BERTHE and Mrs Orr-Ewing in the garden of the latter's finishing school

Genius—Meet Beauty

by ANTHONY BARTLETT

I WAS reading the other day about a Mrs Orr-Ewing, who keeps a finishing school in England for young ladies. Mrs Orr-Ewing has obtained a prodigy from France, Berthe Grimault, who wrote a novel when she was 14 that created a sensation—so I was told—in both France and England.* Unfortunately, from Mrs Orr-Ewing's point of view, this lass had had a somewhat sketchy upbringing on the pig farm that was her home, and the book she had written was unfortunate too—various descriptions were "amoral," "ugly," "made money." So Mrs Orr-Ewing's going to change all that. Mrs Orr-Ewing says that Berthe has always lived with ugly things — pigs, for instance — and has therefore written about ugly things. Mrs Orr-Ewing is now going to show her beauty, and she'll see if little Berthe, who is now 17, can express that as well.

The story reminded me very much of something that happened to a great friend of mine in England. Peter Pipkins, his name was; he came from rather ordinary parents in a middle-class district, and he always had a fondness for writing. At the time I'm speaking of he was having a great run of luck in the school magazine, turning in anything from short stories to Rugby reports. One day he sent a story to *Peg's Paper*, and to everyone's pleased surprise, he was accepted. Success led to success, and before long he was making a steady guinea a week from writing alone.

One Saturday morning he and I were having coffee together when a tall fellow in Donegal tweeds walked up to our table and introduced himself.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he said, in a strong Irish accent. "My name is Finnegan—I believe you're Peter Pipkins, sir, the author."

"Yes," said Peter, taken aback. "That's right. Yes."

"That's fine," said Finnegan. "You don't mind if I sit down?"

Of course, we didn't, and soon we had this chap Finnegan equipped with coffee and a biscuit and he got down to talking business.

"You may not know it, Mr Pipkins," he said, "but you've got a big following in Ireland?"

"Ooh," said Peter. "Really?"

"That's right," said Finnegan. "We think you've a big future as a writer . . . except, of course, that . . ."

"Except what?" said Peter, whose eyes were beginning to glaze with excitement.

"Except that we think you're on the wrong track." Finnegan leant forward. "You're writing now about men and girls, handsome men and lonely women who meet in the jungle of bricks and mortar that you call cities, where the true human values are lost. Your stories appeal to the baser passions of the body, Mr Pipkins—in fact, I'd go so far as to call your stories ugly—indeed, amoral."

"Oh."

"There are other things, Mr Pipkins, for the true artist to take into consideration. The fine sweep of the hills, the first touch of the cold morning air, the lowing of the cows—the pageant of Nature." Finnegan looked out of the windows of the cafe. "I can see that here, in this town of yours, your emotions must be stultified. You want to get out—get out into the fresh, clean air. Come to Ireland, Mr Pipkins—you'll be welcome."

It was all very touching, and Peter was touched. Within a week, his parents had agreed to let him go to Ireland for three years to stay with Finnegan and his family at Finnegan's expense. During his stay he was to get close to Nature and refine his sensibilities.

I had some letters from Peter while he was away. He told me about the farm in the back-blocks somewhere behind Dublin where Finnegan took him. When he arrived he found the farmhouse full of people, and he was very flattered, thinking that the countryside had turned out en masse to greet him. He soon found out it hadn't; the whole crowd lived in the house. There were six rooms, and eleven people — they washed under a pump, cleaned their teeth with salt, and slept in their underclothes, all habits that Peter very soon found sensible, under the circumstances, and accordingly adopted. During the day, Finnegan would take him out for walks on the hills while the others worked on the farm; in the evenings, everyone would sit around the fire while Finnegan read to them out of the current number of *Peg's Paper*.

At the end of the three years, Finnegan said to Peter: "Well, my boy," he said, "I hope you've benefited from your stay here, and that you'll write something really worth while when you get back home."

"I hope so, too," said Peter. "But look, Mr Finnegan—why have you taken all this trouble over me?"

"Why?" said Finnegan. "Because the only thing my father left to me other than the farm was a perpetual subscription to *Peg's Paper*. I'm looking to you, my boy, to give us something in it a little different from the stuff that I've been having to read out for so long."

Peter was most affected by this, and when he got home, and slowly recovered from the abnormal physical health that had kept him from writing all the time he'd been in Ireland, he put his mind to satisfying Finnegan's hope. Unfortunately, he couldn't. Immediately he put pen to paper, he found himself writing about handsome men and lonely women in the suburbs of London; the only difference from before was that now and again one or other of them would be Irish. The money rolled in, and he saved it. The reproachful letters from Finnegan he burnt.

I only hope Mrs Orr-Ewing is more fortunate. How terrible it would be if Berthe wrote a sordid book about a finishing school.

* *Berthe Grimault's novel, "Beau Clown," is reviewed this week on page 17.*

Parking Metres

THE GREAT DETERGENT

WANTED — a modern Hercules
To depigment the lily,
Deodorise the polecat
And soundproof Piccadilly;
Perhaps deflate inflation,
Bring frosts to Borneo,
Devise a silent celery
Or grass that doesn't grow.
Then after a dozen labours,
If he should want thirteen—
He could perhaps be told to go
And make the H-bomb clean.

—R.G.P.