A PAINTER OF THE FOREST.

ALEXANDER WYANT. By Eliot Clark. Illustrated. Frederic Fairchild Sherman; $12.50.

Mr. Clark's book is the latest of a series that has now become well and favorably known to those interested in American landscape painting. Like most of the earlier volumes in the series, it presents a painter's views of a painter. Professor Mather's book on Homer Martin was, of course, the work of a critic and a student; but the other volumes in the series have been by painters. They have been appreciations,— to use a somewhat hackneyed term in the sense in which Walter Pater brought it into use. For that reason the books have an especial value for the student and lover of pictures. They are beautifully printed and illustrated, and they present an especial view. This latest volume, like the others in the series, is well worth having.

I have before had opportunity in THE DIAL to point out reasons why those who are planning the series should try to do even more than they do; and in spite of my ill success in the past, it seems worth while to say the same thing briefly once more. It seems to me almost obvious that such beautiful monographs ought to have some of the apparatus that would be of value to the student of American painting, as well as the artistic appreciation that would perhaps satisfy the painter or amateur. If nothing more, it would certainly be useful to have in such a volume a list of the pictures of Wyant, with the dates of their execution. Of course such a list is not necessary to the appreciation of Wyant or anybody else; but Mr. Clark apparently and naturally has a clear idea of the general development of Wyant's art and of the place in that development of one or another picture. It is only asking him to give the reader the means that he has himself collected, at least to some degree. The utmost vagueness prevails in this matter, not only in regard to Wyant, but with many others of our earlier landscape painters. It would seem clear that if students do not know just what a man painted, they cannot know his place in the history of art.

Mr. Clark's book, like the others in the series, not only does not have any list of the pictures of its subject, but it does not give the dates of the works which it does reproduce. Mr. Clark usually speaks of pictures with especial reference to the period in which they were painted. Yet the details noted with each painting rarely give the date or the period. Mr. Clark notes where and how the picture is signed,— a matter which seems almost invariable, and which can usually be seen by looking at the painting itself; but he does not give the date unless it is on the picture. As the reproductions are not arranged in any obvious order, and are sometimes referred to in the text and sometimes not, they are useful chiefly for that direct appreciation of the beautiful which is so necessary and so delightful, but not (even in Mr. Clark's view) absolutely sufficing. Besides direct appreciation of a beautiful picture, the student wants to know its place in the life of the painter, that he may form some idea (as Mr. Clark does) of the growth and development of the painter's art; and for that one would desire either a dated list of the pictures of one's painter, or at least that the pictures reproduced should be chosen and arranged to illustrate the development the writer has in mind.

All of which is rather negative criticism, as well as something for which Mr. Clark himself is not responsible. It is the plan of the series not to give scholarly apparatus, but to give instead artistic appreciation. I do not see that the two are incompatible, but perhaps they are. Perhaps Mr. Clark would not be able to give the names and dates and so on that I should like to study over. I am quite sure that I should not be able to give the kind of appreciation of Wyant (or anyone else) that he can. And that, after all, is one of the most important things in art of any kind. To know what the artist aims, tries, longs to do,— that is at the bottom of a real enjoyment of what he does do. And few persons can appreciate what a painter tries to do better than a painter; he is likely to have something in common that will enable him to appreciate. Mr. Daingerfield, in writing of George Inness, had the advantage of personal acquaintance. Mr. Clark could hardly have known Wyant personally, save perhaps as a boy; but he is himself a landscape painter of a time not so long after Wyant, and naturally he is well acquainted with the work and the traditions of the earlier man.

However that may be, Mr. Clark's is the first attempt that I know of at a careful study of Wyant's art. Wyant is not so distinctive a painter as George Inness, on the one hand, or Homer Martin on the other, with both of whom he is generally named in the development of American art. Most large galleries have some of his pictures, though not always his most characteristic, if one may judge from Mr. Clark's selections, which are usually from pictures in private galleries. Still, Wyant does not make so striking an impression on

people as do a good many other painters of more definite characteristics. It is all the more useful, therefore, that we should have the impression of one who has been really impressed.

