

## The Spanish Maiden



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### Story outline

It was in April, 1889, that the discussion took place respecting the offer or loan of the picture entitled the "Spanish Maiden," a nude female figure, which is now hung in the present gallery. A series of very ably written and amusing letters appeared in the Advertiser by advocates for and against the acceptance of the picture, which was finally refused admission on the score of propriety.

Mr George Knight withdraws his painting from the Gallery in May 1889 - Letter #14.

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*Mr George Knight's offer*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Wed 1 May 1889 Page 3**

#### REPORTS.

The selection committee reported having met recently for the purpose of considering the desirability or otherwise of accepting Mr G W Knight's offer to lend his picture called "The Spanish Maiden", recently purchased by him at the Centennial Exhibition. There were present: Messrs Vahland (in the chair), A Bayne, J W Rymer, and R H S Abbott. It was decided to recommend the executive committee to accept Mr Knight's offer.

Mr Rymer complained that the report did not set forth in detail what transpired at the meeting of the selection committee. He stated that the recommendation was only carried on the casting vote of the chairman (Mr Vahland), as both Mr Bayne and himself (Mr Rymer) voted against the acceptance of the offer. Mr Herman failed to see how the gentlemen who had selected the pictures "Mentionni" and "The Nymph" could offer any objection to hanging such a fine work of art as "The Spanish Maiden." He moved the adoption of the report.

Mr Vahland seconded the motion. Mr Macgillivray said that seeing they were only occupying the building temporarily, and especially as a number of young girls, pupils of the School of Mines, were frequently engaged in taking lessons in telegraphy in the gallery, he thought it would be unwise to hang a picture to which objections might be raised. He moved an amendment, "that the committee whilst thanking Mr Knight for his kind offer, regret that at present they cannot see their way to hang the picture in the gallery."

Mr Rymer seconded the amendment, which was supported by Messrs Abbott, Bayne and Robshaw, and the Rev J Gartlick. The motion was lost by 7 votes to 2. Mr Herman then moved a further amendment, "that the whole matter of objectionable pictures be referred to the general committee." Mr Vahland seconded this amendment which was lost.

Mr Macgillivray's proposition was then put and carried, and the meeting closed.

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*"A SPANISH MAIDEN."*

*Letter #1*

*by George W Knight*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Thu 2 May 1889 Page 3**

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir, - The most beautiful animal on the face of the earth is woman; next, though more roughly hewn, is man, and, thirdly, comes the horse, the whole being the result of evolution, the products of the Almighty laws of God.

Rosa Bonheur sees no impropriety in painting the stallion, and no outcry of her immodesty has ever been raised in the world because she portrays the works of the Creator.

The life-sized oil-painting in question is an original by Jose Guherrez, of Madrid, A.D. 1837, a very celebrated Spanish painter. The picture cost 400 guineas 52 years ago. It is "A Spanish Maiden" in all the purity and innocence of expression true to the model of the Great Architect of the Universe.

A minister of the gospel (so-called by compliment) fills the chair of the art gallery committee in Sandhurst, and blushes for shame that the beautiful work of his Creator should be reproduced on canvas, and hung on the walls of the art gallery.

This picture was selected for a place of honour by the art judges of the Centennial Exhibition, Melbourne, hung there its whole season, and the letter I received from Sir Jas M'Bain speaks more to its merit as a work of art than any words of my own.

The self same picture together with the late Mr Rae's collection was hung for five or six months in the self same room at the Mechanics' Institute, when we had in our midst such men as Mr J Woodward, G Aspinall, W Rae, D MacDougal, R Andrews, R R Haverfield and others, the loss of such mind power in a small city like this is irreparable.

The consistency is charming. The Sandhurst committee buy from the French court, a life sized incorrectly drawn anatomical figure without a face, selected solely for the form of the limbs, for 70 or 80 guineas, by the self same gentlemen who reject a picture from the round of five times the value offered them on loan gratuitously.

When the Melbourne Exhibition closed I purposed forwarding it to Ballarat, and I told one of the committee that I felt quite sure it was far too beautiful to offer to lend to the Sandhurst Gallery, that it was beyond the art education of the committee. The result in no way surprised me, I did not think so many as three or four of the committee could appreciate its beauty.

"Beauty, like wit, to judges should be shown,

Both are most valued, where they best are known."  
I am, yours, etc, GEORGE W KNIGHT.  
1st May, 1889

[Sir James M'Bain's letter will be published tomorrow Letter #3.]

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*Letter #2*  
*by A LOVER OF ART*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- What was the primary objection of the initiation of the Sandhurst Art Gallery? Was it not to promote the study and development of high art, and has not the institution received the pecuniary support of over 100 subscribers with that end in view?

How is it then, Mr Editor, that when the generous loan of a valuable oil painting from the brush of a great Spanish artist is offered to the gallery that it takes a month to decide whether it shall grace or disgrace the existing collection? By your report of the executive committee's proceedings, the Rev J Garlick in the chair, it appears that the picture referred to has been rejected, on the ground of its being indelicate.

What meaneth this mock modesty in refusing to hang a noble work that has already excited the admiration of experts, although it does not meet the approval of so-called "business men" of prudish tastes? Why the very coins of the realm stigmatise such thoughts by the appropriate mottos, **honi soit qui mal y pense**.  
*(Meaning shame on him who thinks evil of it (the motto of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, a British order of knighthood.)*

It is very sad to think that the third city in the colony should lose such a masterpiece through the bungling and lack of wise judgement on the part of the sorry representatives of art in this district. I wonder how many of the committee are qualified to pronounce a genuine criticism upon this **chef-d'oeuvre**. *(meaning: a masterpiece: "the painting was made after a number of preliminary studies as a self-conscious chef d'oeuvre"*

But here is where the gross inconsistency comes in, affording evidence of the sophistic nature of the excuses given for objecting to this particular study.

