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Man and Nature - An extract of "Teachers in Quarantine" by Donald McDonald

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The establishment of the station dates back to the early fifties when the ship of doom, the *Ticonderoga*, sailed through the Heads freighted with pestilence and death. She was from New York with Emigrants, and yellow fever, the scourge and terror of the rich southern states of America, broke out on board; and as far as I know "Yellow Jack" had his first and last footing upon Australian soil. The passengers were isolated here, and the geographical features of the land made isolation perfect. Otherwise we might by this time be quite on familiar terms with yellow fever, regarding it lightly as one of the afflictions of humanity, which having been acclimatised thus early in our history, would have been in any case inevitable. The *Ticonderoga* left a rather sad record on Nepean, where 270 of her passengers were buried. In the broken-down cemetery below the station, *Ticonderoga* is the significant word upon some of the smouldering head-stones that are being eaten away by the salt winds and mosses, which are the vandals and scavengers of time.

One hot day 25 years ago I rested with others in the shade of some thick tea-tree and we sat upon little moss-clothed squares of sandstone that seemed to have been cut for rough seats. The eye running carelessly over the mossy faces began in a little while to realise hieroglyphs in the clustering moss, and slowly we realised that inscriptions upon long-hidden long-forgotten tombstones - the relics of the *Ticonderoga*. They were scattered all over the flat fronting the bay. Many were afterwards discovered; many are no doubt yet concealed by the scrub and clustering clematis and ice plant, to be revealed during the next few weeks to the students of a nature class hunting for specimens. Most of them have no doubt crumbled away, or in the expansion of the station have been cleared off without a thought of their significance. The burials were much hurried in the *Ticonderoga's* time, the graves very shallow, the tombstones rough and small, very apt to be mistaken, after fifty years, for sandstone boulders. The last

survivor of the *Ticonderoga* was said to be John Kettle Thomson, who died lately in Melbourne. He came as a boy upon the plague ship. His father was one of the victims; his mother never got beyond the doorway of the new country to which they had come, but settled down upon the peninsula, which is the cradle of the state. Whole families were lost amongst the victims of the pestilence - upon one tombstone, which has evidently been renewed, is cut the names of Janet, Malcolm, Farquhar, Angus and John McRae.