

## ARTICLE II.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER IN A DOZEN LANGUAGES.

BY DONALD B. MACLANE,  
WILBRAHAM, MASS.

A FEW years ago I experienced a personal renaissance. I decided to read each day a little Hebrew and a little Greek, which since Seminary days I had sadly neglected. Soon I added a Latin Testament and a German. I found so much delight in reading the Testament in these languages that I have added nine more to my collection,—modern Greek, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, and Icelandic. I have a schedule by which I read five verses a day from these books in rotation. I beg of you not to imagine that I have mastered or ever hope to master all these languages. I am the merest amateur and novice. I use no dictionary or grammar. I confine myself to the Gospels, which every minister knows almost by heart anyway, not attempting to read the Epistles. I simply stumble clumsily through the five verses, freely consulting my English Testament in case of doubt. But I have come to love all these languages. My Tower-of-Babel Bible reading is one of the happiest ten minutes of my day, and I wish to share with you my pleasure. Hence this paper, "The Lord's Prayer in a Dozen Languages."

1. Let us begin with the *Greek*. The most notable feature of the Greek is its wealth of terminations to indicate case and person, mood and tense. More than half of the words

in the Prayer have some sign of inflection or conjugation. The genitive, dative, and accusative, the singular and the plural, the masculine and the feminine, the indicative and the imperative,—all of these are differentiated in Greek with a precision and elegance unmatched in the other languages. Take the definite article, *the*, for example. *The* occurs 14 times in the Prayer, about twice as many as in any of my other languages (English has only 3 *the*'s, *the* kingdom, *the* power, and *the* glory). But Greek puts in a *the* on all occasions,—Our Father who art in *the* heavens, hallowed be *the* name of thine, come *the* kingdom of thine; and so on to the end, it is extremely *the*-ological. Furthermore, these many *the*'s are found in the Prayer in no less than eight different forms according to the case, person, or number involved (*ho, tois, to, hē, ton, ta, tou, tous*). This shows the gusto, the nicety, the elaborateness, with which Greek revels in grammar.

2. *Modern Greek.* We speak of Greek as a dead language. But modern Greek is very much alive, and is very little changed from the ancient Greek. In modern Greek the Prayer is almost a duplicate of the ancient, word for word, and letter for letter. Whatever changes there are, are comparatively insignificant. For example, as far down as through "our daily bread," the only changes are *eltheto* instead of *elthato*, *tēs gēs* instead of *gēs*, and *eis hēmas* instead of *hēmin*.<sup>1</sup> In the rest of the Prayer, indeed, the proportion of changes is larger, but all are trivial, none radical. The difference between the Greek Testaments, ancient and modern, is quite parallel, it seems to me, to the difference between our Authorized and Revised versions. Is it a proof of the stagnancy of Greek culture that its language has practically

<sup>1</sup>For texts other than Westcott and Hort's, one or both of the first two of them can usually be omitted.—H. W. M.

marked time for two thousand years, or is it evidence that classic Greek reached such perfection that no improvement has been possible?

3. *Latin.* I love the sonorous phrases of the Vulgate. The Latin language has been so hallowed by ecclesiastical associations that I often feel as if Latin, and not Greek, were the original language of the New Testament,—or, at least, it ought to have been. Somehow the Latin speaks with an authority all its own. *Pater noster qui es in coelis. Sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua*—and how imperative and regal this makes God's will and the doing of it—*Fiat voluntas tua.* Thus the ponderous periods go on all through the Prayer. It is curious that my edition of the Latin Testament—it is not so of others, I am told—has, "Give us this day our *supersubstantial* bread."

