the light of the committee's "réfutation d'une plainte diffamatoire portée par les deux ex-Présidentes", confirmed the Paris Alliance's complete approval of M. Maistre and the new committee created by him. Fully aware of the facts of what Maistre had achieved, though less so of the manner in which he had gone about it, the Paris Alliance saw no reason for disowning him now, but such support could only have aggravated his own feeling that a grave injustice had been done to him.

At the same meeting, 22 new members were listed, including "M., Mme et M. Georges Pigeonneau", and *rapprochement* with Government House was taken a stage further with the Présidente being commissioned to ask Lady Carmichael if she would kindly agree to become the Présidente d'honneur. Her reply is recorded in the minutes of the following meeting as: "[Lettre] de Lady Gibson Carmichael ne pouvant accepter *pour le moment* le titre de Présidente d'honneur, mais assurant la Société et le Comité de toute sa sympathie", but it is not clear whether the underlining would have been hers or the secretary's.

The meeting of 9 July considered a letter "... de M. Maurice-Carton, refusant de s'occuper des examens de cette année, alléguant comme raisons de refus d'abord ses nombreuses occupations, ensuite son opinion qu'il y a trop d'examens à Melbourne." As the latter reason was the exact opposite of what he had said about examinations the previous year, a somewhat bemused committee discussed whether they should write to him to point this out, but decided against it. However, he had retrieved something from the wreck: on 28 August he wrote to M. Pigeonneau to thank him for his presence at a function of the French Club.

Pigeonneau's appointment to the Melbourne post had been officially confirmed on 3 April, which must have been very soon after Maistre reached Paris. However, despite what M. Pichon's letter suggested, this confirmation did not result from his being given another posting. Whether because he declined what was offered to him and was held "en disponibilité" for some time, or because from the start he found further service unacceptable while the matter of the injustice done to him remained unresolved, the *Annuaire diplomatique* for 1909-1910, under the heading "Agents admis à faire valoir leurs droits à la retraite",

lists "[M.] Maistre, consul de 1^{re} classe . . . 22 septembre 1909". His promotion to "consul de 1^{re} classe" would not have been an ultimate blandishment, but part of the normal mechanism for retirements in such cases.

While no details have been found of Maistre's subsequent activities, his authorship of a study of the economic resources of Cuba suggests an involvement in some venture in or to do with that country.²³ However, he was not yet done with Australia. In 1913 appeared *Le Commonwealth d'Australie; étude de géographie physique et économique*, par M. Paul Maistre, Ancien consul de France à Melbourne, published like the Cuban piece by the *Revue de géographie*. This is a well-organized and systematic study containing numerous photographs, diagrams, tables of statistics and references to sources which show that he had begun preparing it while in Australia and had continued with documentation for it after his departure. The first three-part chapter, "Morphologie", covering a third of the content of the book, was prepared by M. Ch. Velain, obviously an expert familiar with numerous works in English on Australian geology, topography, hydrography and climate. After his brief historical outline Maistre offers material on the population, including the Aborigines, agriculture, pastoralism, forestry, mining, manufacturing industries and overseas trade. The few pages of his concluding chapter, "Les progrès de l'Australie et son avenir", make perceptive comments on some of the major issues facing the country which he was able to criticize as a friend; it is interesting that he, like the authors of the two other studies in French of the new Commonwealth, expresses disquiet at the power of the trade unions.²⁴

No details have been found in Australia of the date and circumstances of his death, as the *Annuaire diplomatique* gives these only for personnel dying while still in the service of the ministry. Although he was obviously too old for active military service in 1914, one wonders whether, with his command of English and knowledge of both England and Australia, he was called to serve his country in some liaison capacity.

