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Overture on the Eldership.

AMONG the overtures presented to last General Assembly was one pointing to the system of "Term-Service," as it has been called, in which the Assembly was asked to consider the advisability of establishing a system "by means of which, elders shall be appointed to serve for a term of not more than five years, those serving said term being eligible for re-election, and to devise some plan to secure this end, it being understood that any such arrangement shall not affect those now in the eldership." Owing to the late stage at which this overture was introduced, it was decided that its consideration be deferred till next Assembly. There is every probability, therefore, of a lively discussion upon this subject at the forthcoming meeting in Hamilton, the birthplace of the overture. It is to be hoped that the "Ruling Elders," who have been or may yet be appointed commissioners, will in the meantime study up this subject, in which is involved the whole question of the status and functions of the order of Presbyters to which they belong, and that they will come prepared to take an intelligent part in a discussion that ought to be specially interesting to the laity.

The theory upon which nearly all Presbyterian Churches base their polity in this

regard is, that while the New Testament recognizes but one order of Presbyters, in it there are two degrees or classes, known as *Teaching Elders* and *Ruling Elders*. There are those who hold with Professor Witherow, of Londonderry,* that inasmuch as the terms "Overseer," or Bishop, "Presbyter" and "Elder," are used interchangeably in the New Testament, it is proper to concede to all Presbyters equal rights, to teach,—if they can—to rule, to administer the sacraments, to take part in the ordination of ministers, to preside in Church courts and generally to exercise all the functions of the ministry. But this is not claimed by the elders themselves as a class, and it is well, in considering this question, to recognize the position assigned to lay elders by the Churches of the present time, rather than to expend argument as to the nature of the office of "the Scriptural Elder." It is not difficult to account for the departure from the original use and want of the primitive Church. To be of any practical benefit, the overture should be regarded in the light of modern usage and with the single aim of increasing the usefulness of the class of office-bearers to which it refers. In the report on the

*THE NEW TESTAMENT ELDER, his position, powers and duties in the Christian Church. James Bain & Son, Toronto.