Among all the languages on my list, Latin takes the prize for having the fewest words in the Prayer. Latin needs only 59 words to say what the Greek, for example, needs 71 words to say, and the Portuguese 76. But the average length of the words in the Latin is greater than in the other languages. It has fewer words of one syllable. It would be difficult, I fancy, to write a primer of Cæsar's wars in monosyllables for the edification of small Romans. And I doubt if St. Paul could have had graded lessons in his Sunday school there at Rome; for how could he have written the lessons for beginners in a way that they could understand in this massive language that says "Forgive us our debts," for example, in these thunderous syllables: *Et dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris?*

4. *Italian.* Perhaps the most noticeable tendency of the Italian is to have words end in a final vowel. There are 66 words in the Italian Lord's Prayer; and, of these 66, 56 end

in a vowel, the majority of them a long *a* or a broad *o*. Let me give you a phrase or two to show how like music these many vowels make the great language of Dante. It is no wonder that singers like to sing in Italian. "Thy will be done" is *La tua Volontà sia Fatta*. "Give us our daily bread" is *Dacci oggi il nostro pano cotidiano*. The Italian far surpasses other languages in its wealth of final vowels. From its abundance of *o*'s and *a*'s, it might be called the Alpha and Omega of Speech.

5. *French*. In passing from the Latin and the Italian to the French, we note the inevitable tendency of words to become abbreviated and shortened. The Latin two-syllabled *pater* becomes in French the one-syllabled *père*. To give a few other cases: heaven (Lat. *coelis*, Fr. *ciel*); earth (Lat. *terra*, Fr. *terre*); glory (Lat. *gloria*, Fr. *gloire*). The same thing is true of vowels. Long Latin vowels have become short in French: thy name (Lat. *nomen tuum*, Fr. *ton nom*); bread (Lat. *panem*, Fr. *pain*). This proneness to short vowels and short words—the French leads the list in its number of monosyllables—gives to the French a nimbleness and grace very characteristic.

We have seen the wealth of *o*'s and *a*'s in the Italian. In the French there is a similar wealth of *e*'s,—pronounced, however, not as we pronounce *e*, but *a*. *Sanctifié, Volunté, Offensés*. "And" is *et*, "is" is *est*, "the," in the plural, is *les*. In short, the French is a very *e*-lite language.

An interesting change of order occurs in the last words, "thine is the kingdom." Is it characteristic of the genius of the French mind to wish the final and most emphatic word to be the word "glory"? For it is to thee that appertains, in all the cycles, the kingdom, the power, and the glory—*la règne, la puissance, et la gloire*.

6. *Spanish.* Spanish does not follow the French in its abbreviation of Latin words. Rather the tendency is often the other way. The two-syllabled Latin word *regnum*, kingdom, which was shortened in French to *règne*, is lengthened to three syllables in Spanish (*re-i-no*). In the Prayer, the French has seven more words than the Spanish, but Spanish has 26 more syllables than the French, holding the record of all for polysyllabicability. Would it be a legitimate guess to say that this leisureliness of the language is characteristic of the languorous life of the people beneath their sunny skies?

But far more interesting to me is the wealth of the vowel *o* in Spanish. "In heaven" is *en los cielos*; "forgive us" is *perdonanos*; "as we forgive our debtors" is *como nosotros perdonanos a nuestros deudores*; "for ever" or "through all the ages" is *per todos los siglos*. In our English prayer there are 21 *o*'s, so called. But these *o*'s are of many shades of pronunciation. Strictly speaking, the English prayer has only two pure Continental *o*'s—"hallowed" and "glory." But in the Spanish prayer there are 37 Simon-pure *o*'s. The vowel in more than a fourth of all its syllables is *o*. I said that the Italian was the Alpha and the Omega. Spanish is content to be the O-mega alone, or, rather, shall we say O-megiston, *o* superlative? And, by the way, it interests me to think that the great Spanish classic, "Don Quixote," even in its name, with its two *o*'s, is characteristic of Spain.

7. *Portuguese.* George Borrow, in his "Bible in Spain," speaks disparagingly of the sound of Portuguese compared with pure Castilian Spanish. But on the printed page the two look much alike; and all that I have said of Spanish might be said almost equally well of the Portuguese. The word "father" is interesting. In Portuguese we have the extreme point of attenuation through which the Greek and

Latin *pater* has evolved. The first step in the process is found in the Italian, which reversed and therefore shortened the last syllable, *-er* to *-re*, changing *pater* to *padre*. The next step is in the French, which drops the *t* or *d*, merging the two syllables into one — *père*. In Portuguese we find one more step: the *r* is dropped, leaving only three letters — *pae*. Latin *pater*, Italian *padre*, French *père*, Portuguese *pae*, Yankee *pa*, — thus the nations play the game of bringing up father.

