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ART. I.—DR. ASA BURTON'S THEOLOGICAL SYSTEM.*

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THE object of this Article is to call the attention of the theological world to a most able, but we fear neglected, author, who is not dead but only sleepeth. We are coming to the grave of Lazarus; we hope to witness a miracle. We trust the Redeemer is there; and, though some of the spectators may say he has been dead four days and by this time savors of oblivion, yet we are waiting for the voice, *Lazarus, come forth!* and the apparent death will be only a season of suspended animation. We believe, to have Asa Burton appreciated, he needs only be to read and known; and it would be the crowning act of a long life to bear some humble part in recalling his reputation and influence to their proper station.

To the prevalence of any literary performance two things seem to be necessary: first, merit and originality; and, secondly, a power of appreciation in the cotemporaries of the author. The shepherd, in Virgil, who sang to the mountains and woods—*studio inani*—could only hear a perishing echo. It was Virgil himself that recorded the music and prolonged the

* *Essays on Some of the First Principles of Metaphysics, Ethics and Theology.* By ASA BURTON, D. D., Pastor of the Church of Christ in Thetford, Vermont. Portland: Printed at the Mirror Office. 1824.

on reunion, nine mistakes are made in twenty lines, besides the omission of an important clause of six words ; and yet it appears as a *verbatim* quotation—a strange proceeding for a believer in the *ipsissima verba* theory of subscription.

The truth of the matter is, that the author is bitterly opposed to reunion, and has done his best to show that there is a fundamental and irreconcilable difference between the bodies on the “subject of doctrinal divergence from the standards,” and that, in assenting to the reunion, the Old School must be prepared “to enter into covenant to abandon the precious doctrines of grace to the mercy of every theological empiric who may fancy that his free inquiries have found a new and better way.”

In thus outraging the convictions of nine-tenths of his own communion, and raising an issue known to all the world to be utterly false, he has entirely overshot the mark. The Disruption era has passed away with its bitter strifes and animosities. A better era has dawned. A new generation has come into power, fully resolved to bury the dead of past controversies, and to join hands with their brethren in the great work of building up the kingdom of their Lord and Master. Dr. Baird’s book is an anachronism. It belongs to the buried past.

ART. VI. THE CANON MURATORIANUS.*

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In the year 1740 Muratori published an ancient Latin fragment containing a list of the books of the New Testament. He derived it from a kind of common-place book which he had discovered in an Ambrosian library at Milan. The entire volume seems to have been a receptacle for extracts, which some industrious monk, perhaps, was in the habit of making from ecclesiastical writings. The common-place book itself, from internal evidence, such as the chirography, color of the ink,

* *Canon Muratorianus.*—*The Earliest Catalogue of the Books of the New Testament.* Edited, with Notes and a fac-simile of the MS., by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, LL. D. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1867.

etc., appeared to have been written in the eighth century; and this particular extract relating to the canon, which had been copied into it, from an incidental statement in it, must have been originally composed in the second century. It was therefore a new and very important testimony respecting the antiquity of the New Testament; although Muratori seems to have published it rather as a specimen of the barbarism of the scribes in Italy, during those dark ages in which ancient learning had declined, than as a witness for the authenticity of the documents of Christianity. It immediately, however, attracted the attention of scholars. Eichhorn reprinted it in his Introduction to the New Testament with annotations. Routh did the same in his *Reliquiæ Sacræ*. More recently it has been carefully examined and criticised by Wieseler, Credner, Westcott, and others. And, last of all, Tregelles, at the expense and under the auspices of the delegates of the celebrated Clarendon Press, has published an exact fac-simile of the fragment with learned and copious explanations.

The copyist of the eighth century was evidently illiterate, and Muratori could not have discovered a better specimen to prove the ignorance certainly of some of the scribes of that time. Some portions of the fragment are in such ungrammatical and corrupt Latin, that it is impossible to make any sense of them, and even those parts from which an intelligible meaning can be deduced, are greatly marred by mis-spelling and grammatical errors. *Cum*, the adverb, is mistaken for *Cum*, the preposition, and *eum* is altered to *eo*, in order to agree with it. *Numeni* is written for *nomine*; *secundo* for *secundum*; *decipolis* for *discipulis*; *concribset* for *conscriptit*; *Callactis* for *Galatis*; *Thesaoleceusibus* for *Thesalonicensibus*; *Apocalebsy* for *Apocalypsi*. Westcott remarks, as follows, upon the manner in which the scribe has done his work: "In thirty lines there are thirty-three unquestionable clerical blunders, including one important omission, two other omissions which destroy the sense completely, one substitution equally destructive of the sense, and four changes which appear to be intentional and false alterations. We have therefore to deal with the work of a scribe either unable or unwilling to understand the work

he was copying, and yet given to arbitrary alteration of the text before him, from regard simply to the supposed form of words."

