

[Dumfries Courier, reprinted in the Sydney Gazette]

20/4/1827

AFFECTING CIRCUMSTANCE

Mr. Pagan, of Curriestanes, has a hay stack at Starryheugh, on the Castle-Douglas road; and yesterday week a man was discovered lying at the farther end of it in a state of the most dreadful destitution. Sleeping and waking he had spent six days and seven nights at the said secluded spot, with no other shelter from the rain and the wind, save what was afforded by a layer of hay. While his strength permitted, he occasionally crawled to the side of a ditch, and devoured chicken-weed, and when this resource failed him, he was actually compelled by the cravings of hunger to chew and swallow small quantities of hay. This is the man's own statement, and it is borne out by so many collateral circumstances, that Mr. Pagan and others have no doubt whatever of its truth. He was seen on the Tuesday or Wednesday preceding, by the servant of a drover, who had cattle in the park, but no attempt was made to disturb him, from an impression that he was asleep from the effects of liquor. His frame was spent to the last degree of emaciation, and, to use the words of Mrs. Pagan, "he was so light that an old and feeble woman might have lifted him in her arms like a little child."

Although decently dressed, he had no money, and as he could not bring himself to solicit charity, he was slowly awaiting the approach of death, in one of its most painful and lingering forms. It was on Monday week that the frost commenced, and if he had remained without another night, it is more than probable that cold, acting as the ally of hunger, would have terminated his sufferings before morning. But an all kind Providence overruled and averted that appointment; and the sufferer was discovered by John Grierson, who, though a poor man, has as kind a heart, as ever warmed a breast. By his exertions a cart was procured, and the man conveyed to Curriestanes, where the most humane attentions were paid to him by the family. His feet were washed, his sores dressed, and wine and other restoratives administered in such quantities as his situation required; and when he had recovered so far as to tell his story, poor Grierson, who has experienced much of the hardships of life himself, was so much affected, that he went to his master, and with tears in his eyes borrowed a shilling for the man's behoof. Notice of all the circumstances was sent to the Rev. Mr. Thourburn, and although he could not visit the sufferer at the time, he desired that every care might be taken of him, and generously offered to defray all expenses. In the evening a comfortable lodging was procured to him in Maxwelltown, where the man now lies in a convalescent state. All the neighbours became interested in his fate, and Mr. Fleming, in particular, has been unceasing in his attentions. The account the man gives of himself is as follows:- His name is John Barclay; he was born in Lanarkshire, and bred a sailor. For the last eight years he had sailed in a vessel belonging to London, but having been long absent from Scotland, he felt a strong desire to revisit his native country. He did so and learned, to his bitter regret, and disappointment, that his friends, with one or two exceptions, were either dead or dispersed.

In these circumstances he was anxious to return to London, and proceed to Greenock, in hopes of being allowed to work his passage in some vessel bound to the Thames. Being disappointed in this, he walked to Portpatrick; was disappointed a second time from the state of the weather, and then formed the resolution of walking to Dumfries, crossing the Solway in a coal-boat, and endeavouring to procure a passage from Maryport or Whitehaven. Whilst on the road he was attacked with a severe bowel complaint, which frequently compelled him to sit down, and by the time he arrived at

the nine mile tollbar, he was, to use his own expressive words, completely "done up." There he parted with the last farthing he possessed in the world for a little bread, and that was the only suitable sustenance he tasted for the long period of seven days. Though his feet were blistered to a shocking degree, he still crawled onward the best way he could, and on observing the hay-stack at Starryheugh, he repaired to its side, made himself a bed on the cold ground, and determined to die rather than beg. To this painful recital we have only to add, that Mr. Barclay had every appearance of being a respectable man. He has evidently seen better days; and his story is believed by all who have conversed with him. His wife died in childbed several years ago, and he has no relations who are in a situation to assist him, or to whom he chose to make his poverty known. On Saturday last he felt very unwell, but as good hopes are entertained of his ultimate recovery, we trust the humane and charitable will come forward and afford him the means of pursuing his journey comfortably to London. We understand that Mr. Fleming, merchant, has been laudably active in procuring subscriptions in his behalf.