Before he seeks to give a special appreciation, Mr. Clark views the whole career of Wyant, particularly in its historical relation. He sees in his earlier paintings the influence of the early American landscapists, particularly Durand, and something of the German painters then popular, as well as something of a quality that seems his own. Mr. Clark has some good remarks on the landscape of that earlier time:

> The pencil and the brush were for the German painters and their American followers during the first part of the nineteenth century what the camera is to the modern tourist. They were essentially topographical draughtsmen, bringing home records of foreign lands and unusual scenes to satisfy the interest of the curious. Their aim being essentially to inform and instruct, their work is purely illustrative. Wyant lost little time in following vague and uncertain ideas and theories, but was content to apply himself in the given manner. This was in a certain sense painting over drawing, and it is only in understanding this method that we will get a clear idea of these early pictures and understand their deficiency as well as their significance.

Such painting gave a good deal, but it lacked more; it gave form and detail, but it lacked light and atmosphere. Mr. Clark thinks that in spite of local subject and superficial representation it was not essentially American in character. It seems to me, however, that notwithstanding its foreign influence it had a good deal that was characteristic of the time. It was at once large and grandiose, small and petty; and really those were common characteristics of that America of the middle of the century which was Wyant's influence in his earlier years.

Later on, like all other landscape painters of his day, Wyant became interested in the Barbizon painters. In 1880 these were dominant men; some, though, escaped their influence. But in the next ten years of his life, Wyant learned more directly from nature than from anything in anybody else. Those were his Adirondack years and the years he passed in the Catskills. Of this period Mr. Clark does most to give us the spirit and the sentiment. He makes an excellent remark about the difference between the earlier Wyant and the later:

> Had Wyant not become ill, but returned strengthened and invigorated from his early Western adventure, we might have had many interesting records, topographically correct, of the wonders of Western scenery. He would not only have been the rival of Bierstadt and Church for popular applause and appreciation, but would have added a more sensitive and truthful account of the country which he observed.

It is not that sort of thing that we get in the later Wyant. In the later French landscape Wyant saw the possibility of giving not merely the forms and figures of nature but his own impression and appreciation. Mr. Clark is very interesting in his presentation of the technical means whereby Wyant found it possible to express the things he wished to express. He began by reducing the angle of vision, and so enabled himself to get a single impression; and as he became more and more intimate with the Adirondack woods, these impressions became more and more personal and beautiful. There is an attractive picture of Wyant's in the National Gallery at Washington,—"The Flume on the Opalescent River," a beautiful rendering of a beautiful and striking place. But a place needed not to be so particularly striking in its form as the Flume on the Opalescent. So simple a subject as the "Old Clearing," in the Metropolitan, reproduced by Mr. Clark, gives us the real thing just as well,—indeed better, because our mind is not distracted by considering the forms and details which had been so fascinating in the earlier art. Wyant's impressionism was not mere vagueness. Mr. Clark shows how carefully in his later years he studied all kinds of natural objects,—rocks, trees, brooks, and so on,—and how excellent he became as a draughtsman, so that (though in later years he had to work with his left hand) he could use the forms of nature to express his own ideas of rhythm, balance, and harmony.

There never, I believe, has been an exhibition devoted to presenting an adequate idea of the whole work of this painter; but there are several places where one may obtain a good idea of his work. In the Metropolitan Museum are seven of his pictures; with two exceptions these are not dated, but at least they are hung near together, and they are so different in period and character that with Mr. Clark's help one may form from them an excellent idea of the painter. There are also a number at the Corcoran and National galleries in Washington,—though, as I remember, not so many. It would be a delightful occupation for the picture lover to settle and clarify his ideas about a painter concerning whom most people are a little vague. Wyant is commonly mentioned with George Inness and Homer Martin. He will rarely be thought equal to either in that vague element which we name "greatness,"—but he will be found by many to have a personal charm equal to either.

EDWARD E. HALE.