Art. VII.—THE MONTH.

THE Session of Convocation during the past month was of considerable importance, as it marks a step further—and it may be also a step backward—in the movement for the creation of a "Representative Church Council." After the election and confirmation of the Dean of Windsor as Prolocutor, to the universal satisfaction of the Lower House, the Archbishop at once proceeded to submit to the Upper House two resolutions respecting the proposed Council. He reminded the Bishops that certain resolutions for the creation of the Council were passed last July, laying down "in somewhat general terms what should be, in the opinion of those who passed them, the constitution of the Council when it was ultimately formed," and that a Committee of Bishops, clergy, and laity "should be appointed by the two Archbishops to prepare a scheme in detail to give effect to the resolutions, and to report to the Convocations and to the Houses of Laymen." The resolutions of the Joint Meeting of July, supplemented by the scheme of the Committee, were accordingly submitted by the Archbishop, and he then moved: "That this House, having considered the report of the Joint Meeting of members of Convocation and of the Houses of Laymen . . . requests the Archbishops . . . to summon in July, 1904 . . . a meeting of the Representative Church Council, whose constitution is set forth in the resolutions adopted by the aforesaid Joint Meeting and in the scheme prepared by the Committee. . . . And this House desires that the Representative Church Council should, at its first session, give further consideration to the question whether the initial franchise of lay electors should or should not be extended so as to include women."

Upon the first of these resolutions there was little debate in the Upper House, but certain declarations were made by the Archbishop and by the Bishop of London of which it is of great importance to take note, in reference to future proceedings on the subject. The Archbishop carefully explained, both in the Upper House and in an address which he subsequently gave to the Lower House, that, strictly speaking, every one of the six bodies who met in joint committee last July would have the right to amend the resolutions which were reported to them. But he urged that if each of the six bodies exercised this right, and reported their respective amendments to another joint meeting, further amendments might then be introduced at that meeting, and the resolutions would then go back a second time to each of the six bodies

concerned, and we should be "launching on a series of backward and forward procedure of which I, personally, see no end." Accordingly, he urged that all amendments should be reserved for consideration at the next joint meeting in July, and that the Council should be summoned as provisionally in existence on the bases of the resolutions passed last year and of the supplementary scheme. The force of these practical considerations could not be questioned; but too much stress cannot well be laid on the assurances of the Archbishop that, in assenting to go forward on this provisional basis, none of the bodies concerned is pledged to a final acceptance of the Resolutions and the Scheme in their present form, or in the form they may assume next July. To the Upper House the Archbishop said that "the resolution did not ask their lordships either to adopt the Resolutions that were passed at the joint meeting, or to adopt the report of the Committee appointed at that sitting." "It seemed to him that, if they were to go forward practically, they must take what was then done as provisionally settled for the time, and give effect to it by letting the Council meet upon the lines which had been suggested. *That would in no way preclude the future reconsideration* of any point which concerned either the franchise of those who were to be electors, or the qualifications of those who were to be elected." Similarly, the Bishop of London, in seconding the resolution, said that "what had already been done was tentative. Nothing final had been arrived at." Again, in his address to the Lower House, the Archbishop said: "I perfectly admit that technically it would be in order to move any number of resolutions to modify or change what was done last July. . . . And we are perfectly prepared to admit the reconsideration of any part found to work badly. . . . We are in no kind of way finally binding ourselves now as to the constitution of that body."

It is of the more importance to bear these assurances and formal promises in mind, because an apprehension evidently prevailed in the Lower House that they would not be found to have much practical validity, the Archdeacon of London, for instance, saying that, "when the Council assembled, they would probably be told that it was too late to have any discussion at all" on such a matter as the relation of Convocation to the new Council. It would seem that it would be impossible for that to be said without stultifying, and even falsifying, the most solemn assurances of the Archbishop. The Lower House accordingly made the situation plainer by adopting amendments in the resolutions suggested to them, which were subsequently accepted by the Upper House. It was first resolved that the resolutions and the scheme be "received," without

saying anything as to their adoption; and it was explicitly understood that the question of such adoption was reserved for future consideration. It was indeed preposterous to ask the House, as was done by the resolution first suggested, to say that they had "considered" a scheme which, from some strange oversight, had actually not reached the hands of most of the members. The Lower House then proceeded to pass a second resolution, asking the Archbishops to summon a meeting of the Representative Church Council next July, but introduced the expression "provisional constitution," thus recording in its resolution the express assurances of the Archbishop. The position of the Lower House was thus fully safeguarded, and when the Archbishop subsequently induced the Upper House to substitute for the vaguer form which it had previously passed the form adopted by the Lower House, the whole Convocation became formally pledged, in the Bishop of London's words, to regard all the proceedings, both of last July and of next July, as "tentative."