8. *German.* We will now take a leap from the Romance languages to the Teutonic tongues. There is a great contrast between the two families. For one thing, in the Romance languages the vowels dominate, but in the Teutonic the consonants have the right of way. The glory of the Italian is its *a*'s, of the Spanish its *o*'s, of the French its *e*'s; but the glory of the German, for example, is its *ch*'s and *sch*'s and all its other consonants. To take the phrase "For thine is the kingdom." listen to the vowels of the Italian (*Perciocche tuo e il regno, e la potenza e la gloria in sempiterno*); to the consonants in the German (*Denn dein ist das Reich und die Kraft und die Herrlichkeit in Ewigkeit*). If the palm of sheer musical beauty must be given to Italian, German no less deserves the award for robust and reverberating strength. If the Romance languages work miracles by their cadences of *a, e, i, o, u*, the Germanic no less work wonders with their combinations and permutations of *p, q, r, s, t*.

Another interesting distinction is this, that the Romance languages, as a whole, show a greater tendency for long words than do the Teutonic. There are far more polysyllables in the languages so far considered than in those we shall speak of below. Take the case of words of four syllables, for example: Greek has six four-syllabled words, Latin two, Ital-

ian four, French three, Spanish two, and Portuguese four; while, on the other hand, German, Dutch, Swedish, and Icelandic have only one apiece and Norwegian and English have none. The average number of syllables in the Romance languages is 130, in the Teutonic only 96. The average number of letters in the former — for I have been pedantic enough to count even letters — is 305, in the latter 207. Hence, if English itself were not a Teutonic language, and with fewer letters even than the German, a prejudiced John Bull might argue that the Teutons, strictly speaking, were the most ill-literate people on the face of the earth. These are the broad distinctions between the Romance and the Germanic tongues: the one emphasizes vowels, the other consonants; the one is more polysyllabic, the other has shorter words and fewer letters.

So much for the Teutonic tongues in general. Now a word for the German in particular. The German is second only to the Latin in the fewness of the words it requires to express itself. The Latin has 59 words, the German 61. All the others need anywhere from 64 to 78. There is German efficiency for you.

9. *Dutch.* Dutch beats the Dutch for quaint and droll picturesqueness. I cannot glance at it without chuckling to myself, it is so curious both to see and to hear. To begin with, it has a propensity for double vowels which has no parallel in other languages. "Name" is *naam*, "earth" is *aarde*, "bread" is *brood*. There are a dozen such double vowels in the Prayer. And if we reckon *j* as a duplication of *i*, as it practically is, at least in these Continental tongues — witness the Greek name for Jesus (*Iēsus*), the German *yes* (*ja*, but spelled with a *j*, and not an *i*) — we shall have seven more double vowels in the Dutch, for the

Dutch has the habit of inserting a *j* after an honest *i* where there would seem to be no possible need for it. In "who art in heaven," "art" is *zijt*, "kingdom" is *koninkrijk*. "We" is *wij*; and, by the way, "thy" is a triple vowel, *uw*.

But strangest still in Dutch is the letter *g*. The way to say *g* in Dutch is to clear your throat. Our professor in the Seminary used to talk about the gutturals in Hebrew, but I never appreciated a guttural language until I heard the Hollander in my church speak, who taught me all the Dutch I know. (I will represent the gutturalness of the *g* by an apostrophe before—every time you see that apostrophe you must clear your throat.) "Hallowed" is '*geheiliget*'; "Give us our daily bread" is '*geef uns . . . uns da'gelike brood* (you see that they clear their throats even in the middle of a word). There are ten such guttural *g*'s in the Prayer. Needless to say, the true Hollander can say them with perfect ease and grace.

But strangest of all, to us Americans, is the coincidence in the phrase "Deliver us from evil." In Dutch it is, "Deliver us from the Booze" (spelled exactly as we spell it, but pronounced *Bo-se*).

