

## **Masonic Tracing-Boards.**

By

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Synopsis :-Their operative origin and short sketch of their history. Their speculative use and approximate date of introduction. Illustrations of outside forms of early date. Ancient custom of " Drawing the Lodge," and aspect of the Lodge in olden times. Substituted expedients during transition period. Reasons for discontinuance of ancient custom. Early specimens. Tracing-boards, Tracing-cloths, and synonymous terms. References thereto in the Lectures. Their diversity or uniformity of design. Explanation of characters on the Master Mason's Board.

The subject to which I propose to direct your attention this evening, is in connection with one of those common objects displayed in every Lodge, and with the form and aspect of which you are all familiar. The " Tracing-board " it is usually called, and it is referred to in the first Lecture as one of the three "jewels," that lie open and immovable in the Lodge for the Brethren to moralize upon. It is, probably, in a large measure owing to the familiarity the Brethren have with this " jewel," as a consequence of the prominent position it usually occupies in every regular Lodge, coupled with the attention so frequently and particularly directed to it, when the Lectures upon it are given, an impression is naturally created, that both the object and subject are commonplace, and unworthy of particular notice. But commonplace as in a sense this subject is, and simple as it appears to be, it nevertheless comprises elements of considerable interest, and is worthy of a greater amount of consideration and attention, than is usually bestowed upon it by the ordinary Mason.

First, let me remind you, that the appellation " Tracing-board " as applied to this interesting " jewel," is, as you are doubtless aware, inaccurate, and that it should more appropriately, as well as more accurately, be called " The Trestle " or " Lodge Board." I propose, however, throughout this Paper, to adhere to the incorrect appellation, as being the one we are all most familiar with. Next I would remind you, that its origin as well as its early history, like most other subjects connected with our Order, as indeed of the Order itself, is enveloped in a veil of secrecy, which, so far, has baffled all efforts to entirely raise, but though complete success has not as yet attended the efforts of those who have attempted the task of raising it, some progress has been made towards effecting this object, some information obtained and some few facts brought to light not previously known.

That these Trestle or Lodge-boards are undoubtedly a connecting link between the operative Masonry of ages now long past and gone, and the speculative Freemasonry of the present day, admits, I think, of little doubt, since the connection can be fairly traced ; still there are missing links which require replacing, before we can claim a complete and unbroken chain. I would suggest that in considering the subject therefore, it is necessary to do so under two heads :

1. Their operative use and history.
2. Their speculative use and history.

With the operative use and history of the Tracing-board I shall deal but very briefly, since it is not material to my Paper, except so far as it was probably the ancestor, so to speak, or basis on which the speculative Tracingboard was founded, and it is with this other aspect I propose to deal at large this evening. However, with reference to this first part of the subject, I would direct your attention, and refer you to the particularly interesting Paper read before the " Quatuor Coronati " Lodge in 1893, by Bro. C. Purdon Clarke, and to the discussion which followed, also to the subsequent Papers to which it gave rise.[*vide* Transactions A.Q.C. vol. vi., p. 100, *et seq.*] In the original Paper, Bro. Clarke explained the form and use of the

Tracingboard amongst the operative workmen in Persia, with which he became acquainted when in that country some years previously, and he showed how, in that country, it had had an unbroken record of usage for upwards of 4,000 years, and that plans of buildings are there designed, not as our Architects do now, on plain paper, but on sectional lined Tracing-boards, every square of which represents one or four bricks (bricks in that country being made square), and he adds " these Tracing-boards are the key to what otherwise appears a mystery, as they represent in miniature scale the floor of the master builder's work-room." He also illustrated the uses of this Tracing-board, and a fixed scale or canon of proportions as applied both to Architecture and Sculpture in other Countries, on both the Continents of Asia and Europe, and in conclusion, he drew attention to the fact, that " the use of floors in portions of buildings in course of erection by Mediaeval Masons, for tracing their full size details is well known," and he mentioned various places where traces of these plans may be seen, viz., on the terrace roofs of the Aisles of the Cathedral of Limoges, at Clermont, and St. Quentin. The late lamented Bro. G. W. Speth summed up this Paper in a few concise words, which may not be considered inappropriate to quote ; he said :