1. The picture has been already hung for several months in the self-same room where the "goody-goodies" now think it is unfit to be exposed.
2. It was purchased and possessed by a wealthy English connoisseur in art.
3. It was passed by the select hanging committee at the Centennial Exhibition.
4. It was viewed and appreciated by a vast assemblage of visitors equal to five times the population of Victoria.
5. It was pronounced by the principal official authorities to be the finest piece of flesh painting that they had ever seen.
6. Sir James MacBain, on behalf of the Commissioners, sent a special letter of thanks to the exhibitor (who kindly offered to lend it to our gallery) for having afforded the greatest pleasure and delight to all who had seen it.

Again, they go to Melbourne and buy a painting of another undraped female form entitled "Summer", a picture of less merit (although costing £85), yet they are too fearful of exciting an immoral tone among art students by exhibiting the "Spanish Maiden".

Moreover, they seem to forget that in their last purchase the face is hidden, while the anatomically defective limbs constitute the chief feature, but "decline with thanks," the picture alluded to, notwithstanding the "human face divine" is the predominating characteristic - the body being a secondary consideration in the artist's effort to "paint like Nature."

But - "Knowing that Nature never did betray The heart that loved her," it is hard to find other than reproachful words to express one's opinion of such singular conduct on the part of the custodians of the Sandhurst Fine Art Gallery.

I am, etc,  
A LOVER OF ART.

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*Melbourne Centennial Exhibition 1888-9*

*Letter#3*

*James MacBain*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Fri 3 May 1889 Page 3**

"A SPANISH MAIDEN"

*The following is a copy of Sir J MacBain's letter referred to in Mr G W Knight's letter published in yesterday's issue, touching the refusal of the Art Gallery committee to allow his picture, "The Spanish Maiden," to be hung in the gallery:*

*Executive Commissioners to Mr George W Knight.*

*Melbourne, April, 1889.*

Sir,- On behalf of myself and colleagues the Executive Commissioners of the Melbourne Centennial Exhibition 1888-9, I have the honour to tender you our warmest thanks for the very generous manner in which you have assisted towards the success of the undertaking by the loan of your valuable picture, 'The Spanish Maiden'.

The Victorian loan collection of works of art was one of the great attractions of the Exhibition, and it will no doubt be a source of gratification to you to know that you have contributed so largely to the pleasure and instruction of so many of your fellow colonists both in Victoria and the other Australian colonies.

I have the honor to be, sir,  
Your obedient servant,  
JAS MACBAIN, President.

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*Letter #4*

*by the Rev John Garlick*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- Mr G W Knight, and "Lover of Art," in their letters of your issue today show very clearly, that so far as my individual action is concerned, with respect to the decision arrived at by the executive committee of the Art Gallery, they know very little, or ignore a great deal

about what they write. They both seem anxious that the responsibility of excluding the painting should be saddled on me, who according to the former, am "*a minister of the gospel, so called by compliment.*"

Mr Knight's bracketed sentence would seem to convey the *raison d'etre* (*meaning the most important reason or purpose*) of his letter. The report of the meeting as given in the ADVERTISER of Wednesday, upon which both letters purport to be based, certainly does not give prominence to any action of mine, it does not even mention that I was in the chair, but that Dr Macgillivray occupied that position, which was quite true, until he was called away, and of the part I took, all that is said in the report is, that the amendment (which was an amendment on a motion, affirmative of the adoption of what was called a report of the selection committee), proposed and seconded by two prominent members of the council, "was supported by Messrs Abbott, Bayne and Robshaw and the Rev J Garlick."

Was I singled out then because I am "a minister of the Gospel, so called by compliment" and as an awful example of the baneful influence such miserable creatures as ministers of the Gospel may be expected to exercise upon the fostering and advancement of art? If not, why was my calling so contemptuously alluded to? Mr Knight may rest assured that his *bete noire* (*meaning a person or thing that one particularly dislikes*) "a minister of the Gospel, so called by compliment," took no more active part than the rest of the committee who voted against the admission of the picture.

Nor was the "minister of the Gospel, so called by compliment," in the least responsible for the independent action taken by each of the other gentlemen. And it may be as well that both your correspondents should be informed, if they do not already know, that the Art Gallery executive committee is made up of gentlemen, who for practical common sense, good judgement, upright and pure motives, and due appreciation of art, may without fear of loss, be pitted against themselves.

But putting aside the covert implication that the admission of the picture was refused through the influence of the "minister of the Gospel, so called by compliment," an implication that Mr Knight must surely see is unworthy of the intelligence with which he is generally credited. The fact remains that a kind and generous offer had to be refused, but neither of your correspondents asks why, or makes the slightest reference to the reasons alleged by the mover of the amendment, and embodied in your report of the meeting in question.

Two meetings of the executive committee have been called to consider the admission of the picture in question. At the first meeting the question was remitted to the selection committee to report on; their report (in reality, the opinion of the two gentlemen who proposed that it be received at the first meeting), was considered at the meeting held on Tuesday. At neither meeting were the merits of the picture, as a work of art, discussed at all, nor was the opinion expressed that the exhibition of such pictures, under proper supervision, was indelicate or demoralising.

"A Lover of Art," therefore, is intensely wrong when he says it "has been rejected on the grounds of being indelicate." Two grounds, and only two were urged for the non admission of the picture in the present conditions of the art gallery, viz.

1. In the present stage of its existence the gallery is small, in some respects meagre, and that, as its main object is education in art, taste and refinement, it would be alike inexpedient and

unwise to give an undue preponderance to any one class of painting, the class represented by the picture in question, it being held, is already quite sufficiently numerous for the size of the gallery.

2. That as the art gallery occupies the lecture hall of the School of Mines upon sufferance, the place being used for other purposes, notably for the practice in telegraphy, of young ladies in classes, or individually, their attendance being in a certain sense compulsory, and that, in the absence of any responsible officer, boys have been known to visit the gallery, and, in the presence of these young ladies, to make remarks about the pictures, which were certainly not dictated by a love of art.