In these circumstances it is, we think, much to be regretted that, on the impulsive motion of the Bishop of Colchester, the House should have suspended its standing orders and hastily entered on a discussion of the tentative resolutions of last July. It was probably something unique in the proceedings of a deliberative assembly that, after proposing and carrying the suspension of the standing orders in order to discuss the resolutions, the Bishop of Colchester should have explained that he was not himself prepared to lead the discussion, and hoped that someone else would do so. But, in point of fact, who could be prepared for the discussion? Not only did no one know that so momentous a question was coming forward, but no one knew, or could know, what was before the House for discussion. It was not yet known what is to be the franchise of the lay electors; it was not known whether it is desired that women should have votes; it is not yet known what subjects are to be treated as within the competence of the new Council; and, in short, everything is "tentative." Accordingly, after the discussion had proceeded a little way, the previous question was moved and carried, and premature discussions in the Lower House itself were thus averted. Chancellor Worlledge then moved and carried a resolution that "The relations between the Representative Church Council and the Houses of Convocation need more attention before the Council meets in July, and this House humbly requests . . . the President and . . . the Upper House to give the matter their further consideration." The point raised in this resolution is of the highest consequence, and attention was drawn to it by the Bishop of Oxford in the Upper House.

But after the positive assurances of the President as to the tentative character of all proceedings at the present moment, it is not likely that much attention will be given by the Upper House to the question before next July. The matter will be of the first consequence when the proposals for the Representative Council have reached their final stage, but until then we cannot know what we are dealing with. For this reason we deem it unfortunate that, probably under the influence of the apprehension expressed by the Archdeacon of London in the observation already quoted, the House appointed a Committee "to report at the next group of sessions on the resolutions and scheme dealing with the proposed Representative Church Council." This committee will not have before them either the actual constitution proposed for the Council or any definite statement of the duties of the Council; and the Bishops having been formally asked by the House to consider a momentous element in the proposed scheme, the committee will have to consider and report upon it without waiting for such consideration. The result may be to precipitate conclusions upon imperfect data, and thus to embarrass the House and its members in future and more practical deliberations. The House was in the strong position of being pledged to nothing until it had the final scheme before it, and of being then perfectly free to discuss and amend any part of it. If, in consequence of the report of this committee, its view of future proposals should be in any way pledged or prejudiced, its freedom of action will be so far compromised. In this respect the action of the Lower House can only be regarded as a step backwards. The Resolutions and the Scheme of the Committee are thrown into a crucible by the Lower House, and the premature discussion, which was deprecated by the Archbishop, will have already begun before the Joint Committee meets. If the course thus taken only involved delay in what seems to us a very anxious, if not dangerous, course of policy, we should hardly regret it; but we fear it may have more inconvenient consequences.

The second resolution, recommending the reconsideration by the Joint Committee of the question "whether the initial franchise of lay electors should or should not be extended so as to include women," was passed by both Houses, though the Lower House refused to give the question the exceptional importance of desiring that it should be considered at the first session. Nevertheless, it must needs be considered at the first session, for the Council cannot be considered really in existence until the franchise on which its lay members are to be elected has been determined; and there is a practical conflict between the resolution on the subject passed last

July and the recommendation of the committee. The latter, speaking broadly, recommends a vestry franchise which would include some women, whereas the former explicitly confines the franchise to the male sex. Here, again, there were assurances on all hands, from the Archbishop downwards, that the resolution passed by Convocation recommending the consideration of the subject in no way pledged anyone who voted for it. It seemed, in fact, from the debate in the Upper House that there will be an acute conflict of opinion among the Bishops on the subject, the Bishop of Worcester intimating a strong opinion in favour of admitting women, and the Bishops of Bath and Wells and of Oxford indicating, to say the least, great doubt as to its desirableness. A similar conflict of opinion was foreshadowed in the Lower House, and it is evident that both in itself and in its consequences the question will prove of great importance.

A meeting was recently held in which the admission of women to the suffrage was urgently pressed by the Bishop of Worcester and the Dean of Arches; but we doubt whether the speeches at the meeting will either have advanced the cause itself or done any good to the prospects of the Council. There was, in the first place, in more than one of the speeches, the tone of badinage which is common in dealing with this subject, but which is of ill-omen for its introduction into a serious scheme for Church representation. But, in the next place, the Bishop of Worcester was constrained to admit that the present position of women in Church work was somewhat out of harmony with St. Paul's ideal, and this cannot but suggest the inquiry how far we are to go from St. Paul's ideal. Worst of all, the Dean of Arches expressed the opinion that the form in which the lay franchise was settled by the resolution of the Joint Committee was due to "haste and miscalculation." Of course there was haste, for how can any important subject be debated in the ten-minute speeches which were all that the Archbishop allowed? And if there be haste there must needs be miscalculation. What security have we that similar haste and miscalculation has not affected the whole scheme, or that it will not be similarly affected in the future? There are many persons who will continue to view with grave anxiety the eagerness of some of the Bishops to throw the whole constitution of the Church into the melting-pot; and the depth of this anxiety will hardly be lessened by the proceedings we have been reviewing. The only satisfactory point in the situation is that all the proceedings are avowedly tentative. So, we trust, they will long remain.