

until 1543,*—that is to say, in his old age,—the great work which was destined to uproot the secular theory of the schools, and to substitute in its place that which forms the basis of modern astronomy. It was entitled “*De orbium cœlestium Revolutionibus* ;” and it was dedicated to Pope Paul III. The first copy was placed in the author’s hands as he lay upon his deathbed, only a few hours before he expired [24th May 1543].

Copernicus placed the Sun, immovable, in the centre of the world,

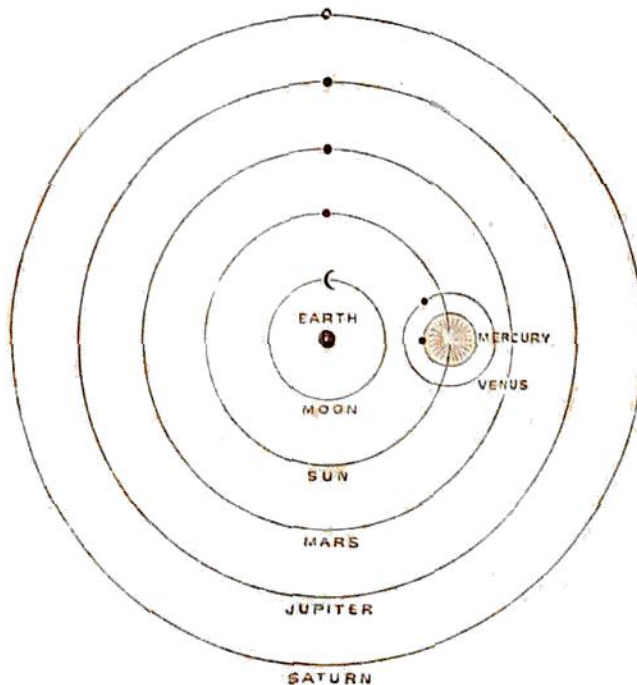


FIG. 12.—SYSTEM OF EGYPTIAN COSMOGRAPHY.

and made the planets, with Earth among them, circle round this central orb. He gave to the Earth a movement of rotation on its axis, which it accomplished in twenty-four hours. The diurnal and nocturnal movement of rotation of the stars which glittered in the celestial vault was thenceforth explicable with marvellous facility. And thus the German astronomer stripped our planet

of the brilliant spherul train which had been accorded to it from the first faint dawn of science ; he reduced it to one solitary satellite (and yet that, in itself, how beautiful !), the Moon, which illumines the night by the reflected rays of the Sun, sunk beneath the other hemisphere.

Copernicus thus expresses himself in his dedication to the “*Celestial Revolutions*” (*De Revolutionibus Orbium*) :—

“I am certain that philosophers will proclaim the truth of my discovery when they shall have attentively examined the proofs

* [It was completed, however, in 1530. Probably Copernicus delayed its publication from a just fear of the persecution in which it might involve him, as its views were presumed to be contrary to the science of the Bible.]