Critics differ in respect to the language in which the fragment was originally written ; some, (and among them Tregelles and Westcott,) asserting that it was Greek ; and others, like Wieseler, contending that the original author composed it in Latin. But, surely, the ignorance of Latin which the scribe of the eighth century evinces in his errors and blunders, is strong proof that he could not have been acquainted with the Greek language—a tongue of which the Western Church, generally, in the eighth century, had very little knowledge.

Respecting the antiquity of the fragment, the following statement, contained in it, shows that it belongs to the second century. The original author, whoever he was, after mentioning the canonical books of the New Testament, alludes to the *Shepherd of Hermas* in the following manner : "Hermas wrote the *Shepherd* very recently, in our time, in the city of Rome (*Pastorem vero nuperrime temporibus nostris in urbe Romæ*), while Pius, his brother, the bishop, sat in the chair of the church of the city of Rome, and therefore it ought to be read. But to read it publicly in the church to the people, is not admissible ; either among the prophets, the number being complete, or among the apostles, their time having come to an end." This proves that the author of this list of the canonical books was a cotemporary of Hermas, and his brother Pius, bishop of Rome. The *Pastor of Hermas* has been referred to, that Hermas, to whom Paul sends greeting, in Romans xvi, 14 ; and the author himself professes to be a cotemporary of Clement, the disciple of Paul. But it is impossible to believe that a treatise so entirely vacant of the doctrine of gratuitous justification, and laying so much stress upon works, can have proceeded from an immediate disciple of St. Paul. The testimony of the Muratorian fragment is rather to be taken than that of Origen, who was the first to suggest that the apostolical Hermas was the author of the *Shepherd*. This would make the date of its authorship to be somewhere near the middle of the second century. The date of the episcopate of

Pius has been variously stated from 127 to 157. Pearson gives good reasons for the earlier rather than the later date. If we adopt the mean, and place the episcopate of Pius about 140, we may reasonably assume that, inasmuch as the author of the Muratorian fragment states that the *Shepherd* was written "very recently" (*nuperrime*), "in his own day" (*nostris temporibus*), this list of the books of the New Testament may be placed about the year 160. It is therefore a very important testimony, because a very early testimony, respecting the writings that were received as inspired by the church of the second century.

The Muratorian Fragment first mentions the four gospels as canonical. Matthew and Mark are not directly named, because the fragment is mutilated. But it begins with saying, that the *third* gospel is that of Luke, and then designates John's gospel as the fourth, from which the inference follows that, in the portion that is lost, the writer had spoken of the first and second gospels. The writer remarks that Luke had not seen the Lord, and that some time after the Ascension, under the authority and with the assistance of the apostle Paul, he wrote the third gospel, commencing with the birth of John the Baptist. The origin of the fourth gospel he describes in the following peculiar manner: "The fellow disciples of St. John, together with the bishops of his region (*episcopis suis cohortantibus*), asked him to write the narrative of the life and teachings of Christ. In reply, he proposed that they should keep a fast of three days with himself, and whatever should be revealed to each should be related to all in common. In the same night it was revealed to the apostle Andrew, that John should write the whole narrative in his own name, and then it should pass under the survey of them all." The writer adds that it is not strange that St. John should relate minute particulars concerning Christ, even in his epistles (*epistolis*), since he wrote as one who had seen with his own eyes and heard with his own ears. Here is an evident reference to 1 John i, 1, and an implication, by the employment of the plural number, that St. John composed more than one epistle.

The Fragment next mentions the Acts of the Apostles, ascribing the authorship to Luke. There is also a reference of some kind to Paul's journey into Spain; and perhaps to the martyrdom (*passionem*) of Peter, but the text is so corrupt at this place, that the critics differ in regard to the meaning.

