

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

(continued from page 5)

CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

Sir,—It seems that your discussion of Priestley's assault on "cultural democracy" has suffered from an initial lack of clarity on the exact meaning of "dictation" in the original context. That the uncultured should not be allowed to "dictate" to the cultured as to what the latter shall enjoy is so much beyond controversy that no one has bothered to defend it. But how are we to think, whether favourably or otherwise, of the cultured as "dictating" his tastes to the uncultured? Short of an actual totalitarianism, neither Lord Reith nor any other champion of Good Things can really ensure that the public are getting an exclusive or predominant diet of what is good for them. Nor will all the subsidising of national theatres, national orchestras, Arts Councils and the like ever amount by itself to forcing high standards on the masses.

There are two worlds in this matter, and where is it that any real clash of standards can or does take place? Surely the point of contact that matters is that afforded by the critics, especially those operating through such mass media as the press, radio or such magazines as your own. Trouble arises when the critic is able to express judgments by his

standards and these judgments are brought to wide popular notice. For the mass-man, be he proletarian or peer, asks from the arts mere enjoyment, gained gregariously with the minimum of mental exertion on his part. Then comes the critic. He does the work of Socrates; he challenges the mind's acceptance of something as good; he demands that we understand ourselves as well as the works of art we see or hear; he compels the awakening of the faculties of analysis and discrimination. Inevitably, he measures by his own standards, which may not be ours; but this is secondary to the main function of this Socratic gadfly, which is the shock and stimulus he gives our minds and the response of greater activity which he calls forth. But in all this the mass-man sees nothing but an unprovoked and malicious attempt to rob him of his pleasures; and his reaction may resemble that of a hog aroused from his mudhole.

So it was in Athens; and as I write, the theatrical critic of a local paper is being attacked in its correspondence columns with something not unlike hatred. There will also be those interests in commercial entertainment who find their dividends safer if people don't. It seems to me that criticism and the attempts periodically made literally to

intimidate and repress it form the real issue of the discussion. But the critic need not try to dictate. He should know better. He won't succeed except at the price of destroying the very things he believes in. Indoctrination, the bludgeoning of the mind, can't call forth appreciation, which is the life and sensitivity and discrimination of the mind. If the critic resists attempts to write him off as a spoilsport and frighten him off the field he has made the only contribution that needs making towards the solution of Priestley's problem.

J. G. A. POCOCK (Christchurch).

Sir,—Of all the literary and other headliners who have expressed their opinions, M. H. Holcroft seems to me to have given the soundest and most level-headed judgment. As he states, political and cultural democracy cannot be separated. The term political freedom is usually restricted to mean the right of a people to choose their own governing bodies, no small right when the larger responsibilities of modern government are considered. But the danger of taking the right to choose his own form of music, of theatricals and of literature from the man at large is in the fallibility of human judgment concerning what is best for the world. Mr. Holcroft carries the argument so far, but it could logically be taken still further. I would be inclined to survey

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[N Mackistan the Hielan' man

Is makin' a' the noise he can.

MacGhandy in his philabeg

Is pu'in' at the Southron's leg.

Mutters of internecine war

Shake Dundee pur and Glesgapore,

An' folk are lookin' awfu' sad

Awa' by Aberdeenabad.

THE fury of Strathnavertana

Threatens the raj and all its mana;

The swords of Tam o' Shanter Singh

And William Wallacejee shall ring.

Let Attlee Sahib fear, puir body,

The ensanguined waves of Clydeawaddi

Should Selkirk and the Argyll Khan

Lead forth the power of Mackistan.

—C.

the scene from the more lofty and disinterested pedestal of the scientist. It must be accepted that we live in a changing world. In other words, we have not yet come to the end of the evolutionary road. Tastes in art have changed and will continue to change, so that the experts and scholars of to-day who would have us think this way and that in connection with music and literature may,

(continued on next page)



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