Melbourne

Notes

1. For a study of his short stories set in Australia, see C. B. Thornton-Smith, "The Australian Semi-Fictions of Paul Maistre" in *Essays in Honour of Keith Val Sinclair: An Australian Collection of Modern Language Studies*, ed. Bruce Merry, Townsville, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1991, pp. 83-99.
2. An incomplete run of the annual or sometimes biennial *Annuaire diplomatique* [...] from 1883 to 1937 was among the bound volumes donated in 1988 to the Monash University Library by the then French consul-general in Melbourne, M. Dominique Raoux, after the discovery in a Melbourne garage of a collection of consular documents from 1854 to 1939 which had been put into storage in 1940 (see Colin Nettelbeck, "The Consul's Treasure", *Explorations*, n° 7, December 1988, pp. 18-23). The 1901 issue is Maistre's personal copy, with his signature on the cover and title-page, and some annotations in his hand.
3. For the 1888 Exhibition he was appointed as a "commissaire-adjoint de la section française".
4. This followed a proposal by M. Astruc, a Mauritian employed by Mr Woolf, that a branch of the Alliance be formed in Melbourne, but it was deemed inadvisable for "un homme de couleur" to be seen as the prime mover.
5. For a brief history of the Melbourne Alliance, see Colin W. Nettelbeck, ed., *The Alliance Française in Australia 1890-1990—An Historical Perspective*, Melbourne, Fédération des Alliances Françaises en Australie Inc. in association with ISFAR, 1990.
6. The lectures, offering a competent and scholarly overview of French literature from the beginnings to Molière, were translated into English by the industrious James Smith and published as *The Spring and Summer of French Literature—A Series of Lectures Delivered in French*, London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1896. The Introduction states simply that the lectures were delivered at Melbourne, and the first lecture begins with the words:

My first emotion is that of gratitude; my first words must be those of thankfulness, for the distinguished patronage which has enabled me to make my *début* this evening under such favourable auspices. The kindly reception which I met with at your hands, when I ventured to submit an outline of the plan of my modest literary lectures, will remain forever engraven in my memory and my heart. (p. 1)

The references to the patronage and reception she has met with seem too high-flown to refer to the Alliance, which is not mentioned. A clue as to where and under what auspices she gave them is provided by the minutes for the March 1898 meeting, where it is noted that Mlle Dreyfus has sent £67 for the library, being the proceeds from talks on French literature which she gave at Government House the previous year. Apparently she had been prevailed upon

to resume the series from her awkward stopping point in 1895. The committee was now duly grateful, electing her a life member and deciding to offer her a gift. It is an open question whether the Government House patronage resulted from Mlle Dreyfus's initiative or the good offices of the Alliance.

7. This was not his *Notes pratiques* [. . .], which could hardly have been charming on any count, but *Dans la brousse australienne: scènes de chasse*, Paris, Librairie Illustrée, Montgrédien et Cie, [1901], a partly fictionalized account of hunting trips which Maistre made in Gippsland with other Frenchmen and several Australians; it was supplemented by accounts of aboriginal customs and legends, informative material on the extraordinarily comprehensive range of fauna he claimed to have shot, and the ostensibly first-hand story of a man who spent a number of years living with an aboriginal tribe, drawn from various sources. This work was begun in 1894, but then set aside as Maistre concentrated upon a series of short stories set in Australia, which were published from 1894 to 1897 in the *Nouvelle Revue Internationale*, in which early chapters of *Dans la brousse* [. . .] also appeared in 1899 and 1900. While serving in the comparatively unexacting vice-consulate at Cardiff, Maistre seems to have completed both this work and *Notes pratiques*.
8. It would have been no coincidence that at about the same time Mme Phalempin took it upon herself to organize a fête, thus raising a considerable sum of money which she offered to the "Caisse de secours de l'Alliance Française". The committee rejected the offer on the basis that the Alliance did not have such a fund and decided to ask Dr Crivelli if he would establish a society to help needy French people in Victoria. In fact, while the Alliance had no such specific fund, in its early years it had twice come to the aid of the needy, first with a single payment of money to a family in straitened circumstances, and then with a monthly allowance to an aged French lady who was no longer able to earn her living by teaching and was eventually repatriated. As benevolent assistance did not fall within the Alliance charter, the committee was correct in adhering to the rules on this occasion, albeit in a situation where the Phalempin initiative was hijacked into Crivelli control, while the keeping of the Phalempins at arm's length is indicative of its fixed determination, predating any involvement of Maistre in the matter, not to lodge the account with the CNE.
9. In fact, the CNE in 1890 was purely a discount bank and therefore not in a position to accept deposits, but by 1897 it had widened its activities.
10. See Anny P. L. Stuer, *The French in Australia*, Canberra, Department of Demography, Australian National University, 1982, pp. 89-90, 124.
11. One cannot compare the membership lists of the two bodies, both dating from 1890, as fire destroyed the early records of the Austral Salon, which was founded by a group of ladies with a common interest in literature, public speaking and music. Their awareness of the lack of a platform for amateur musicians and speakers led them to establish their own concert hall in which many meetings, debates and successful concerts were held, as well as functions

