

A NOTE ON THE USE OF RUSSIAN AND NORSE MEASUREMENTS BY EARLY NORMAN BUILDERS.

By N. BELAIEW.

Some time ago, while paying a short visit to Torquay, I visited Cockington parish church. The vicar of this Parish, the Rev. T. C. Walters, M.A., has issued a pamphlet giving a short description of this church and a report of events relating to the history of Cockington. In an appendix to this pamphlet he gives a short note which he calls 'Evidence of the Norse measurements used by the early Norman builders.' He shows that, with regard to the dimensions of the width of Torre abbey church, the total width is 49 feet, or 7 sajenes, 1 sajene being equal to 7 feet. The total width of St. Marychurch parish church is 21 feet, Kingskerswell church is also 21 feet wide, and Cockington church 14 feet.

Even more interesting are the dimensions of the walls and arcades of Torre abbey church. For instance, the north wall is 4 ft. 8 in., or 56 inches. This means nothing in yards, but it is exactly 2 arschines, 1 arschine being 28 inches, or one-third of a sajene. The width of the aisle is 4 arschines, the arcade on the line of the original north wall is 2 arschines, the nave 11 and the south wall 2 arschines.

From these brief remarks it becomes quite evident that the measurements used by the early Norman builders were arschines and sajenes, these measurements being still in use in Russia. How are we to explain that simultaneously in Russia and in England up to the present day the same measurements, as far as foot and inch are concerned, are still in use, and that, if England has now discontinued the use of the arschine and sajene, which have become only Russian measures, they were in use in this country in the time of William the Conqueror and his son?

These measurements, as far as we can see, were never used by the early Saxon builders, but were brought to this

country by the Normans. This appears to give us the clue to the question. If we agree that such measurements as inch, foot, arschine and sajene are neither English nor Russian, but, as the Rev. T. C. Walters rightly calls them, Norse measurements, then it becomes evident that these Norse measurements were brought by the Normans to Russia in the ninth century, to Normandy in France in the next century, and to England with the Conqueror.

As centuries passed, the English forgot the arschine and the sajene and invented the yard, which was equal to 3 feet, whereas the Russians faithfully conserved not only the foot and inch but the arschine and sajene as well.

I think that this small point may be of interest, as being one of many signs that from the point of view of culture we have some features in common.