It was held that the committee should hesitate before they admit any other pictures of the class referred to, so long as they occupy their present quarters. Of course, sir, the members of the Art Gallery committee know, as well as your correspondents can tell them, the great depth perfect beauty there is in the sentiments expressed by such aphorisms as "To the pure all things are pure," Honi soit qui mal y pense, etc, but they know also the danger to which the healthy development of these lofty sentiments may be exposed by a too careless and unconditional application of them.

It may, perhaps, in some respects, be unfortunate that the committee has, in this early stage of its history, been placed in the unpleasant position of feeling themselves compelled, from force of circumstances, to refuse the generous offer of what might practically be a perpetual loan of a high-class work of art, because by some friends of the gallery it may be thought the refusal will have the tendency to check other liberal donors and lenders.

But I do not think so. I think it will have the effect of urging the committee to renewed efforts to procure a building of their own wherein they may make such provision as in their wisdom they shall deem fit for the reception of such offers.

Yours, etc,  
JOHN GARLICK.  
Sandhurst, 2nd May.

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*Letter #5*  
*by J H POTTER*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- As I have taken some pains in endeavouring to secure the picture of the "Spanish Maiden" for the Sandhurst Art Gallery, I feel that owing to its rejection by the executive committee I have a word to say. Being a member of the general committee myself, I have the interests of the art gallery at heart, and from my education in art lore and experience in most of the old world countries (through visitation of the famous European galleries and study at South Kensington), my opinion may be deemed worthy of consideration.

I should like to follow in the wake of art experts and critics, and since the best colonial authorities have pronounced the picture in question to be a genuine work of art, even eulogising to a high degree the exquisiteness of the flesh coloring. I believe it to be wise to submit to the dictum of such eminent specialists.

I know most of the members of the Art Gallery committee, and a worthy set of men they are. Their business capacities as tradesmen are undoubted, but as regards their



knowledge of art and art culture, I have never seen their pictures exhibited in their homes nor heard their knowledge of painters and paintings anywhere.

From my own observation, I positively know that two nude pictures have been exhibited for sometime in the gallery, and no objection was taken to such showy paintings, but as soon as a splendid "work of art" is offered to the gallery, the "worked up caucus" damn "the true, the beautiful and the good."

It may be a great pleasure to some ignorant people to know that the Apostles of the so-called "fleshy school" are crucified in Bendigo, but nevertheless the name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the leader of the school of painting characterised by his enemies as one of the "beauty unadorned" people dwells in the minds of thousands who live in a world of art "far from the madding crowd."

Apparently Bendigo is doomed as a progressive city. It is well known that Ballarat receives visits constantly from distinguished visitors in order to see the beauty of their buildings, the statuary of their parks and the pictures in their gallery; but who, amongst the learned and cultured, ever think of visiting Bendigo?

Even the Governor's visits are like angel's surprises; the reason being very well known. There are large-hearted, liberal minded and public spirited men in Ballarat who, from their position and training can entertain and display to their guests the progressive and advancing strides of their city alike in architecture, industry and art.

But where are they to be found here? The Government seems to look upon Sandhurst as an eye-sore, for the ministry seldom appear in our midst, and rarely grant the needed requirements of a rising and growing population; no wonder! when we find men in their wrong position, "rushing in where angels fear to tread."

The Art Gallery Committee is practically ruled by the same class who wield the power in all our public institutions, such as the School of Mines, Mechanics Institute, Hospital, and Benevolent Societies. How many of the intelligent young colonials are represented on these boards? Echo answers nil.

The inconsistency of the Art Committee, the short-sightedness of those who voted against the admission of the picture, combined with the "churchy clique" who controlled the meeting, are sufficient to make the true devotees of art give up the work of trying to educate a certain class in our community to aspire towards nature and nature's ways.

The statuary of the old world, such as Power's Greek Slave, the Ladcoon, Canova's Venus, Venus de Medici, and Venus de Milo, are prized in the original, and as "copies" in all the famous museums in the world, and even Mr Boehm, the Queen's sculptor's greatest efforts are in the nude, and those who have seen Whistler's Roman Haroes, Rembrandts etchings in Dusseldorf, along with Reuben's Raphael's and Titian's finest works, which are exhibits in Paris, Brussels, and Antwerp, prove that the old masters of the Flemish school did not think it imprudent to paint what the God of purity designed for great and high functions in the world of "prudery, false delicacy and hypocrisy."

-Yours, etc,

J HUNTER POTTER.

Victoria House, Wattle Street, 1st May,

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*Letter #6*  
*"A SPANISH MAIDEN."*  
*by J W Rymer*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Sat 4 May 1889 Page 5**

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER)

Sir,- It is to be regretted that the writers who complain of the action of the executive committee in declining the loan of the picture referred to should have indulged in abuse and personalities, and wandered away from the reason given for declining the loan to discuss the merits of this and other pictures and then have an opportunity to air their supposed knowledge of art.

The real question at present at issue is - "Whether it is advisable to hang the picture or not, as the institution has no gallery of its own, and there are persons whose pursuit of education compels them to occupy the room now used as a gallery;" and if the complaints had been directed to this, much unpleasantness might have been avoided.

I have neither time nor desire just now to reply to the letter of the Rev H Potter as I would wish, but may some day amongst other things show him that there are intelligent young Colonials on some of these boards, that tradesmen can be, and are not only good art critics, but patrons of art and artists, and that some of the members of the executive committee have visited almost as many galleries, have seen almost as many pictures, and have nearly - without aspiring to have - as much art culture as he.

But after all is not further effort waste of time, for has not the rev. gentleman written, "apparently Bendigo is doomed as a progressive city." Poor Bendigo - unkind Hunter Potter! -Yours, etc.

J W RYMER.

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*Letter #7*  
*by ONLY A TRADESMAN*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- The Rev Hunter Potter with that charming modesty and self depreciation which is so characteristic of his utterances has entered the arena as champion of the "Spanish Maiden", and I have no doubt that he congratulated himself when he read his masterly effusion in print this morning on having administered the coup de grace to his opponents.

