AUSTRALIA, by

AUSTRALIA comes to life in this short book. Concentrating on his theme, the development of a nation and national characteristics, Russel Ward describes the first 50 years of settlement as a period of conflict between social groups where the lower classes in particular adapted to the new environment. The life of the convict and bush worker fostered the collectivist and democratic outlook which in its various aspects have come to be regarded as peculiarly Australian.

This outlook was not altogether shared by the middle class which came into existence, in strength, after the goldrushes. Economically and politically this liberal-minded middle class was building a nation but it did not decisively alter the Australian "image" which remains very much as fashioned by convict, bush worker, shearer, unionist.

By the turn of the century a good foundation for nationhood had been laid, economically, in politics and in culture, only to be checked by war and depression.

It is perhaps not so easy to assess the salient features of Australian society in the post-war boom. Here Russel Ward describes most of the major events and public attitudes but he does not clearly delineate the pattern of prevailing trends. He points out that the Liberal Party has been careful to maintain near-full employment, but he does not give adequate emphasis to its major concern: the interests of the Australian monopolies and foreign investors. Neither group emerges with clarity. Further, he accepts uncritically the view that heavy American investment is needed for national development (p. 139). It is increasingly obvious that the Australian public is becoming aware that our national interests and integrity have been betrayed. In spite of "prosperity", education, social welfare, the development and conservation of resources have been neglected.

Ward maintains that it is the Australian temper to abhor violence in word and deed. Are we too happy with the concept of our country as "the quiet continent" (p. 17) —whatever the reality?—S.B.

In his provocatively-titled book "Success and Failure of Picasso", John Berger, English marxist author and critic, abruptly seizes his reader's attention with an opening flourish around the theme of Picasso's fabulous success measured in terms of wealth, fame and possessions.

This is followed by an assertion that forces other than Picasso's undeniable powers as an artist or the strength of his personality have contributed largely to the quite unprecedented extent of his fame and fortune.

To so much as hint that an artist of such towering stature as Picasso can in some way also be a failure is such a hazardous departure from generally-held opinion, that all arguments developed to support it, be they ever so intriguing and at first sight convincing, must be all the more closely examined.

Picasso's fame as a personality, says Berger, puts Picasso the artist in the shade. Only one out of hundreds, he says, who know the name of Picasso would recognise a picture by him.

It is difficult to test this. Whether or not I am one out of hundreds, I can recognise paintings by Picasso as I see them in reproductions on display, out of the corner of my eye, and find each a surprising, new and sudden visual experience that holds some hitherto unnoticed element of reality.

For Picasso with all his expressive use of distortion and displacement of parts is, in no sense, an abstract painter. And I have acquaintances among the hundreds whose interest is not specially trained on painting, for whom the works of Picasso hold a fascination.

It cannot be denied that Picasso's literary associates have written much that amounts to an exaggerated and, at times, an absurd adulation of his personality, while almost dismissing his painting as a side issue.

He himself is quoted as saying that it is not what the artist does that matters, but what he is!

He is also apparently opposed to reasoning about art or to the critical analysis of the processes of artistic...
creation. "I put down on canvas the visions that force themselves upon me. I do not know beforehand what I shall put on canvas, and even less what colors I shall use."

Berger covers a lot of ground in his book and produces a mass of detail in a racy, very readable style and an ordered sequence.

The most controversial points are, perhaps, what he calls Picasso's failure, and a criticism of society, specifically the French Communist Party, for refusing to accept Picasso at his true value as an artist, while at the same time exploiting his great name and reputation.

Picasso's failure, according to Berger, stems from his failure to find subjects worthy of his genius, and his inability to break from the isolation that success and the adulation about his personality forced on him.

Of Picasso's decision in 1944 to join the French Communist Party, Berger writes: "There were positive reasons why Picasso wanted at this time to begin a new phase of his working life. Having lived through the nazi occupation and so experienced political events at first hand, as he had not done since his youth in Spain, he was genuinely moved by political emotions.