"I think there can be no two opinions as to the interesting nature of the Paper we have just heard. As a Society of Freemasons descended in direct lineal continuation from Societies of Actual builders, the methods of these latter can never be otherwise than of interest to us, even though the methods themselves have no real and obvious bearing on our proceedings of to-day. In the present case, I think the connection is quite possible, although there may be many gaps to fill up, the evidence for which has not yet come to hand. Bro. Clarke has shown us, that in Egypt a Tracing-board of squares was used, whilst in Persia this Tracing-board is actually, in one of its forms, the floor of the architect's workshop itself, " and he went on to refer to the square pavement of our Lodges, and its corresponding likeness to this Persian Tracingboard, and concluded by saying "The missing gap is " here to show that in our Mediaeval operative Lodges, this squaring of the plans was used ; but Bro. Clarke has shown, at least, that designs were worked out on the floors of the buildings, which is a step in that direction. If therefore we were justified in concluding that something similar to the Persian practice prevailed in England, then we should have an obvious operative origin for our Masonic pavement. The alternate coloring of black and white in the squares, which would be unsuitable for operative purposes. might be attributed to subsequent symbolic ideas."

This comment, as you will notice, raises two points ; one, the descent of the Tracing-board from the operative Mediaeval mason, and the other the origin and form of the Square pavement with which our Lodges are universally ornamented. I will leave the latter point as being only an incident to the subject. There is just one other short reference I wish to make, whilst dealing with this side of the subject, that is in Kenning's Cyclopaedia it is recorded, that a Tracing-board was mentioned in an inventory of effects belonging to the ancient York Lodge of operative masons at York in the 14th century. thus showing that our Medieval operative Brethren possessed, amongst other effects, a Tracing-board, although it may not prove its actual use or form. I do not think I need dwell longer on this side of the subject, but will proceed with the second part. viz., their speculative use and history. And I may here at once say, that as far as I have been able to ascertain down to the present, the Tracing-board, in its present form, came into use in our Lodges about a hundred years ago. Whether such boards were in use before that, and if so, for how long, or to what extent, has not yet been ascertained. Fresh facts and information are practically daily coming to hand. These facts would take up too much space and time to give in detail, I have therefore thought it better on this occasion, to deal in generalities rather than particularities, as the time is hardly as yet ripe

to deal with the latter, and some new information may any day turn up, which might cause me to have to modify the conclusions I have formed.

As an illustration. I may mention, that as late as last Tuesday, I received a letter from Bro. Sadler, the Sub-librarian of the Grand Lodge, in which he calls my attention to two entries in Lodge Minutes, one of the year 1733 in which it is recorded, that Lodge No. 28 -" The Old King's Arms "-purchased a Drawingboard and in 1787 a Tressel Board was presented. Also in the Minutes of the " Medina " Lodge M o. 35. there occurs the following entry, viz. :-" Bro. William Goudge this night made a present to this Lodge of a painted cloth representing the severall forms of Masons Lodges." This entry will antedate my assumed date by some years, but I would point out, does not destroy my general proposition, as it is only evidence that in those two instances a Tracing-board was obtained in these Lodges, but what about the greater number of others that did not seek to obtain a set until many years after?

However in fixing the period at which I suggest the Tracing-board was adopted as about a hundred years ago, I will give you the dates of a few of the earliest sets I have been able to trace in Lodge use or custody, and also direct your attention to a few outside illustrations, and then leave you to draw your own conclusions.