If I did not wish to preserve strict neutrality in this paper, it would be easy for me to say that the Dutch is my favorite of them all—at least of all the Teutonic tongues. I am always glad when my daily round of reading brings me to it. Every other word has such a quaint, unexpected form. And there is a homely, stalwart sturdiness about it, like the character of that people, who have said to the great deep, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further."

10. *Swedish*. We in English dot our *i*'s and cross our *t*'s, but in Swedish they also *o* their *a*'s. The *a* will often be written with a small *o* above it, like the halo over a saint, or



like the Iota subscript in Greek — only this is Omicron superscript. There are nine *a*'s in the Prayer thus haloed, and this *o* above gives to the *a* the sound of *o*, completely usurping its place. "Our Father" is *Fader Var* (with the *a* of "Var" dotted with an *o*, and pronounced *Vor*).

It must be hard to be a Christian in Sweden. It is a herculean task to do God's will in Swedish. "Thy will be done" or "Be done thy will," in Swedish, is *Ske din Vilje*, to pronounce it as it is spelled, but the doing of it, that *Ske*, which means "Be done," is pronounced like nothing else in heaven or on earth. I have buttonholed three or four Swedish friends to coach me on it, but it is an impassable shibboleth for me. As nearly as I can describe it, it is a combination and a hybrid between an *f* and an *h*, and a whistle and a whisper; and how they can say it as glibly as they do amazes me.

11. *Norwegian*. There are many similarities, but a few interesting differences, between Swedish and Norwegian. "Bread" in Norwegian is *Brod*, with a diagonal line through the *o*. As nearly as I can describe the pronunciation of this letter (though I could not pronounce it to the satisfaction of my Norwegian parishioner who did her best to tutor me on it), it is about the same as an unlauded *o* in German. It stands as a separate letter in their alphabet.

Norwegian is the only other of the Teutonic tongues which follows the lead of the German in capitalizing all nouns.

Norwegian drops that curious *o* over the *a* which we found in Swedish. In some of the parallel cases it writes the vowel frankly *o*, as it is to be pronounced, *Fader Vor*. In other cases, instead of putting an *o* above, it puts another *a* beside, making double *a*, and pronounces the two as *o*. In "as in heaven, so on earth," "so on earth" is *Saa og Paa jorden*. We might propound this riddle, "When is an *a* not an *a*?"

Ans. "When it is double *a* in Norwegian, for then it is *o*." My Norwegian friend laments the fact that we mispronounce the name of her king. It is spelled *Haakon*, but it should be pronounced *Hokon*.

From our English point of view, Norway is nearer the kingdom of heaven than is Sweden. It is easier there to do God's will—at least for strangers. For that word *Ske* which we found impossible in Swedish is child's play in Norwegian—*Shay*.

The word for "earth" in Norwegian and Swedish is interesting, for it is *Jorden*, pronounced *Yowden*; and what is a yowd but a yard? and so our English word "yard" must be first cousin to the word "earth." Therefore he who has a yard might claim that he has the earth with a fence around it.

12. *Icelandic*. Just for curiosity I ordered an Icelandic Testament from the Bible Society, and had to wait for several weeks before it arrived. Icelandic is Norwegian only slightly disguised. These Scandinavian tongues seem to delight in introducing novelties into our good old alphabet; for in Swedish we have the *a* with an *o* over it, in Norwegian we have the *o* with a line through it, and also, by the way, which I did not mention before, the diphthong *æ*, written together as one letter, and standing in their alphabet as a separate letter. In Icelandic we find still two other strange letters—a *d* with a broken back and crossed as we cross our *t*, and another dental like a *p* with the stem going above as well as below the line. From comparison of the parallel passages in Norwegian and Swedish, I should judge that both these letters are variants of the letter *d*, perhaps *dh* and *th*.

There is fine rhythm in Icelandic in the phrases "Hallowed

be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done" (*Helgist nafn ditt. Komi Riki ditt. Verdi Vilji dinn*<sup>1</sup>). "Give us up our debts," says the Icelandic, "as we give up our debtors." And there is great pathos somehow in the phrase "Deliver us from evil" (*Frelsa oss fra illu*), "Free us from ill."

13. *Russian.* Since beginning this paper I invested in a Russian Testament, for I felt that there ought to be at least one representative of the Slavic tongues in this Congress of Languages. I found a Russian alphabet in my encyclopædia, and with the aid of this I laboriously transliterated the Prayer into our abc, for the Russian alphabet has 35 letters, and only eight of these are like ours. I dropped into a little tailor shop and had a Polish Jew coach me on the pronunciation; and it was a very pleasant chat and instructive interview which I had with him. But in spite of encyclopædia and private tutor, Russian is my Waterloo; for it seems to be another family of languages altogether. I feel as lost in it as when I began Hebrew. There are almost no familiar roots which connect it with the Greek, Latin, or German. Even the name for "father," which in all other languages is a lineal descendant of the Greek *pater*, in Russian is alien and orphan—*otche*. However, there is one word about which there can be no mistake: Kingdom in Russian is czardom. "Thy kingdom come" is *Da Priidiet Tsarstvie Tvoio*; "Thine is the kingdom," *Tvoio est Tsarstvo. Tsarstvie, Tsarstvo, czar-dom, is kingdom.* Julius Cæsar has stamped his name not only on Kaiser Wilhelm and ex-Czar Nicholas, but even on the kingdom of heaven, the czardom of God; or we might say that Cæsar, in Russia at least, has rendered unto God

<sup>1</sup>The *d* in "Verdi" is the broken-back variety; the other *d*'s are the *p* with the double-ended stem.

the things that are God's, Thine is the czardom, *Tvaio est Tsarstvo.*

14. *English.* This completes our round of languages. But perhaps it is high time for us to say a word about our own king's English. There are three points in which our mother tongue is distinguished in this international assembly.

First, we have a larger proportion of monosyllables than any other tongue. Thanks to the sturdy Anglo-Saxon of King James's Bible, there are 48 monosyllables in our Lord's Prayer — as contrasted with 21 in Latin, 26 in Italian, 30 in Spanish, 33 in German, 36 in Norwegian. We have 48. French, indeed, has nine more monosyllables than we, but it has a total of thirteen more words; so, allowing for this handicap, English wins the prize for its large proportion of monosyllables. Right along this line, I may add that English has only two words of three syllables (*temptation* and *deliver*), and not one word of more than three syllables. This is a record unmatched by the others.

In the second place, if we count the total number of syllables in the Prayer, English has the fewest of all, 84, which is seven ahead of its nearest rival, Norwegian, and 55 ahead of Spanish, which needs 139 syllables to say what we say in 84. However, it must be remembered that the Spanish syllables, and all the Romance languages, are lighter and less encumbered with consonants than the English and the other Teutonic tongues.

In the third place, if we count letters, English stands second in fewness, with 250 letters, yielding the palm only to the Norwegian, which manages with ten less than we. French, for example, needs 85 more letters than we.

So we can be proud of the king's English for its terseness and brevity. We win in our large number of one-syllabled

words. We win in the small sum total of our syllables. We stand a close second in the small number of letters we require. So, if terseness and brevity be a virtue, and if I had not bound myself to strict neutrality in this paper, I might with reason claim that English bids fair to become the universal language.

15. *Turkish.* I must bear in mind the clause "Lead us not into temptation," as I resist the impulse to stretch out this paper to inordinate lengths, by dragging in other languages still more strange and foreign. For, partly through books and partly through good friends, I have happily gained possession of the Prayer in Welsh, Gaelic, Arabic, Turkish, and Zulu. However, it is not hard to resist the temptation; for, if Russian was my Waterloo, these even more would be my Verdun. Nevertheless, I will speak one word about the Turkish, for it will give us a glimpse into a realm of language totally different and passing strange. Turkish is an agglutinated language, and the practical effect of its agglutination is to make it the most backhanded, upsidedown, cart-before-the-horse affair that could be imagined. Hebrew is written backwards, but Turkish is spoken backwards. I mean that in many of the phrases the order of the words is almost opposite to what we would consider the natural and logical order. The Prayer in Turkish opens, "O heaven in being father our." "Forgive us our debts" goes, "And us-to debtors are-who-those forgive we as, our debts ours forgive." These are the most extreme cases, but all the phrases of the Prayer are more or less upside down, like these. Let me now read these two sample phrases *backwards*, and they will seem more forwards, to our way of thinking, than when we follow the Turkish order. "Our Father being in heaven O." "Forgive our debts ours as we forgive those

