

this inquiry, to observe the heliacal risings and settings of the stars. We know that they chose particularly the heliacal rising of Sirius, at first, doubtless, on account of the beauty of the star; and, especially, because, in those ancient times, this rising of Sirius being nearly coincident with the solstice, and indicative of the inundation, was to them the most important phenomenon of this kind. Hence it was that Sirius, under the name of Sothis, occupied so conspicuous a place in their mythology, and in their religious ceremonies. Supposing, therefore, that the return of the heliacal rising of Sirius and the tropical year were of the same duration, and believing, at length, that this duration was 365 days and a quarter, they would imagine a period after which the tropical year and the old year, the sacred year of 365 days only, would return to the same day; a period which, according to these incorrect data, was necessarily 1461 sacred years, and 1460 of those improved years to which they gave the name of years of Sirius.

They took for the point of departure of this period, which they named the Sothiac or great year, a civil year, the first day of which was, or had been, also that of a heliacal rising of Sirius; and it is known, from the positive testimony of Censorinus, that one of these great years had