The opening paragraph in his letter gives his reason for this display of fiery zeal and is the key note to his amiable attack on those who have been so unfortunate as to differ with him. He says "that he has taken some pains to secure this picture for the Gallery." One cannot help wondering whether if he had not taken these pains he might not have been found roaring with equal ferocity on the other side.

What naturally strikes the observer most on reading the rev gentleman's letter is the amount of travelled research and culture that must be stacked up in that "admirable Crichton." His years are not many, but his receptive powers must be prodigious. He has been everywhere, seen everything, and what he has not acquired is not worth knowing.



Consequently, he never hesitates to attack, to admonish and lecture on any subject under the sun. Cosmogony, ethics, or the way to bring up a young family; art, science, literature, theology are at his fingers' ends. He knows more about medicine than any ordinary M.D.; would put to shame Huxley and Darwin in a flippantly delivered half hour's lecture and discourse art in a manner that would cause Ruskin to burn with envy.

All this to the admiration and astonishment of his little world - "And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew, That one small head could carry all he knew!" Can we wonder that this man of many powers and great abilities should chafe and fret while living in a place like Sandhurst, surrounded by "tradesmen" and people with such vulgar taste that they cannot see the propriety of placing a nude figure in a schoolgirls classroom.

Is it surprising that his eyes should turn longingly to Ballarat, where our brothers and sisters have by a strange and rapid process of evolution developed in a few years high-class culture that we are incapable of, and the want of which naturally vexes the reverend gentleman's soul, especially after his extensive experience in the great cities of Europe. I used to look upon the members of the Art Gallery committee as worthy men, fairly representative of the intelligence and culture of the district; but, after Mr Potter's remarks respecting their characters and surroundings (written from his own knowledge so that they must be correct), I have nothing but feelings of contempt for them.

How dare these men - merely tradesmen - such as earn their living by common honest labor - not cultured traders who have been to Europe and know every thing - take any interest in works of art, or try to adorn this city with picture galleries, libraries, and the like? Would such a thing be tolerated in Europe (to say nothing of Ballarat)? Did we ever hear of tradesmen acquiring picture galleries or other works of art in the old world? Of course not.

And I trust that this wretched committee, seeing the error of their ways, will at once retire into obscurity, and allow the cultured scholarly and polite Mr. Potter to take the matter in his own hands, to re-arrange the gallery and adorn it with copies of the Venus' Greek slaves and Spanish maidens, which filled his soul with poetic joy when he spent those long years of travel in Italy, Paris, Brussels, and Antwerp.

That I am a tradesman was formerly to me a matter of honest pride, but now I feel my insignificance and the disgrace of my position. But surely I may claim the Rev Hunter Potter as a brother tradesman in one respect, and may sum up his stock-in trade in one word of three syllables.

-Yours, etc.,

**ONLY A TRADESMAN.**

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*Letter #8  
by J H Potter*

(TO THE EDITOR OP THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- Yesterday I sent to you a letter with my name adhibited re the bigotry of the Art Gallery committee. Today I wish to give a true expose of the history of the hanging the "Spanish Maiden."

The lady in question was brought before the Executive Committee, in order to find out whether or no she was a fit subject for hanging. It was unanimously agreed that the jury should adjudicate on her case by referring the whole matter to the Select Hanging Committee.

This committee assembled and agreed that the lady should be hung, but when their recommendation was brought before the executive they annulled the judgement of the experts in art practically saying, we (the executive) know as much as you do, and more, and your judgement of pictures is not to be compared to ours. I may mention that this is the first time the select committee has met re the hanging of any picture, whether in the nude or otherwise.

Messrs Vahland and R H S Abbott voted strongly for the exhibition of the maiden, while Messrs Bayne and Rymer stoutly opposed the lady. When I heard that the select hanging committee were agreed, I canvassed a few of the executive, who were in favour of the scheme, but with the exception of Messrs Vahland and Herman, they were inconveniently absent on Tuesday last at the meeting. Intelligent men can read between the lines.

The reasons given by various members of the committee for the rejection of the picture are exceedingly puerile. Mr Garlick said that his chief reason for condemnation was that one day he heard two young fellows pass a remark about the galleries "nude figure" [Summer](#). What has this got to do with Mr Knight's picture, which has not been seen as yet, and Mr Rymer, who paints in the nude himself, says "that our wives and daughters will not come into the gallery and behold *The Spanish Maiden*," while at the same time he is one of the Episcopalian sinners who purchased "Summer" in the nude and gave his consent to the "Nymph", another nude, in order that they might be exhibited to the public. What holy consistency! I am tempted to quote Burns, but I refrain.

I am more than surprised that the learned and scientific medico, Dr Macgillivray, should have moved while in the chair that the picture be rejected, but I have heard since that "church influence" was brought to bear on the heads of those square sinners whom we well know to be large hearted and broad men.

Burns, no doubt, was right when he said "The fear o' hell's a hangman's whip." But this is by the way. I regret I have been confined to my room this week through sickness, but as soon as I am about I purpose getting the names of twelve subscribers in order to call a general meeting of the society so that the "Spanish Maiden" may again be put on her trial whether she be hung or allowed to domicile.

Yours, sincerely,

J. HUNTER POTTER.

P.S.- The names of the executive who voted for the rejection of the picture are Messrs Garlick, Macgillivray, Rymer, Robshaw, J H Abbott, Davis and Bayne, and those in favour of the "Spanish Maiden" were the fearless and brave Messrs Vahland and Herman. I may also state that in the words of the revival hymn "Still there's more to follow."

J.H.P.

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*Letter #9*

*by A WORLDLY MAN*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- As a resident on Sandhurst of some years longer than your correspondent (J H Potter)

without deigning to offer an opinion as to the advisability under the existing circumstances of hanging the picture in dispute, I would suggest that our recent arrival should abstain from doing such an injustice to the people among whom he has found it best for the present to cast his lot as his letter implies.