of other bodies, including some of those of the Alliance. The Austral Salon's figureheads were even more prestigious than the Alliance's: the first president was the Countess of Hopetoun, wife of the then Governor of Victoria, and the two vice-presidents were Lady Clarke and Lady Davies, besides whom there was an acting vice-president. It was a body alert to feminist issues, holding a reception early in 1902 to farewell the famous women's rights activist, Vida Goldstein, before her visit to the USA, and then in 1903 enabling her to speak at their first political meeting. Even if all Maistre had meant was that the Alliance had become a women's club putting on far less impressive musical evenings than the Austral Salon's, he would still have been ignoring the latter's other activities. (See Janette Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman—Vida Goldstein*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1994, pp. 34, 57, and Joan Gillison, *A History of the Lyceum Club (Melbourne)*, Melbourne, The Lyceum Club, 1975, pp. 19–20, 38.)

12. A popular young Belgian in the gem trade, he was to become Belgian consul in Melbourne in 1924; see K. A. Lodewycks, *The Belgians in Australia*, Brisbane, Boolarong Publications, 1988, p. 59.
13. Three Madden brothers followed their father into the legal profession. Of these, Sir John Madden, who as a young man had served his articles with (Sir) Edward Holroyd, was by now Chief Justice of Victoria, while Sir Frank Madden was Speaker of the Legislative Assembly; David Madden remained simply a solicitor but was very much an Establishment figure and must have been the person whom Mrs Cave consulted (see *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 10).
14. This second consultation with Mr Madden was quite understandable given the implications of the article, which read:

Financial matters in the Alliance Francaise of Melbourne are still obscured from the vulgar gaze of the curious owing to the failure of the treasurer, Mrs Henry Cave, to submit her books to the auditor. The matter is now in legal hands, and those who demand a sight of the accounts are awaiting developments. It is pointed out that if the Alliance funds had been in the hands of the French bank, and the banker himself made a member of the Alliance, no indecorous clamour to see the books could have been raised. But the fund was never transferred, and the banker was affronted by being blackballed when put up for membership. These facts were discussed at the last meeting, when it was stated that "the Society had no right to reject one of the most respected members of the French community. On the other hand, it might, and should, turn its back upon candidates of doubtful character, or bankrupts, or persons who had met with the condemnation of Courts of Justice." These pointed remarks have racked the French community in Melbourne to its foundations. As in the past, the doors of the Alliance have not always strictly closed upon candidates coming within this sweeping category. (*Table Talk*, 27 February 1908, p. 5)

As Mrs Cave was the only person mentioned by name, in a context suggesting that she had something to hide about a matter over which she had nevertheless already taken counsel, and as the broad outline of the situation and Maistre's words are reported so accurately, it must be assumed that information was leaked to the paper by one of his supporters with access to the minutes. However, he would hardly have been satisfied with the twist put upon his description of those ineligible for membership, to the effect that such people had been granted it in the past.

