

tary work was done, with glimpses of early post-Revolutionary literary characteristics and tendencies. Should the succeeding volumes be as well done, the series will be a most commendable one. The ground to be tilled by Mr. Warner and his co-laborers is narrower than that worked by Mr. Morley in his English series, but better harvests are to be expected from our more virgin soil.

Mr. WARNER's series of short biographies of "American Men of Letters" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) opens very fitly with Noah Webster. Without entering particularly into the question of Webster's rank as a literary man, the choice is doubtless intended as a recognition of his pioneer position in our literature and of his zealous efforts to give it a distinctive character. Living in the early days of the Republic, and sharing keenly in the patriotic impulses of the time, he became permeated with the idea that a national literature was vital to national independence. It was with this view that all his literary ventures were entered upon. His dictionary was to be an American dictionary; and long before this gigantic undertaking had been assumed by him alone, he had prepared, as an American school-master, his spelling-book especially to instruct American youth in a national mode. He was an advocate of "spelling reform" chiefly with the object of establishing a difference between American and English letters. His idiosyncrasies were so marked as to amount almost to monomania, his scholarship was inadequate for his pretensions, his culture was of a very doubtful character, and his origin of the humblest. But, working with all these disadvantages, his sterling common-sense, his genius for systematic work and faculty for organization, and, above all, his extraordinary perseverance and industry, served him so well that he succeeded in procuring the adoption of many of his most radical innovations, and his great dictionary—though much of Webster has since been worked out of it—remains the proud monument of his active life. Mr. Scudder's sketch shows us not only the living man behind this dead monument of letters, but gives also an admirable picture of the times in which his soli-