We cannot all be J Hunter Potters, but we all may sympathise with him in his not having been invited to the homes of our tradespeople who he so kindly tolerated when assuming that because he has not seen them, our people have no pictures in their houses. This can be remedied by all those who desire the privilege of associating with a parson who rejoices in not being "Churchey," whatever that may mean.

While agreeing with our crudite critic that in some matters we may be second to Ballarat, I think his native modesty should not have prevented him doing our city the justice of being better appreciators of the particular art or profession (trade is vulgar), by which he gets his living amongst us, than are the people of Ballarat.

The ordinary intelligence of some Bendigo people is completely lost in bewilderment when contemplating what might have been the result if the small modicum of travel, which has fallen to the lot of Mr P, and which has so exalted him above his fellows could have been continued for a lengthened period. We may envy him his opportunities of travel, but we hope he will not pity us too severely for not being in such favourable circumstances to become art critics.

The hon secretary, who I understand is a native, although perhaps not an intelligent one in Mr Potter's estimation, may object to being described as nil, but it may safely be left to him to defend himself. I hope you will kindly insert this as being the opinion which this reverend critic's modest letter has originated in the mind of many others besides yours, etc,  
A WORLDLY MAN.  
3rd May, 1889.

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*"A SPANISH MAIDEN."*

*Letter #10*

*by BOHEMIAN*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Tue 7 May 1889 Page 3**

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE BENDIGO ADVERTISER)

Sir,- The offered loan of the picture of the "Spanish Maiden" has caused as great a sensation amongst the patrons of the Sandhurst Art Gallery as the arrival of the Spanish Armada in British waters created in England in Queen Elizabeth's reign. It is devoutly to be hoped that the storms that have arisen on the present occasion will not prove as disastrous to the exhibition of this fine work of art as their precursors did to King Philip, of Spain's invincible fleet.

In order to preclude the possibility of so dire a calamity, I humbly beg to offer Mr G W Knight, the generous lender of the painting, a practical suggestion, which, if adopted, will save the appreciative public of Sandhurst the loss of so valuable a study of fine art. I am, of course, aware that an objection to the painting has been made by the Rev J Garlick, who seems to think that nude pictures might raise impure thoughts in young minds, but then the Rev Hunter Potter, a far higher authority (and a lately married man to boot), declares that it is

right and proper to study God's highest work, the human form divine, in all its naked simplicity.

Ministers of the Gospel must, I suppose, like doctors, differ in opinion, and in such cases it is evidently our duty, as laymen, to follow the more pleasant course opened to us by our spiritual fathers; and I have no manner of doubt but that the vast majority will be with the lately married reverend, who regards trade as vulgar, but nude painting as sublime.

My suggestion then, dear sir, is this, viz, that Mr Knight shall withdraw his generous loan to the Sandhurst Art Gallery, and lend the Spanish Maiden to the trustees of the West Sandhurst Presbyterian Church, so that it may be hung on the north wall, immediately behind the pulpit.

The probable larger gatherings at the services held in this church would speak volumes for the devout appreciation of high art in sacred places, and an indirect plebiscite could thus be taken amongst church-goers on the Sabbatarian question of throwing open the Art Galleries, Public Libraries, and Museums on Sunday afternoons.

The congregation would probably benefit in yet another way by the innovation; for should the discourse of the reverend pastor become prosy or uninteresting, as sometimes happens in the best churches, the worshippers instead of falling asleep, could improve the occasion by quietly studying the lovely figure and graceful curves of the female form divine.

True, a few of the plainest and most prudish members among the lady worshippers would be certain to cavil at the display of feminine charms that might contrast so strongly with their own well-padded, though perchance still ungainly figures, but even these might benefit by the comparison, and, learn to dress more gracefully and to pose themselves less haughtily; and if, after all, they should find their efforts at improvement vain, and their vanity deeply wounded, they will have the choice of joining the puritanical Rev J Garlick's church, or of sitting under the able and more solid discourses of the portly Dr Nish, of St Andrew's Church.

In either case neither the West Sandhurst Church nor the Rev Hunter Potter would be likely to suffer much, from the change, as the flocking thither of all the lovers of fine art and female beauty would soon cause all the vacant pews to be filled, if it did not materially increase the offertory and church funds.

I am sure the Rev J Hunter Potter will tender me his grateful thanks for so wise a suggestion, and that you, Mr Editor, will convey them to me through your Art Gallery columns, knowing how anxiously I shall await them. I ask nothing in return, Mr Editor, save that a special collection might be taken up once a year for your unknown radical correspondent.

**BOHEMIAN.**

P.S.- Conversing today with a local pedagogue (*another name for "teacher", but one who is strict, stiff or old-fashioned.*) on this subject, and asking him his opinion, he quaintly informed me that should a lad in his school have the temerity to draw on his book or slate a nude figure of a man or woman and not take more pains to conceal those parts usually covered by pants or petticoats, he should consider it his most bounden duty to flog such precocious youth to within an inch of his life, and follow up such punishment with expulsion

from school for obscenity. But then these school teachers are already extreme in their views,

Yours truly, B

*Compiler:*

*Meaning of BOHEMIAN: a socially unconventional person, especially one who is involved in the arts.*

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*Letter #11*

*by F.C.*

(TO THE EDITOR OP THE BENDIGO ADVERTISER).

Sir,- Re the vexed question on the "picture" and the Sandhurst Art Gallery, allow me to express my opinion that the Rev Mr Garlick takes a very good view of the matter. I was not aware that the "collection" had become so small until I read Mr Potter's statement of "two nude pictures" from his own observation.

I have seen a few pictures too, in London and elsewhere, but I was never tormented by having to look at them in any other state than nude. I have often met with disgusting representations by vicious and "daubing mimics" which should have been covered or blotted out.

But sir, to the point. Real lovers of art are lovers of delicacy and virtue, no doubt. Wholesale exposure of beautiful forms is too familiar. The divine form was from God, and the artist who can reproduce faithfully is from God too. That which we love we guard with jealous care. And what more beautiful and loveable than the "ministering angel," woman!