"Most of his friends were in the Resistance and he himself, though he took no part, nevertheless became a figurehead of the movement.

"When at last Europe was liberated he felt—like millions of others—that he must assist the birth of a new world. And in 1944 he joined the French Communist Party."

Explaining his decision, Picasso said: "Have not the communists been the bravest in France, in the Soviet Union and in my own Spain? How could I have hesitated? The fear to commit myself? But on the contrary I have never felt so free, never felt more complete. And then I have been so impatient to find a country again. I have always been an exile, and now I am no longer one: while waiting for Spain to be able to welcome me back. The party have opened their arms to me and I have found there all whom I respect most, the greatest thinkers, the greatest poets . . . and all the Resistance fighters.Again I am among brothers."

Berger notes that, in becoming a communist, Picasso
had hoped to come out of "exile". But, he says, the communists did what everybody else had done — they separated the man from his work. They honored him as a man while they argued about his work or dismissed it as decadent.

"I cannot believe", Berger says, "that he was in any way mistaken or that he chose the wrong political path. But as an artist with all his powers he was nevertheless wasted.

"As a result of his taking part in the peace movement his fame spread even wider. His dove became a symbol not so much as a result of his power as an artist but in the linking of his name with the power of the movement."

Many rich and successful artists having in their young days surmounted the difficulties of getting their careers under-way, have in their later years of success and prosperity abandoned their socially critical attitudes to simply live on their reputations and repeat pale versions of earlier successes. They settle down in comfort and become conservative.

There are others, notably David Sequiros, who play a leading, active part in the revolutionary party and throw all their immense talent into the service of humanity, in the struggle for a better life.

In coming to the Communist Party at the height of his success, Picasso is an exception. It is open to argument that he was able to use to the full his immense artistic talent in the service of his fellow-man.

If, then, there is some truth in the assertion that the communists failed to value or to understand his art or to lead him to more human subjects, then his example must be studied against the time when equally gifted men come—as they must—to throw their energies and their creative impulses into the socialist movement.

Berger, of course, cites other influences that contributed to what he calls Picasso's failure to develop in the later years of his career, chiefly the extent of his success. Although he has never lost his personal integrity or become corrupted by this success, it nevertheless prevented him from developing because it deprived him of contact with modern reality. He was hemmed in by his wealth and reputation, roped off from contact with simpler men.

Berger makes out a strong case. His chief conclusion is that the success and honor offered by bourgeois society
is not worth having and should be refused, not merely on principle, but for the sake of preservation, of personal integrity—and this not just for outstanding artists or, indeed, for artists alone.

It may be that we will not see another artist like Picasso. The historical conditions no longer exist.

He has not lied in spite of success and wealth. He has never become cynical. He has retained his vitality and creative energy into old age, and, whatever else we may say, has remained deeply human and at all times a lover and champion of youth.

His contributions to the arts of sculpture, painting and drawing, and the graphic arts have a scope as vast as they are varied, and he has brought new life into painting and provided a store-house of suggestions for the use of color and design that is inexhaustible.—H. McClintock.

AN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, by Allan Ashbolt. Australasian Book Society.

THIS book will be known as one of the standard reference books on mid-century American mores. Allan Ashbolt eyes dispassionately the American motherland, removed of its schmaltz and its own romanticised illusions.

The picture is horrifying. He bares a society of sprawling urbanism which creates its own atmosphere for prejudice and violence, its tensions, its need for release. It creates its own natural delinquents while seeking its own devouring end: the profit motive:

Criminal world, underworld or the world of juvenile delinquency, all mirror the standards prevailing in the respectable world, all exist as a measure of what standards the responsible world is prepared to tolerate and absorb. (P. 72.)

The 1958 TV quiz scandals, payola, price-fixing and rigged bids accusations were some of many glorious revelations of grand corruption in previously believed sacred areas. Mass-media helped public opinion to bellow outraged. Some minor heads rolled: no presidents or board chairmen! And the corporations continued on.

