

PAUL MAISTRE'S FIRST FAREWELL

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Readers of *Explorations* will remember Colin Thornton-Smith's long and fascinating account of the failure of Paul Maistre, then Consul for France in Melbourne, to reform the Alliance Française de Victoria in the first decade of the twentieth century and of his humiliating recall to Paris early in 1909.¹ Further information on this affair and on Maistre's career is contained in his personal file in the Archives of the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in Paris. It is hoped that appropriate authorization can be obtained to bring some of this material to our subscribers in due course. The contrast between strong public support and the ruthless efficiency of the Consul's enemies is maintained in the new documents. However, the official records also reveal that not all of Maistre's difficulties were encountered in his second sojourn in Melbourne.

Maurice Brodzky's *Table Talk* is a remarkable source for insights into Melbourne life at the end of the nineteenth century. Given its editor's own period in France thirty years before,² the weekly is particularly attentive to doings in the French and Francophile community. The paragraph reproduced below is not untypical of Brodzky's careful approach. If one is aware of the negative reports Dejardin the Consul-General was in the habit of sending to the Ministry about his subordinate Maistre, the last sentence has to be seen as delicious irony. It is hard to believe that Brodzky did not have confidential advice, possibly from both the interested parties, on this tension. Sometimes the gossip columnist has to show more tact and subtlety than professional diplomats . . .

MONSIEUR P. L. Maistre, the Vice-Consul for France at Melbourne, is leaving with Madame Maistre and family for France on January 29 by the French mail steamer, *Armand Behic*. Monsieur Maistre has been over 12 years in Melbourne, and on several occasions has been Acting-Consul General for lengthy periods. He has won the esteem of the whole French colony in Victoria as well as that of a large circle of private friends and those who have made his acquaintance officially. Following the good old English fashion his friends have determined to entertain him at a

banquet, prior to his departure, and an influential committee has been formed for that purpose, Mons. H. de Possel, manager for the Messageries Maritimes Company, being the chairman. Monsieur Maistre has considerable literary talent inherited from his father, an old French Liberal of the 1848 revolution, and who for 42 years was keeper of the archives at the French Embassy of London. When a very young man Monsieur Maistre nearly became a professional journalist, his contributions to the *Phare de la Loire*, the leading newspaper in the city of Nantes, gaining him the offer of the proprietors to become one of their leader writers. He chose, however, the Consular service, and qualified himself for the higher grades by perfecting himself in the German and Italian languages as well as English. For some years past his contributions to the *Nouvelle Revue* and the *Revue Universelle* have assured his position as a brilliant writer, and he has received special commendation from the Minister for his consular reports. He has now completed his term of service as vice-consul, and is entitled to promotion as a consul, a claim which, no doubt, will be recognised by the Minister, who has granted Monsieur Maistre three months holiday before appointing him to a new position. Much as his departure is regretted by his Melbourne friends, none regret it more or congratulate Monsieur Maistre more heartily on his change than Monsieur Dejardin, the popular Consul-General for France, who has just returned from a prolonged visit to Paris.³

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Notes

1. C. B. Thornton-Smith, "Paul Maistre, Vice-Consul and later Consul for France in Victoria, 1886-1898, 1901-1908", *Explorations*, n° 17, December 1994, pp. 3-47.
2. On Brodzky see Henry R. Lew, *The Five Walking Sticks. The Story of Maurice Brodzky Investigative Journalist Extraordinaire*, Caulfield North, AMCL Publications, 2000.
3. *Table Talk. A Journal for Men and Women*, n° 655, 14 January 1898, p. 2c.