Ignorant as I am, I endorse Mr Garlick's judgement anxiously.

Yours, etc., F.C.

Raywood, 4th May, 1889).

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*Letter #12*

*by Mr J H Potter*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE BENDIGO ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- According to promise, I now send you my third letter, which for the present shall be my last. But, before proceeding to say what I intended, I may remark that I can take no notice of your correspondents who write anonymously, and fire their guns from behind a hedge. One of them, no doubt in his high flown and sarcastic style, thinks he has effectually crushed me in my effort to uphold the right at the expense of adverse criticism.

However much members of the committee may wince under the statements I boldly made, not one of them has yet attempted to refute my assertions, which embodied the following principles:-

That from established precedent in the selection of pictures, the advancement of art teaching, or the creation of an appreciative love for artistic study in its highest development, viz, the "human form divine" - the picture in question ought to have immediately found a place in our Art Gallery when such an exceptionally favourable opportunity presented itself.

It is simply a species of prevarication to make pretension of certain class-room objections (that never occurred to those who pose on this point when "Summer" was purchased) and hide the fact that has oozed out in casual conversations, that, with one or two exceptions, a prejudiced opinion did occupy the minds of the committee.

I still contend that the display of such puerile judgment in this and other public affairs really shames "poor Bendigo" in comparison with our sister city Ballarat - our inferiority to which is too well known in this district. But even children do not like to be corrected for their faults or their shortcomings, and I am not surprised that Mr Rymer on behalf of his colleagues should - feeling guilty, and perhaps naturally indignant - throw out the anathema, "Unkind Hunter Potter!"

What I further wished to bring under your notice as a supporter of the gallery, is - that seeing the committee wavered in their decision, or rather, being afraid of evil consequences, felt incompetent to accept the responsibility as a body delegated the onus to the hanging committee, yet unconstitutionally repudiated the recommendation of their own referees, or shall I say, were not brave enough to abide by it in the eye of public opinion.

They ought to have either called in experts from Melbourne or else summoned a general meeting of subscribers and decided the delicate question submitted to them by the majority of votes pro or con.

In conclusion, I may add that it was not in my ministerial capacity that I took up the cudgels on behalf of the "Spanish Maiden", but simply as a true citizen, one of whose functions should ever be to try to make his surroundings better in whatsoever part of the world his lot may be cast: and I fearlessly appended my name then as now.

- Yours, etc,

J. HUNTER POTTER.

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*"THE SPANISH MAIDEN"*

*Letter #13*

*by IGNORAMUS*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Wed 8 May 1889 Page 3**

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE BENDIGO ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- Can you, or any of your readers, refer me to any work wherein the name of "Gutierrez" is mentioned as an eminent painter?

Yours, etc,

IGNORAMUS.

6th May, 1889.

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*Letter #14*

*by George W Knight*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- I have withdrawn from the Art Gallery this most exquisite and valuable oil painting, which might have become a permanent loan to this public institution.



So many ladies and gentlemen have requested me to allow them to see it, but I regret to say that it is now cased down; Mr Rymer's pictures, however, remain to take its place.

My best thanks are due to Mr John Hunter Potter, Mr Vahland and Mr Herman for having the courage of their opinions and the fearlessness to express them, the regret these gentlemen feel that art is so ill appreciated in Sandhurst is shared in by me.

Numbers of subscribers to the gallery have expressed their intention to me of withdrawing their subscriptions dissatisfied with the genuineness of the reasons given by the committee in rejecting the loan of a work of art of far greater merit than any that they have purchased. The judgement of the best experts at the Melbourne Exhibition was not good enough for Sandhurst.

- Yours ect,

GEORGE W KNIGHT.

May 7th, 1889.

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*Letter #15*

*by C G DARVALL*

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER)

Sir,- The correspondence as to the hanging of the "Spanish Maiden" might well be allowed to drop were it not for the expressed intention of Messrs Knight and Potter to move further in the matter and endeavour to get the decision of the committee reversed.

Seeing that further action is to be taken it may be as well perhaps that a little more discussion should take place, and if you will allow me I will express my opinion, simply as one of the public to whom the gallery is thrown open. There has been some rather tall talk about art, and some I think of those who object to the picture have been rather shy of saying straight-out the plain common sense reason for objecting to it for fear that their doing so might be taken as proof that they did not stand on the high "art" level.

For myself I am quite careless on this point, and I wish to say plainly and distinctly that I object altogether to the picture because of its indecency. Such pictures are works of art we are told. The great masters have painted the nude, and art cannot be properly studied without working from the nude. There is a good deal of cant in this talk of art.

I will undertake to say that where there is one person so deeply imbued with the spirit of high and pure art that he can look at pictures of this class and have no thought of impurity, there will be thousands who will see in them little more than what is low and sensual.

A doctor needs to study anatomy and physiology, but as a student, his dissections and investigations are not carried on in public, nor does he afterwards make a display of whatever he may have of anatomical drawings and preparations of models. These things are all right and proper, but they have their proper place and are not laid open to all comers promiscuously.

So life study has its fitting place in reference to art, but that is no reason why our daughters should be made to blush when they go to a picture gallery. And as to study, where

are our art students, for whose supposed benefit such examples of art are to be exhibited? Where are they? and who are they?

Mr Jones has a life class meeting in the gallery, but I believe they have not yet got to that exalted position in art that nothing but nakedness, downright stark nakedness, will do for them. There are painters who have made the human figure their especial study, and who excel in portraying it, whose pictures are never offensive. Such exposure as there may be appears to be casual, inadvertent or just as a matter of course.

Others again, especially of the French school, seem to make the exposure purposely, nay even ostentatiously. Let us have art by all means, but we need not have pictures that in their effect are obscene. I am not mincing matters; those who take my view of the question are told that they are prudish and mock modest, but I will venture to say that if I were to write in plain homely words a detailed description of the picture about which this discussion has arisen, you, Mr Editor, would not allow it to be printed and it is not a verbal description that they would hang up, but a skilful representation.