I may however mention in regard to outside illustrations, that though I have stated my opinion as to the date of the adoption or introduction of the Tracingboard into our Lodges, as having taken place about a hundred years ago, I am aware illustrations of " forms of Lodges or Tracing-boards" exist, which extend back at least fifty years earlier. For instance, there is a pictorial representation in Cole's "Illustrations of Masonry (1801)," also one in an English pamphlet entitled " Solomon in all his Glory (1768)," and others in the French book " Le Macon Demasque (1757)," and in a still earlier French engraving of a Lodge interior of about 1750, all of which have a strong resemblance to the earliest form of Tracing-board. Some may object that these illustrations or pictorial representations are not Tracing-boards proper, and I concur in this, but I have mentioned them as they have a very strong likeness to the early Tracing-board, and as illustrations of the " form of the Lodge." At the same time, even if they were actual Tracing-boards, they could hardly be admitted as evidence of either existence or use in our Lodges in this country, unless supported by other evidence of undoubted character, because they are only unauthentic exposures and of a similar character to many others of about that period.

Dr. Oliver, however, who is a well-known Masonic Author, would appear to place some credence on the French illustrations referred to, because in his " History of the Royal Arch," [Vide Oliver's " History of the Royal Arch," 1867 ed., p. 26.] he refers, while dealing with another subject, " to an old Master Mason's tracingboard or floor-cloth, published on the Continent almost immediately after Symbolical Masonry had been received in France. as a branch from the Grand Lodge in England in 1725, which furnished the French Masons with a written copy of the Lectures then in use ; " but I shall content myself with mentioning, that whilst these illustrations exist, of their purport and actual value I leave you to judge. This is somewhat anticipating my subject, so in order to make myself clear, I must first explain, as briefly as I can, the custom of the Lodge previous to the Tracing-board being adopted. It is therefore necessary for me to ask you to step back into the past-say two hundred years ago-when practically there is no doubt as to what was the usage and custom.

In order that you may fully realize the usual aspect of a Lodge at that period, you must dismiss from your minds a Lodge as you know it now, furnished as it is, with the latest accessories and comforts of civilization. In those days the Lodge generally met at some reputable Inn or well-known Hostelery, the walls of the rooms were not papered as now, but panelled with oak or other wood panelling, dark and polished with age ; the beams and rafters

overhead were bare and exposed, not ceiled over and whitened as now ; the fireplaces were large spacious open chimney places with fires on the hearth ; electric lights, gas, or even oil lamps were unknown, candles being the illuminant in those days ; chairs and seats, comfortably upholstered and cushioned such as we are accustomed to. were not in vogue, while the floor was the bare boards, carpets and druggets being an unknown luxury. You may probably wonder how our ancient Brethren managed without all these comforts, but manage they did, and fairly happy they seem to have made themselves. To proceed however with my description, the floor of the room in which they met being bare boards, was sprinkled with sand, when however there was an initiation, and probably on other special occasions, a space in front of the Master's pedestal or centre of the room was left or swept clear of sand, and in this clear space the Tyler drew with chalk, charcoal and blue stone, or some of those substances, the ground plan of a building or other geometrical figure.

In his preface to the " Ahiman Rezon " of 1764, Bro. Laurence Dermott, who always took advantage of any occasion `` to have a dig " at his opponents the " Moderns," after referring to his veneration for such implements as are truly emblematical or useful in refining our moral notions, goes on to illustrate his stricture by saying; " nor is it uncommon for the Tyler to receive ten or twelve shillings for drawing two signposts with chalk, &c., and writing Jamaica rum upon one and Barbadoes rum upon the other, and all this, I suppose., for no other purpose than to distinguish where those liquors are to be placed in the Lodge." [*Vide* "Ahiman Rezon, ' 1764, PP. 32-33.]

