

Eldership, submitted to the third General Council of the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian system, held in Belfast in 1884, is the following statement:—

*Term of Service.*—At the first, elders were elected in nearly all the Reformed Churches annually. In most Presbyterian Churches at the present time, however, the term of office is *ad vitam aut culpam*. "If they demit their office, the congregation should be very cautious in again calling them to exercise it." (*Canadian Book of Polity*, p. 45.) In the Reformed Church of the United States the term of office is determined by each congregation, but it is usually for two years, the parties being eligible for re-election. In the United Presbyterian Church of North America it is provided, (1) "That it is the imperative duty of the elder to resign whenever his influence is so impaired from any cause that he cannot exercise his office efficiently in the congregation in which he is installed;" (2) "That when it is evident that an elder has become unacceptable and inefficient in a congregation, it is the privilege of that congregation to ask him to resign; and if the end be not thereby accomplished, in conjunction with the Session, may lay the matter before the Presbytery for their action."

In the Presbyterian Church of the United States, North, it was enacted in 1875 as follows: "If any particular Church, by a vote of members in full communion, shall prefer to elect Ruling Elders for a limited time in the exercise of their functions, this may be done." But in this case the office is held to be perpetual though the exercise of its functions may cease. The elder whose term of office has expired is eligible for re-election. If not re-elected, he is still an elder. Such elders, by due appointment of the Session or Presbytery, may become members of any of the courts of the Church above the Session.—(*Hodge's Presbyterian Law*, p. 297.)

From this statement it appears that there is considerable diversity of practice in the several branches of the Presbyterian Church in regard to the tenure of office in the eldership, and that the question is therefore one which is not revolutionary in its nature, and is fairly entitled to be discussed on its merits.

Of course, it must be interesting to know how the "rotary" system works in the Churches that have adopted it. As it is not practised in any of the British Churches, so far as we know, we naturally look to the Presbyterian Churches of the United States. The Dutch Reformed Church in that country has incorporated the "Term-Service" as a part of its polity, and its ministers

speak approvingly of it. They find no more difficulty in electing or re-electing an elder every two years than in the case of electing a trustee or manager of a congregation for a like period. Some time ago we endeavoured to ascertain the mind of a number of leading ministers and elders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America on this subject, and now submit a few extracts from the replies to our enquiries:—

I. *Cleveland, Ohio*, 18th May, 1885:—"The New School Body had generally adopted it before the Union, and its use has increased since then. Personally, I like it exceedingly. It has been in vogue in my own Church ever since its organization, forty years ago, and some men are in my session now who have had continuous service—or nearly so—as elders, ever since, being re-elected every three years. It need not make frequent changes, yet it gives opportunity for them if desirable, or if any of the Session cease to represent the Church."

II. *Philadelphia*, 18th May, 1885:—"We have found the "Term-Service" work to the satisfaction of our Congregation, and others speak well of it. There is, however, a difference of opinion among the brethren with regard to the matter."

III. *Washington*, 18th May, 1885:—"Term-Service" for the Eldership has been very extensively adopted in our Church, and so far as my knowledge extends it has been found decidedly advantageous. It has certainly increased the efficiency of many sessions, and I think that wherever it has been tried, its superior usefulness has been acknowledged.—(An Elder.)

IV. *New York*, 18th May, 1885:—"In none of the Presbyterian Churches of which I have any intimate knowledge here are the elders elected for a specified term. It is my impression that in the vast majority of congregations in the United States, elders are elected for life or during good behaviour. The plan of electing them for a limited term is an experiment, the result of which I will feel much interest in learning, as I think the idea is a good one.—(An Elder.)

V. *Cleveland*, 8th June, 1885:—"The "rotary" system prevails almost universally in this locality. The permanent system would not answer here at all. Practically, the old members of Session are almost without exception re-elected from time to time; at the same time an opportunity is afforded to correct any mistakes which may have been made in the election of undesirable elders.—(An Elder.)

VI. *Indianapolis*, May 20th, 1885:—"In some sections of the country the "Term-Service" is more common than in others; but it has not been generally adopted in any section or State. In some of the States there are very few Churches organized under this plan. In Kentucky, for example, I think there is no Church that has adopted "Term-Service." My judgment is that, as a rule, it is not desirable, but there are cases where it is a relief. I think it would be a mistake to prohibit it. My own experience as a pastor is that serious evils are easily to grow out of a yearly election of elders, and I think that is the judgment of the mass of our ministers.

VII. *Hartford*, 18th May, 1885:—"The Term-Service has been adopted by many of our Churches, especially in the New West and in feeble Churches. In the more settled parts of the country and in larger Churches it has not been used to any great degree. Personally, I dislike it, as being practically an injury to pastor and people, and theoretically, as contrary to the principles of our form of Government.

VIII. *Brooklyn*, 18th May, 1885:—"My impression is that the great majority of our Churches adhere to the plan of a permanent eldership. I think the "rotary" system is regarded as a new and shorter method for getting rid of an obnoxious elder. I have had no experience of its working. My Church has never adopted it. I can see no more reason why an elder should be elected for a limited time than there is for stated-supplyship to be a substitute for the pastorate.

IX. *Princeton*, 16th May, 1885:—"The Term-Service of the Eldership has not been extensively adopted in this Church, and the practical operation of it is, in most