15. Maistre was aware that she was also to see Sarah Bernhardt to discuss the repertoire for a proposed second Australian tour, after her successful performances in Sydney and Melbourne in 1891, but this did not in fact take place.
16. The Crivellis' views as to the social unacceptability of the general run of French people living in Australia are confirmed by a comment in a book of which one of their sons was the major author. According to him, they "ne gagn[ent] guère à être fréquentés; fort souvent ce sont des échappés de la Nouvelle-Calédonie. Citons encore des déserteurs, quelques coiffeurs et cuisiniers, et c'est tout!" It is left to just a few distinguished families to correct the bad impression they make. (See G.-M. Crivelli et P. Louvet, *L'Australie et le Pacifique*, Paris, Crès, [1923], p. 186.)
17. *Herald*, 26 May 1908, p. 5.
18. It is significant that the *Annuaire diplomatique*, which used to list the Australian colonies under the heading "Possessions anglaises d'Océanie", did not see fit to change this after Federation, except to make it "Dominions et possessions anglaises d'Océanie" in 1927, the same year as the Federal Parliament shifted to Canberra, in belated recognition of the changed status of Australia and New Zealand.
19. One report of the first soirée-lecture on 27 March 1908 concluded thus:
 As these readings have for their main object the cultivation of the French language amongst the English-speaking people of Melbourne, it is somewhat of a pity that greater advantage is not taken of them. Up to the present the initiators of the movement have not received much encouragement in their undertaking in this direction. (*Argus*, 28 March 1908, p. 16)
- The report of a later soirée-lecture included the comment:
 The rule that French shall be the sole means of communication has till recently been more honored in the breach than in the observance, and the fact that the society is paying increased respect to its raison d'être is promising to make it of very real value to French residents, as well as Victorians bent on making a practical acquaintance with the language. (*Age*, 26 September 1908, p. 10)
20. An indirect corroboration of the gubernatorial ostracism of Maistre is contained in a comment on French consuls in Melbourne by the son of the Crivellis already mentioned: "Il n'y a que très peu d'années figuraient encore parmi nos

représentants officiels des personnages qui ne pouvaient être invités aux réceptions du gouvernement australien." (See G.-M. Crivelli et P. Louvet, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.) Despite the mutual demonization of Maistre and the Crivellis, the mention of the Australian as distinct from the Victorian government is not necessarily an exaggeration; at the time, the Governor-General was also stationed in Melbourne and would have been informed of Maistre's impotency.

21. In many ways Mme de Hedenström was the ideal person to take over from Maistre, who was in a very good position to interest her in doing so thanks to his close professional contacts with her husband. His superiors would have been glad at this stage to see the Melbourne Alliance dissociated from the consulate and led by a person beholden to neither of the factions which had been in contention, but with the social cachet to make her acceptable to all. What is more, as a member of Russia's aristocracy, she would have been a fluent speaker of French, but with an English likely to be more problematical, so that there would be no risk of her presiding over the sort of linguistic and cultural drift that had occurred under the old guard.
22. This well-attended function, a final gesture of solidarity with Maistre, is indicative also of a shift in taste from the solemn and elevating. With a gypsy orchestra, two comedy sketches and what seems to have been a blackface minstrel, it was left to M. Napoléon Boffard to provide a touch of high French culture. An intensely patriotic singer and organizer of concerts, in 1907 he had talked of challenging Thomas Bent, the State Premier of almost unequalled crassness, to a duel for having insulted French womanhood.
23. The details in the *National Union Catalog* are:
 MAISTRE, Paul, *Cuba. Etude de géographie économique*, Paris, 1911. 40p. illus. 8° [*Revue de géographie. Annuelle* Tome 5, fasc. 4].
24. While Maistre's is the most scholarly and objectively informative of the three studies, that of his old mentor, G. Biard d'Aunet, is much more reflective about various issues confronting Australia and is frankly related from the viewpoint of a former consul (G. Biard d'Aunet, *L'Aurore australe*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1907). Vossion's work is marred by some factual inaccuracies and an extremely conservative viewpoint, but has the great virtue of containing a French translation in full of the Australian Constitution (Louis Vossion, *L'Australie nouvelle et son avenir*, Paris, Guillaumin et Cie, 1902).