

SELECTIONS.

SOME VERBAL FORMS.

BY NOBLE BUTLER.

(The following article appeared in *Home and School* published by Messrs. Morton & Co., Louisville, Kentucky. As the attack on Mr. Butler's views was made in this Journal, fair-play to that gentleman requires that his answer should also be given.—REVIEWER.)

In the February number of a Canada magazine, "The Ontario Teacher," there is a notice of "Butler's Practical and Critical Grammar," in which the writer dissents from the grammar in respect to the form "is being built," though the notice is in general highly commendatory. He says, "Note O (the last) is devoted to 'is being built,' Mr. Butler taking the adverse side. 'Tis a pity grammarians can not understand that a grammarian can no more stop the growth of a living language than a German emperor could change a dead one. Whether this form is found in the best writers or not, one thing is certain, it has become rooted in English speech, meeting what was felt to be a want. It would be far better then for writers to examine the laws of its formation than to take a prejudiced stand on either side. There is a law governing the use of auxiliaries, and that law will allow of this form, but not of many of the forms quoted on p. 102 from Mason's English Grammar. If this should meet the eye of Mr. Butler, let him examine for the rule. We have never seen it given in any grammar, yet he (Mr. Butler) has in one case called a violation of it 'a vulgarity.'"

In a note the writer says; "'Is being built' is used by Rev. E. A. Abbott, the author of 'A Shakespearian Grammar' and other almost unrivaled works on English. That a distinct form for the progressive passive is needed will be recognized by any one who pays attention to the speech of uneducated persons and of children. How common is the substitute use of the middle in 'getting.' This morning I heard a little

four-year-old say 'while I was getting washed.'"

Now to represent *getting* as a substitute for *being* is like representing ale as a substitute for the orange-peel and water of Dick Swiveller's Marchioness. The little four-year-old used an appropriate word. *Getting*, as the child used the word, means *becoming*, *coming to be*, not *being*. Wordsworth says, "The boy is father of the man;" but the man who is to be the son of that boy will never say "is being washed" or "is being built," unless he should prove to be one of those graceless wretches who show no respect for their parents. The man who is under the hands of the barber is *getting* shaved, but *being* shaved he walks out of the shop. Horace was 'getting' rid of the bore when he was witnessing the arrest, but 'being' rid of him he continued his walk.

When the reverend author of "A Shakespearian Grammar" uses "Is being taught" to denote progressive action he does what Shakespeare never did. Shakespeare says,

"We but teach
Bloody instructions, which
To plague the inventor."

Does Shakespeare mean to imply that the bloody instructions "are being taught" while they are returning to plague the inventor? Does he mean to tell us that the teaching is going on, not completed? We all know he means that after the instructions have been taught they return to plague the inventor. Antony, furious when he sees the messenger of Cæsar kissing the hand of Cleopatra, cries out,

"Whip him, fellows,
Till, like a boy, you see him cringe his face
And cry aloud for mercy. Take him hence!"
"Tug him away! 'Being whipped,'
Bring him again."

Did Antony order his servants to bring the messenger while they were whipping him? When he was started on his way back to Antony I think the messenger was under