The description of the automobile-based economy is illuminating. The closeness of monopoly corporations to Washington is most tellingly illustrated by the events of March 1961 with President Kennedy’s warnings that the economy was in trouble. It was given in terms of one million automobiles languishing unsold. He:
knew that the American public wouldn’t be roused to pity and terror by references to breadlines in West Virginia or twenty million people going hungry or 8 per cent of the work force being unemployed. (P. 105).

In fact,

America has not, in terms of economic and social justice progressed much beyond the situation in 1937, when President Roosevelt saw one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, ill-nourished. (P. 237).

Big business governs and takes over all. The largest monopolies depend on the product which Mr. Ashbolt points out has the swiftest in-built obsolescence: war materials and supplies. The Cold War is profit; imperialism cannot slacken its war-orientation. To discontinue would mean depression and 20 million unemployed.

Such economic war-orientation has been developing for decades. Its imperialistic growth since frontier days continues to be as brash as its origins. Romantically (made) aware of this past, the American’s “security” is handed him as the result of his acceptance of social “responsibility” on monopoly’s terms—and this is expected to include the unions. It is significant and frightening that Mr. Ashbolt has here described without label the corporate nature of Nazi National Socialism, and has twice identified it: in the form of national gangsterism (in the underworld sense), and in the form of Presidential guidance of certain sections of monopoly.

Through the deference to the child who is precipitated into the adult world with the possibility of his being educated to adult near-illiteracy, and through his receiving all his life, in general, a mass-produced aesthetic education of profit-geared cultural rubbish, and through his living in a society geared to over-production and organised waste, it is no wonder that “liberalism” has encountered setbacks and confusion. The Congo and Cuban events, the massive civil rights movement, the Vietnam war, are now forcing more dissenting attitudes, in political terms. As Mr. Ashbolt comments of dissent:

... it is the cornerstone of American liberty. If that collapses, the rest collapses. (P. 210).

An American Experience is penetrating, witty and most absorbing. Unfortunately, it does not allow for necessary cross-reference by failing to be indexed.

It is to be hoped that Mr. Ashbolt will soon be examining the Australian contrasts and similarities he undoubtedly saw on his return.

—D.M.

Mount Isa, town of dust, strikes, miners and pubs! A town that excites the interest of layman and industrial psychologist alike.

What makes the miners strike and turns their wives into super-militant underground workers and defiers of policemen? Why do the MIM executives doggedly refuse the men's demands, preferring to close down the mines rather than to create the happy worker-management relations beloved of Management courses?

Last year Gordon Sheldon, public relations officer for MIM, gave his version of the town and the people who make it live. That is one side of the story. Now we have another.

Mount Isa differs from a coal-mining town and community in that a great proportion of the population is "temporary". Few go there with the intention of sending down permanent roots, and so their emotional lives are disturbed by a basic insecurity. Betty Collins shows how men and women react to this environment.

She is happily partial in her approach. An unabashed proponent of the working class, she blows Mr. Sheldon's vision of glorious Mt. Isa as high as the towering smoke-stack which dominates the town. A tough year she spent in The Isa provided the material for much of this novel.

Her characters are down-to-earth but suffer because of her uncritical approach. She loves them too much, refusing to probe too deeply into their inner lives.

Since this is almost a universal fault with many first novels she may well overcome this problem.

The story centres around Julie and Nick, a young couple hoping to make their fortune in the town, and their friends who harbor similar hopes for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Had the conflict between Julie (an independent Australian girl) and Nick (a Greek with a feudal background and progressive ideas) have deepened and heightened, both the book and the reader would have gained.

Betty Collins has a good working understanding of simple working class politics which she uses to advantage. She shows quite clearly the nature and workings of a foreign monopoly within an exploited country.

—JOYCE HAWKINS.