The epistles of Paul are next spoken of: first the genuine, and then the spurious. After remarking that these epistles themselves give information respecting their authenticity, place of origin, and purpose, the writer first makes particular mention, on account of their importance, of the epistles to the three churches at Corinth, Galatia and Rome. He then distinguishes the epistles which St. Paul addressed to a church, from those which he wrote to individuals. The former, whose catholicity he connects with the sacred number seven, he names in the following order: Corinthians, Ephesians, Philip-pians, Colossians, Galatians, Thessalonians, and Romans. This arrangement differs from that of the Vulgate, which the English Bible follows, and, as Wieseler remarks, is a refutation of Baur's hypothesis that only Galatians, Corinthians, and Romans were accepted as genuinely Pauline by the early church, the remaining epistles being afterwards falsely attributed to him. Baur founded this hypothesis upon the fact that, in the canon of Marcion, Galatians, Corinthians and Romans precede the other epistles. But the order in the Muratorian canon begins with Corinthians, ends with Romans, and places Galatians fifth in the series. After thus mentioning the nine epistles of St. Paul to particular churches, the fragment names the four pastoral letters, namely Philemon, Titus, 1 and 2 Timothy.

Having thus specified thirteen genuine epistles, the writer notices two writings, which he says have been falsely attributed to St. Paul, but which should not be received as canonical in the Catholic church because "it is not proper to mingle gall with honey." These two are an epistle to the Laodiceans and an epistle to the Alexandrines. The first is generally supposed to be that spurious writing attributed to St. Paul upon the strength of Colossians iv, 16; the second, is thought by many critics (among whom are Semler, Eich-

horn, Hug, Schleiermacher, Guericke and Wieseler) to be no other than the Epistle to the Hebrews,—a supposition which Wieseler contends is very probable, in view of the fact, that the characteristics of the epistle to the Hebrews adapt it much more to the Jews of Alexandria, than to the Jews of Palestine. Bleek and other critics, on the other hand, contend that by the epistle to the Alexandrines is meant an apochryphal book, now lost, which was written by a follower of Marcion, in defence of Gnosticism.

The Muratorian canon next mentions the Epistles of Jude and John. The Epistle of Jude is spoken of in such a manner as to leave no doubt that the one in the received canon is meant. The phraseology respecting John's epistles is a little doubtful in its meaning. "Two epistles of the above-mentioned John are received," is the statement (*et superscripti Johannis duae*). Some critics, (Zimmermann and Hug,) suppose that this language covers the three epistles of St. John, the second being regarded as only an appendix of the first. Others, (Schleiermacher and Credner,) think that by "*duae*" are meant the second and third epistles, the first epistle having previously been alluded to in connection with the Gospel of John. Others still, like Wieseler, suppose that only two of John's epistles are mentioned in the Muratorian fragment,—namely, the first and second—the third epistle not being recognized as a part of the New Testament canon.

Lastly, the Apocalypse of John is spoken of in connection with an Apocalypse of Peter. The first of these the writer alludes to in another passage in the fragment, saying that "although in the Apocalypse John writes to seven churches, yet he means it for all." Respecting the canonicity of the Apocalypse of Peter, the fragment remarks that some are unwilling to have it read in the church.

The Muratorian fragment omits the first and second epistles of Peter, the epistle of James, and the epistle to the Hebrews; unless the epistle to the Alexandrines is taken for it,—in which case the testimony of this writer of the second century is against both its Pauline authority and canonicity. The omission, however, of such parts of the New Testament

canon as these, can not be accounted for by the supposition that they were not received by the church to which this unknown author of the second century belonged, but must be attributed to some other cause. Because the authenticity of the first epistle of Peter was never disputed, and it is quoted by Polycarp and Papias—both of them as early as the writer of the Muratorian fragment. The epistle to the Hebrews and that of James were confessedly known to the Roman church from the beginning, and their canonicity was better and more early established than that of the epistle of Jude,—which yet is mentioned in the Muratorian canon. That the second epistle of Peter should have been omitted does not create so much surprise, as its authority was not established until a late day.

We have, then, the testimony of a document written as early as the year 160, that the canon of the New Testament, then received by the Christian Church, was the same that it is now and ever has been. A *catalogue* is more convincing evidence for the existence and authority of Scripture than quotations from single books ; because it shows that the church has fixed upon a list that is *exclusive* of all other writings. The author of this "Fragment" expressly mentions some writings which claimed to have apostolical authority, but which the church to which he belonged rejected. Such a fact proves that the New Testament was not left in uncertainty until the councils of Laodicea and Hippo. These councils only set their seal upon a work that had been done long before by the united voice of the primitive church. The teaching of this fragment of Muratori is, that the New Testament canon was essentially as much settled in the year 160 as it was in the year 360 or 390.