

had for many ages applied themselves to such investigations.

In order to determine the force of this argument, it is necessary that we should here enter upon some explanations.

The solstice is the moment of the year at which the rise of the Nile commences, and that which the Egyptians must have observed with most attention. Having, at the beginning, made, from imperfect observations, a civil or sacred year of three hundred and sixty-five days complete, they would preserve it from superstitious motives, even after they had perceived that it did not agree with the natural or tropical year, and did not bring back the seasons to the same days*. However, it was this tropical year which it behoved them to mark for the purpose of directing them in their agricultural operations.

They would, therefore, have to search in the heavens for an apparent sign of its return, and they imagined they had found this sign when the sun returned to the same position, relatively to some remarkable star. Thus they applied themselves, like almost all nations who are beginning

* Geminus, who was cotemporary with Cicero, explains their motives at length. See M. Halma's edition at the end of the Ptolomée, p. 43.