

[Lafever, Minard]

MINARD LAFEVER, ESQ.

Our readers will remember that Minard Lafever departed this life in September last; and many will also remember that his late residence was Williamsburgh, N.Y., and that he stood at the head of his profession as an architect. He was my friend, and I have some interesting facts of his life to publish.

Minard Lafever was born near Morristown, N.J., in the year 1797. He was a descendant of French Huguenots... When a boy he emigrated with his parents to Seneca county, N.Y., and commenced his career in the backwoods, hewing and framing timber as the apprentice of a country carpenter. The architect *was in him* at an early age, and his mother has often remarked, that "her boys were all ingenious, but Minard made prettier play-houses, and more perfect wind-mills for the cornfields, and water-wheels for the brooks, than the other boys." His opportunities for learning were very limited, but he determined to educate himself, and became a fine historian, and an accomplished scholar. At twenty years of age, he first heard of "Architecture," as a distinct art, and, inspired with a passion to learn and master it, he traveled on foot fifty miles and procured an elementary work on the subject. From that day to the day of his death, he made that art his *spouse*, and addressed to it the best energies and aspirations of his genius. In 1825 he removed with his family to Newark, N.J., and in 1829 he removed to New York city, and worked at carpentry some, while making his last attainments as an architect. In 1829 he published a work on architecture, [*The Young Builders' General Instructor*] which was eagerly studied by carpenters and builders, and for some qualities, was pronounced the best practical work on that subject in the English language. I remember with what delight I myself, in 1835, turned over the beautiful plates of that work, and read its historic sketches, and its fine descriptions of the orders and details of the art. From the date of that publication he quit the carpenter's bench, and gave his whole life to his profession. He was regarded as one of the best architects in America. His designs had a freshness, a richness and originality about them, that gave the impression of remarkable artistic genius. He was the architect of the church of Holy Trinity, in Brooklyn, N.Y... He had engagements for his best designs from every part of the country.

I became acquainted with Mr. Lafever personally in 1851; and while writing my story of the "Master Mechanic," he sat for several of my pictures of the chief character. One of my critics thought my book was misnamed, and that it was not probable that a country carpenter would become an artist in building, as I had figured my hero. I referred to Minard Lafever for the truth of my representations, and the propriety of my title.

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In 1852, Mr. Minard became a member of my church, and many are the pleasant conversations that I had with him on the subject of our faith. His mind was architectural in its structure; it was rounded up and polished off like a temple, and all his intellectual conceptions, whether religious or artistic, had an architectural form and finish... He had an idea that his architectural taste and knowledge would give him a grander view of the wonders of the heavenly city.

In the summer of '52, Mr. Lafever suffered a severe illness, and for weeks his life was despaired of. But during that time his mind was bright and serene, and his faith firm, and even enthusiastic. He partially recovered, and resumed his profession; but a severe cough ensued which ended in consumption; and for the last six months of his life, he was often compelled to remain in his chamber. Still he was resolute, and gave his strong mind no rest from its eager efforts. He was writing a new and extended work on architecture—its origin, its history, and practical details, to be illustrated with numerous and magnificent plates; and on that he wrought almost to the day of his death. He lived to give that—the work of years—almost the last designed correction, when death interrupted the effort. The work [*The Architectural Instructor*, pub. 1856] is now in press, and nearly through...

Mr. Lafever's religious character, especially during his last years, and at his death, was the most beautiful and exalted. While his great and critical intellect admired the history and splendid truths and ideas of Christianity, his heart embraced and breathed its spirit with the simple trust, obedience and adoration of a little child. He lived and died a Universalist. His accomplished wife who is a Baptist, as well as her friends, who were with him in his last hours, all declared that he died in the faith of his church, and set a beautiful example for all Christians. His death seemed a translation to the temple of God in heaven. His funeral was attended by his pastor, assisted by his friend, the pastor of the church of the Holy Trinity, Brooklyn. His remains were buried on Cypress Hills. He has left a host of friends and admirers.

D.K.L. [Rev. Day Kellogg Lee]

Christian Ambassador, Auburn NY, Sat. 13 Jan 1855
[slightly abridged]

Transcribed on 7 Sep 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY