

celestial bodies, the illustrious KEPLER * brought to the system of Copernicus the support and confirmation which it most required ; and thenceforth the rotation of the Earth was accepted by all enlightened minds as an established certainty. It was Kepler who discovered that the planetary orbits are not actual circles, but really ellipses ; it was he who enunciated the exact mathematical laws which the stars obey in their courses.

Kepler, a man of vast mental powers and remarkable force of character, was astronomer to the Court of Prague. His labours and his misfortunes have made him one of the grandest figures in the history of the seventeenth century. The terrible charge of sorcery which constantly impended over him and his mother involved him, throughout his vexed career, in trials, perils, and sufferings over which he could only triumph by dint of a severe constancy and an impregnable courage. Happily, a glowing imagination, which made him conqueror of all the obstacles in his path, inspired him with the strength needful for fulfilling the high destiny of his genius.



FIG. 15.—KEPLER.

We quote a sublime passage from his immortal work,† which throws a vivid light on his strong and resolute nature. After he had discovered the third astronomical law which bears his name, he decided on publishing his treatise, and in the preface he wrote as follows :—

“The die is cast ; the book is written. It will be read now, or by posterity. What matters which ? It can well wait a century

* [Johann Kepler was born at Magstatt in Würtemberg, 27th December 1571. He died at Ratisbon, 15th November 1630.]

† [“The Harmonies of the World,” published at Ling in 1619.]