who are debtors to us." It would be easy to draw a popular conclusion that this backhandedness of the language proves the backwardness of their civilization, and the fact that the Turk ought to go way back and sit down in remote Asia, where he belongs. But it would be both more charitable and scientific, I think, to say that this apparent backhandedness of the language proves nothing but the fact that all this matter of the order and sequence of words is not so much an affair of logic as a mere arbitrary custom and convention. There may be just as much sense in the Turk's order as in ours.

In closing let me briefly give a few general reflections. I wrote most of this paper while on my vacation last summer: and, not wishing to take all my Testaments with me, I copied the Prayer in different languages on little slips of paper, and put them all in a small envelope in my pocket. In all my summer journeyings, what a precious envelope this has been to me! I have cherished it almost as carefully as Ambassador Gerard cherished his mysterious black bag. No summer boarder on a hotel veranda could shuffle and stack his playing cards with more enjoyment than the joy I have found in these little scraps of paper. To me they became not scraps of paper, but living persons. Each had a personality so distinct, each was so individual and so human, that it was just as if I were carrying around with me in that little envelope, a dozen boon companions, twelve royal friends, twelve great souls. I felt as if I were in the goodly fellowship of the Apostles.

And when I have found some one who can repeat the Prayer to me fluently in this language or in that, as I have found in almost every case, why then it ravishes my soul like the sweetest music. What with the blessedness of the Prayer

itself, hallowed by a thousand associations, together with the eloquence and pathos of these strange tongues in which the old words come home to my heart with new power, the effect is indescribable.

President Eliot has put the world's best literature on a five-foot shelf, but I feel as if I had it in this small envelope. For above and beyond all the masterpieces of literature are the greater masterpieces of language. The world's greatest masterpieces are not Homer, Vergil, Dante, and Shakespeare, but Greek, Latin, Italian, German, English, and all the others. Language is the great classic. Language is the supreme masterpiece. Mother tongues are the epics of the world. Now abide Epic and Dramatic and Lyric and Oratorical and all the other branches of literature, but the greatest of these is the miracle of language in which they all live and move and have their being. And when I consider how manifold is this miracle, that my twelve Testaments are only the merest fraction of the world's five hundred languages and dialects; when I realize that all these strange tongues are really not strange at all, for they all make sense, they are as logical and as finished a tool for expression as our English—then I feel that language is the miracle of miracles, that Babel's confusion of tongues was one of the most wonderful events of history, that one of humanity's most priceless heritages is this boundless wealth of language. That there should be so many different ways to say the same thing, that the race should have been able to invent and perfect so many languages, each a satisfactory medium for self-expression and for social life, is it not marvelous, is it not a tribute to the inexhaustible fertility of the human mind? The wealth of human language indicates the wealth of human life. The so-called confusion of tongues is but a witness of the kaleido-

scopic variety, the boundless manifoldness, of man's life and thought. The polyglot words of our lips reveal the multitudinous meditations of our hearts. However sacred might have been the tongues of fire that rested on the disciples at Pentecost, yet truly they were no more divine than the tongues of flame that rest upon every mother's son of us—the divine fire of the gift of speech with which all mankind is endowed.

When I hear my foreign friends recite to me the Prayer fluently in their strange mother tongues, I feel as if I were listening to some magic incantation, some bewitching charm, some mystic spell, such as we read of in medieval legend or folklore. And is it not so, indeed? Is not Language the true magic? Are not words real witchcraft? Do not even the mouths of babes and sucklings, in their first prattlings, utter words of more potency than all the incantations of all the wizards? For through this magic of the spoken word do we not master both the material world of things and the invisible world of thought? In the ordinary small talk of our own mother tongue, we out-Merlin Merlin himself. Language is true Magic. Speech is a surpassing miracle.