

BOOK V.

FORMAL ASTRONOMY.

CHAPTER I.

PRELUDE TO COPERNICUS.

Nicolas of Cus.

I WILL quote the passage, in the writings of this author, which bears upon the subject in question. I translate it from the edition of his book *De Docta Ignorantia*, from his works published at Basil in 1565. He praises *Learned Ignorance*—that is, Acknowledged Ignorance—as the source of knowledge. His ground for asserting the motions of the earth is, that there is no such thing as perfect rest, or an exact centre, or a perfect circle, nor perfect uniformity of motion. “*Neque verus circulus dabilis est, quinetiam verior dari possit, neque unquam uno tempore sicut alio æqualiter præcisè, aut movetur, aut circulum veri similem, æqualem describit, etiamsi nobis hoc non appareat. Et ubicumque quis fuerit, se in centro esse credit.*” (Lib. i. cap. xi. p, 39.) He adds, “The Ancients did not attain to this knowledge, because they were wanting in Learned Ignorance. Now it is manifest to us that the Earth is truly in motion, although this do not appear to us; since we do not apprehend motion except by comparison with something fixed. For if any one were in a boat in the middle of a river, ignorant that the water was flowing, and not seeing the banks, how could he apprehend that the boat was moving? And thus since every one, whether he be in the Earth, or in the Sun, or in any other star, thinks that he is in an immovable centre, and that every thing else is moving; he would assign different poles for himself, others as being in the Sun, others in the Earth, and others in the Moon, and so of the rest. Whence the machine of the world is as if it had its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere.” This train of thought