Notes from France

PAUL MORAND'S first novel, "Lewis et Irène" (Grasset), might have been called "Twentieth Century Limited". No writer, more completely than Morand in his previous books of stories and in this novel, has stood with both feet on twentieth century ground and used his twentieth century typewriter to turn out 100% twentieth century psychology. Others, of course, have made use of the "modern" setting—fast liners, banks, and switchboard—and treated of "up to date" problems like money, love, etc.; but always, it seems to me, with one eye on the past, for comparison. Their modernism is ever between quotation marks. When they take us into the present life of nations and individuals, they are travelers. Morand is a resident. He "belongs". And yet he is so thoroughly French in his sensibilities, that one might

build a whole theory of France's capacity for adjustment upon Morand's efficiency in naming, qualifying, choosing among the elements of the new era, testing their solidity and their promises.

Much less destructive, cruel, acid, and negative than "Ouvert la Nuit" and "Fermé la Nuit", much less dependent upon the disintegration of old standards, this book presents the new ones—at their present stage of development. Its hero and heroine might be regarded as the Adam and Eve of this new era. Both are splendid business people, who practise sport, love power, and know thoroughly how to make use of it. She is chaste and he isn't, but that makes no capital difference. She is of old Greek blood and he is a modern type of mongrel, therefore has more trouble in finding out what he wants. So has our twentieth century. . . .

The Nouvelle Revue Française republishes "Le Vin Blanc de la Villette" by Jules Romains, which is pretty good reading for those who want a direct, humorous, robust introduction to the popular and authentic aspects of Paris—the remotest possible one from the Paris visited or revisited and finally transfigured by tourists. The quais de la Villette are a long, long way from the rue de Castiglione.

Vivid stories of the gipsies in the south of France are presented by Valère Bernard in his book "Les Bohémiens", which is prefaced by Louis Bertrand, the author of the much discussed "Louis XIV". One remembers that not very far from Marseilles, around the little church of the Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a yearly pilgrimage of gipsies from all parts of Europe gathers the strangest people for the worship of St. Mary the Egyptian who landed there, according to legend.

Abel Hermant's last book is likely to overcome the continued resistance to his election at the French Academy. "Xavier" is a series of talks on French grammar, which the distinguished author of "La Carrière" has made as attractive as any of his best stories. With all the differences that exist between the Renaissance and our days, there is something of Cennino Cennini's Book of the Art about Abel Hermant's subtle presentation of French linguisitic casuistry. Need we add that "all students of French letters should read it"? No, we need not.

Frédéric Lefèvre is an editor of the clever weekly paper "Les Nouvelles Littéraires", which we have mentioned before, and its official interviewer. In a book called "Une Heure avec. . ." (Nouvelle Revue Française) he gathers these interviews, which are out of the ordinary. A strange feature about them is that instead of asking Paul Bourget what he takes for breakfast and Anatole France his opinion about bobbed hair or preaching through wireless, Frédéric Lefèvre seems to get from his heroes the best that can be obtained in an hour's talk. This book has a real value as current history of French literature.

PIERRE DE LANUX