Art forsooth! And are we bound to hang up anything that as a work of art, may be good, no matter what it represents? A painter might choose for his subject some historical or mythological scene of unmitigated lewdness. When art degrades itself, I contend we are not bound to acknowledge it. The highest art and morality, and decency go together.

Art that tends towards indecency is bad, and I care not what great authority amongst us sets me down as unworthy of a hearing for saying so in connection with the picture under discussion. My sympathies are with art, but not with art brought down to the level of the pictures on tobacco cases and cigar boxes.

You will not, I hope, refuse to insert this letter because of its plain English. Recollect that it is we who are said to be prudish, the other side is not at all squeamish.

- I am, etc.,

C. G. DARVALL.

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*Letter #16*

*"A SPANISH MAIDEN"*

*by SUBSCRIBER*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Thu 9 May 1889 Page 4**

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

*Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if, within the Sandhurst Aidenn.*

*It shall hang a painted maiden, tell me truly I implore -*

*Hung a lovely painted maiden whom the angels might adore?*

*Quoth the parson, "Nevermore".*

After Edgar Allan POE.

Sir,- I wonder whether the artist ever dreamed that his exquisite work, "A Spanish Maiden", would become so famous as it has done within the last month, or that it would be judged as a "question of propriety" by a committee of the Sandhurst Fine Art Gallery? I fancy not, or he would have hesitated to allow it to leave his studio without drapery, especially had he known of what materials the said committee were composed.

And who, may I ask, are the members of this committee who constitute themselves judges of the taste and intelligence of the public of Sandhurst? What qualification have they for dubbing themselves public censors? Are they prudes, are they Puritans, or are they "Peeping Toms?" I venture to think they are well and truthfully portrayed in the back ground of a picture now hanging in the gallery and commonly known as "The Dancing Girl."

If their objection is based upon the fact that the rejected picture is of the "nude" school they are noodles indeed, and most inconsistent noodles; let them look round our own gallery for examples from the "nude."

Take the "Nymph," "Potiphar's wife," "Susanna and the Elders," the "Venuses," (of which there are many) and, lastly, their recent purchase "Summer", and let them tell us conscientiously, if among those enumerated there is anything so chaste and fascinating as the "Spanish Maiden."

But, sir, all that has been written in reference to the matter at issue, sinks into insignificance for "so, another Daniel has come to judgement," in the shape of a Mr Darvall. This gentleman, I understand, is s sublime artist on the "Black board," and therefore should be qualified to judge of "high art," but the tone of beauty does not appear to form a part of his curriculum.

With your permission, sir, and for Mr Darvall's information, I will quote from the notes of an eminent art critic (M Silvestre). In reference to the "nude" class he says:- "It is a form of art which will eternally remain the most beautiful and the most elevated, no study, in fact, can replace that of the human form in the marvellous flexibility of its aspects, in the living delicacy of its tone, in the admirable harmony of its proportions, and in the poise of its movements."

In his notes on "Hebe after her fall" he remarks:- "This is another notable work in the nude class. The unhappy goddess is drawn and modelled in a large and noble style;" and again, Masson's "Spring" is an able study of female adolescence, full of the promise of nature, beauty, and vigor, and lastly in reference to Leon Perrault's "Love's Conqueror," he says, "it presents a form of subjugation that excites no repugnance."

M Silvestre is an acknowledged authority on "high art," and 'tis' our only marvel he's not a Darvall." I should mention that the pictures referred to are of modern date (1880), and are completely "nude." How naughty!

There is some satisfaction in the knowledge that there are two or three members of the committee who have the courage to express their opinions of the "Spanish Maiden", and can appreciate and admire the portrayal of God's noblest work "the human form divine."

Yours, etc.,

SUBSCRIBER.

Sandhurst, 8th May.

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*Letter #17*  
by Arthur L Bolton

(TO THE EDITOR OF THE ADVERTISER.)

Sir,- In adding to the already voluminous nature of this controversy I must apologise for thus trespassing on your good nature, but I feel constrained to this, because the replies to the Rev J H Potter have hardly been based on a proper footing, viz, they have, generally speaking, been written in a style of ridicule, amusing in itself, but which at the same time should be backed by something more substantial.

True, those three most original effusions, of the rev gentleman's are well calculated to afford opportunity for the development of the risible faculties of all classes and conditions of men. The first of the series strongly reminded me of a story told by Charles Dickens, in Nicholas Nicholby.

It is most likely known to the rev. gentleman that Nicholas was engaged by an actor named Crummles to travel with his company in the capacity of general literary man, dramatist, etc. In giving instructions for the composition of a new play, Crummles lays special stress upon the popular rage for realistic scenery, and mentions that he has lately brought a real pump, cheap, at an auction, finally departing with the strict injunction that the play must be written so that the real pump might be introduced on the stage.

Mr Potter's first letter was one long string of quotations, joined together by a series of conjunctions, and considering the abundance and general fitness of whose choice extracts, they seem to suggest the idea that Mr Potter rummaged them up first and wrote a letter to suit as best he could, afterwards Crummles had a play written to suit his pump.

Potter wrote a letter to suit his quotations. How the compositor must have blessed those endless inverted commas!

How the public must have admired such an evident student of the classics!

Where, however, Mr Pother did condescend to favour us by using his own language, he made some peculiar statements - statements which flatly contradict all that he, as a "minister of the gospel," though literally only "called so" by misplaced "courtesy" is, or should be, expected to teach. For instance, in his first letter, Mr Potter affirms (I do not exactly remember the words) that we should be taught to love and follow "nature and nature's way."

How does this tally with the scriptures, of which the rev. gentleman is undoubtedly the one authoritative exponent? Does not the whole bible abound with commands to fight against our natural desires, and crucify all the lusts of the flesh, to mortify our own grovelling, vitiated nature, and aspire to a new spiritual life?

Most certainly.

And then, the worship of the "human form divine." True, God created the "human form divine," but the Rev Potter seems to forget that God also created man with his eyes closed in one particular respect at least.

The devil by his subtle temptations opened the eyes of our first parents. To their own honour be it recorded, they were ashamed, and hastened to cover themselves. God too, though he had created this "human form divine" as so admired by the rev gentleman, not only sanctioned but gave them clothes wherewith to cover themselves.

In spite of this a puny, insignificant descendant of these beings, although professing to be a follower of this God, dares in the face of all His commands and examples, in the face of reason, decency, and common-sense to advocate what is equal to a return to primeval nakedness.

If the rev gentleman is so animated by a desire to worship the "human form divine", why does he not seek the islands of the sea where many of the natives succeed in attaining to his ideal of beauty?

Or, better still, why does he not, for the nonce, convert himself into that modern advertisement, a human sandwich, and with a "Spanish Maiden" in front and an equally charming production of simplicity behind travel through the streets of Bendigo, thus annulling the harm done by that blundering committee, and "as a true citizen, try to make his surroundings better, in that part of the world in which he is cast."

The insinuation that our young colonials would be guilty (if they had the power) of the conduct Mr. Potter would impute to them, is a vile slander, and should raise a universal and indignant disclaimer.

I say, emphatically, I do not believe it. They are not lacking the depth of thought, common sense and sound judgment of their fathers, and will be found able to withstand all the blandishments of that hybrid anomaly - a "sporting parson." "But even children do not like to be corrected for their short comings." Oh! What conceit is there, my countrymen!

The right reverend father in God corrects his unruly child. All through the rev gentleman's letters it is quite refreshing to notice the vein of self-satisfaction that runs in every line. How our ductile minds will absorb the words of wisdom that flow from his holy pen!

How good it is to find even one disciple of the "**Gay Lothario**" in these days of gloomy puritanism.

(Meaning: a postcard held at the British Museum from 1813 celebrating the character of Lothario from *The Fair Penitent* around the time of a revival of the 18th century play. The full title reads: "*The [Gay Lothario](#). The great and celebrated amateur of fashion.*")

But Mr Potter says, "It was not in my ministerial capacity that I took up the cudgels on behalf of the 'Spanish Maiden.'" Does Mr Potter then, in the language of the Red Indians, possess a "forked tongue?"

Does he say one thing as a "true citizen" and another as a minister? Probably he recognises the fact that the words he has written would be a disgrace to anyone in their "ministerial capacity."

Let me also tell him they are a disgrace to a "true citizen." Also as fearlessly as the rev gentleman I append my name.

- Yours, etc,

ARTHUR L BOLTON,

Sandhurst, 7th May, 1889

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*"The Spanish Maiden"*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Sat 16 Feb 1895 Page 4**

We understand that the painting called "The Spanish Maiden", lent to the Gallery by Mr G W Knight, will be ready for exhibition in a few days. The community is under an obligation to both gentlemen for so kindly contributing to the attractions of the Art Gallery.

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*A special meeting*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Fri 22 Feb 1895 Page 2**

**BENDIGO ART GALLERY.**

A special meeting of the committee was held yesterday afternoon at the gallery. There were present, Messrs J Cohn (president), J W Rymer, E W Kirby, J H Abbott MLC, and W Davis. Apologies were received from Messrs C Cohen and Robshaw.

The business was to receive the report of the selection committee on the loan pictures, "*The Spanish Maiden*" and "*Jesus and the Woman of Samaria*". The president reported that the committee had unanimously decided to recommend that both pictures be accepted. He moved that the recommendation be adopted. Mr Kirby seconded the motion. Mr Rymer said he was very sorry that he was not present at last meeting, as it might be thought he was shirking the question of the admission of the pictures.

On the last occasion the admission of the "Spanish Maiden" was being discussed he had been against it, and, though he knew he was in the minority, had not altered his opinion that the picture should not be hung, considering it not a fit subject for the gallery. He had the authority to say also that Mr Robshaw was with him in his objection. The motion was carried after a short discussion, Mr Rymer being the only dissident. The meeting then closed.

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*Pictures hung in the Art Gallery.*

**Bendigo Advertiser (Vic. : 1855 - 1918) Sat 23 Feb 1895 Page 4**

*THE SPANISH MAIDEN.* [Picture](#)

This picture, the property of Mr G W Knight, has now been hung in the Art Gallery, and will no doubt attract a number of visitors. It is an original work by Jose Gutierrez de la Vega, of Madrid, and was painted in 1837.

**History**

This painting is part of the reason the Art Gallery is located on View St. From 1887 to 1890 the Gallery was housed in a large hall at the Sandhurst School of Mines on Pall Mall (now Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE), until building repairs and the mild outrage caused by the scandalous exhibition of a nude painting, *The Spanish Maiden*, caused the gallery committee to seek other accommodation.

It represents an undressed figure of a Spanish girl half reclining on a couch. The expression of the upturned face is good, and free from any taint of immodesty. The tone is subdued; the drawing and coloring undoubtedly very fine, and experts pronounce it a work of very considerable value and merit. It was hung at the Melbourne Exhibition, and has been kindly lent by Mr Knight to the trustees of the gallery. We are informed that it is valued for



insurance at £350, and that in England it was catalogued at £700.

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*Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well.* [Picture](#)

Painter - Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri).

The meeting between Christ and the woman of Samaria at the well is only recounted in the Gospel of Saint John. Christ, travelling to Galilee, reached the Samaritan city of Sychar. While the disciples went ahead into the city to buy food, Christ sat down to rest by a fountain. A woman approached the well to draw water and Christ requested water to drink. Surprised, the woman questioned why a Jew was asking her for water, given that Samaritans and Jews had no dealings with each other.

The woman, who had had five husbands and lived with a man (as Christ knew), began a dialogue with him that astonished the disciples when they returned from the city, as it was not the custom to speak to unknown women.

This episode, which takes place by a well and in which the water of baptism is discussed, has been seen to symbolise the conversion of gentiles by the Word, among other concepts.

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Compiled by Pat & Ian Belmont  
in May 2020  
for the Bendigo Obituaries & Notes