

Memoir of Rev. Abner Goff

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Rev. Abner Goff was born in Shaftsbury, in the state of Vermont, November 4, 1782. Of his early life and religious training, we have no means of knowing anything. In 1800 he was united in marriage to Patty Hudson, and settled in his native place, where he resided till some time in the year 1813, when he removed to the west, and settled in Licking county, in the state of Ohio, where his family have lived to the present time.

In 1809 brother Goff gave his attention to the subject of religion. He sought, and soon obtained a full and free pardon of all his sins. His conviction was deep, and his conversion was sound and clear. He united himself with the Methodist Episcopal Church, and was soon after licensed as a local preacher. Before he left his native state he traveled one year as an itinerant preacher, under the presiding elder of the district. In 1819 brother Goff was admitted on trial as an itinerant preacher in the Ohio conference, and was appointed to Fairfield circuit, where he traveled two years. During his probation he gave satisfactory proofs of his gifts, grace, and usefulness, and in 1821 he was received into full connection with the conference. From the time of his connection with the conference till 1841 he was an effective and faithful minister of Christ. He traveled, consecutively, the following-named circuits: Fairfield, Granville, Muskingum, Knox, Mansfield, Wayne, Delaware, Mansfield, Granville, Knox, two years; Putnam, Mt. Gilead, Granville, Worthington, two years; Roscoe, Putnam, Irville, Hebron, and Irville again, where his effective labors in the itinerant ministry ended.

In 1842 brother Goff's name was placed on the supernumerary list, and to the day of his death he sustained to the conference a supernumerary or superannuated relation, as his declining health and increasing infirmities demanded. During most of the time of his effective labors the country was new, his family large, and ministerial support very limited; he was therefore, accommodated with work near his residence. But although he was several times appointed to the same fields of labor, he was acceptable among the people, and they always received him as the messenger of God, and treated him with great kindness and respect.

Brother Goff was acknowledged by all who knew him to be a good man. His moral, religious, and ministerial character was unblemished and irreproachable. He was held in the highest esteem by his neighbors, and those with whom he associated. In the society and community where he lived thirty-five years, no preacher was heard with more pleasure than brother Goff, and he was always ready cheerfully to labor to the extent of his ability, when necessity demanded. If the regular minister failed to meet his appointment and brother Goff was present the congregations were never disappointed.

As a preacher his talents were of mediocrity, and his sermons were clear, sound, and Scriptural, and always acceptable to the people among whom he labored. He was plain, artless, and solemn in his style and address. He never studied to please the ears of his hearers with pleasant sounds, nor to dazzle them with shining things. He was a plain, practical Methodist preacher – he aim was at the hearts of the people, and the conscience was not quiet in sin when he preached. He was serious in and out of the pulpit, never trifling, never light. He did not allow himself to speak evil of any person, or to utter an idle word. He was very reserved in his manners; possibly he carried this too far, but it appeared to be a principle with him never to be obtrusive with his words or opinions. With his friends, and when good counsel was necessary, he was communicative and free; but he did not talk to be heard by himself, or to amuse others. The temperament of his nature, and the restraints which he imposed upon himself, sometimes inclined him to dejection of spirits. His piety was deep and consistent, but his spiritual comforts were not always prominent. His temperament had a strong and decided influence upon the state of his mind; but it is believed that disease and the infirmities of age had a far greater influence upon the state of his mind than anything else. During the time that he sustained the supernumerary and superannuated relations to the conference he seldom attended its sessions. A disease of the heart, with which he had long been afflicted, and the infirmities of age gradually increased, exhausting his strength; and as his health failed he become more and more subject to depression of spirit. Indulging the hope that he might be restored to health and soundness of mind, he was brought to Columbus, and committed to the care of Dr. Hills, some time last winter. But the hopes of his family and friends were not realized. From that time his health failed rapidly, and his mind fell into most gloomy, discouraging, and fearful apprehensions. The horrors of despair constantly preyed upon him. From this unhappy state of mind, however, he was mercifully delivered, and his mind became clear and quietly fixed on the promises of the Gospel as in other days, and for some ten days before his release from suffering and from earth the state of his mind was calm and lucid as in the days of his strength. He talked of the past and the future with great composure. His confidence was firm, his hope was strong, and his happiness was inexpressible, and to the last moment of his earthly existence his peace was without interruption. Though from home, he was surrounded by his family and friends, who ministered to his wants, and witnessed with what composure and confidence a good man can die. His sufferings were protracted and most intense, but when they were most extreme, and his mind in its most melancholy state, he was patient, submissive and childlike in his demeanor. No word deserving censure escaped his lips. He received the kind attention of his physician and friends with expressions of the most affectionate gratitude.

Brother Goff died in the city of Columbus, Ohio, on the 15th day of March, 1857.