

CHRONICLES OF THE BUILDERS.

CHAPTER I.

AGRICULTURE—GENERAL REVIEW.

HANDMAID OF MINING—ABORIGINAL AGRICULTURALISTS—GODS OF THE GRAIN-FIELD—ENFORCED LABOR—COÖPERATION—IRRIGATION—BENEFICENT LEGISLATION—TENURE OF LAND—DIVERS MONOPOLIES—CLIMATE—SOCIAL CONDITIONS—RACE CHARACTERISTICS—AGRICULTURAL COLONIES.

AGRICULTURE on the Pacific coast was the handmaid of mining, when the former was but little developed, but presently she became mistress of all. While yet subordinate, she was often more absorbed in the affairs of the mistress than in her own. She lived to look at the gold as it came glittering from the Pactolian streams; she thought the ground too dry to grow anything, profitably; nevertheless, those sons of the gods who delved among the boulders must be fed, and by and bye this feeding became paramount to all.

In Mexico and Central America the Spaniards appeared primarily upon the scene in search of gold and other treasures; and to this end they extended conquest northward, opening the rich silver deposits for which Zacatecas, San Potosí, and other provinces became famous. These in their turn gave rise to farming and other industries, and the Castilian settled here as he had southward as an encomendero to employ serfs for tillage, and to spread the cultivation of the new seeds and plants introduced from the Spanish peninsula. In California agriculture existed prior to the gold discovery; but gold was the primary incentive to that congregation of the nations which finally turned a wilderness into a garden.