

Portraits of Columbus

By James Davie Butler, LL. D.

*Governor Fairchild.*¹—In behalf of the Historical Society, I have the honor—and it is a very pleasant duty—to thank you for your generous gift. Nothing you could bring us from the ancient kingdom where you have so ably represented our country, could be more acceptable to us. It is a present exactly in keeping with our endeavors during a whole generation. One by one have we hung up in our picture gallery the likeness of our State pioneers, as well as of others famous each after his own fashion in our annals. But the grand link thus far lacking in the chain of our pictorial history, you were among the first to observe to be missing, and you have made haste to supply that missing link.

In this labor of love you have followed the footsteps of an illustrious predecessor. When Jefferson was the American minister in Paris, about 1784, he engaged an artist to take the best copy possible of what passed for the most authentic Columbian likeness in existence—the Medici portrait in Florence²—and the original, as most critics think, of the present you bring us to-day. This painting was with Jefferson during his presidency, and he writes about it as one of his chief jewels at Monticello in 1814. In his drawing room there, it hung the second among four portraits on the left as one entered. If Virginia had had any historical society in his time,³ he must have delighted to enshrine his

¹ Hon. Lucius Fairchild, while United States minister at Madrid, admiring the fine Yanez portrait of Columbus, in the Spanish National Library, closely resembling the famous likeness in the Florentine Gallery, he at once caused a copy to be made by the eminent artist, M. Hernandez, of that city, for the special purpose of adding it to the art collection of our Historical Society. It was a happy thought, promptly and gracefully carried into execution.

L. C. D.

² Jefferson's *Works*, vol. vi, pp. 343, 375. *Domestic Life*, Sarah N. Randolph.

³ The Virginia Historical Society was not founded until five years after Jefferson's death, or in 1831.