This drawing is considered by some to have been a representation of the ground plan of King Solomon's Temple, whilst others deem it to have represented the form of the Lodge. But whatever it was, or was meant to represent, is immaterial ; it was termed " drawing the Lodge," and if there had been an initiation, it was incumbent on the initiate to wash this drawing out before the Lodge was closed, a mop and pail being supplied for the purpose, and neither rank nor position in life exempted him from the discharge of this office. This custom of " drawing the Lodge," prevailed from the earliest days of speculative Freemasonry down to the actual introduction of the Tracing-board, with probably some exceptions in its later days, or during what may be termed its transition period, when from some cause or other; but precisely- what is not yet clear, the old custom became superseded or fell into disuse, and during this period various expedients appear to have been resorted to. I will just mention one or two which we are told or have evidence were adopted during this period. Naturally some diversity prevailed, but we are told that some Lodges adopted the expedient of a tape and nails, whereby the drawing being outlined with tape could be nailed down to the floor of the Lodge. I think however you will agree with me, this custom would be one which would have neither an extensive nor lengthy existence, as such an expedient would not be conducive to what is termed "fair wear and tear " of the floor of the room. Another expedient resorted to was that of having the symbols we now see depicted on the board, cut out in wood or metal, and these were deposited on the floor of the Lodge. The Grand Lodge of England possesses several such sets both in wood and metal. This custom seems to me to have some connection with the wording of the Lecture as set out in Hutchinson's `` Spirit of Masonry," Lecture V.[*Vide* Hutchinson's " Spirit of Masonry," 1775 ed., p. III] He there says: "As Solomon at Jerusalem carried into the Jewish temple all the vessels and instruments requisite for the service of Jehovah, according to the law of his people ; so we Masons, as workers in moral duties, and as servants of the G. A. O. T. World, have placed in our view, those emblems which should constantly remind us of what we are, and what is required of us." And I cannot refrain from making this comment, that with regard to these Lectures on the Tracing-board as given now, whilst we have retained the shell, we have ignored the kernel; however this is outside my subject.

To return, there were other expedients adopted, but these will suffice as illustrations, although there is one other which I shall mention later on, but I wish first to say one or two words upon the reasons for the discontinuance of the old custom. Various reasons have been assigned, and amongst others, the ridicule entailed on the initiate on account of the well-known duty which devolved upon him. As an illustration of this ridicule, I may remind you of Hogarth's well-known satirical picture "Night," where the Master is depicted as, if not "disguised in liquor," at any rate as requiring the assistance, guidance and protection of the Tyler, whilst the initiate is pointedly depicted as being "armed" or adorned with a mop and pail. The date of this picture is 1738.

Another reason alleged by a writer about a century ago, attributed the discontinuance of the old custom "to the loss of the art of drawing by Tylers." This I think could hardly have been the case, as it is not likely the art would have died out suddenly, and insufficient Tylers survive to impart the necessary instruction to their successors if called upon to continue the custom; and I think one may fairly assume, neither of these reasons was responsible for the discontinuance of the old custom, though each may have been an element. But it was about this period, that a greater amount of comfort than previously existed, began to predominate in the furnishing and surroundings of houses generally, and Lodge-rooms no doubt participated in the change, particularly with regard to the introduction of carpets, wherewith the hitherto bare and sanded floor was covered up, and as carpets of whatever texture they might be, would be unsuitable to draw upon with chalk, charcoal and blue stone, or any of those substances, the ground plan of a building or other design, wherever a carpet was put down some other expedient had to be adopted of "drawing the Lodge," and amongst others, in addition to those I have mentioned, we are told of one, which probably played an important part in the transformation which ultimately took place. That was the depiction of the symbols and "form of the Lodge," on a piece of cloth or linen, which could be laid on the floor when required for use, and rolled up and put away when not required. And it seems to me as not only feasible, but extremely probable, that to this or some similar custom the origin of the present form of Tracing-board is attributable, as it would prove an easy and natural development at a later date, to transfer this cloth to the plain black or original Tracing-board, and for the two to become subsequently combined.

It may be a question whether the Tracing-board and Floor-cloth are not separate subjects, but if in one sense they are, in another they are intimately connected, and it is almost impossible to disconnect them, so as to discuss the one without some reference to the other; as also other terms which appear to have been used in order to express the same or a similar meaning. However, before saying more on this point, I will proceed to give you another reason for fixing the date of adoption of Tracing-boards, in their present form, to about a century ago. The Grand Lodge of England possesses an interesting document in the shape of the account of the expenses incurred on the occasion of the initiation of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (afterwards Geo. IV.) in 1787, the two first items of which appear to me as being most significant. One is "To postage of a large board," the other is "paid Tyler for drawing the Lodge," and to my mind suggest the following meaning. The large board was an ordinary black or trestle-board, such as is now used for illustrating lectures &c., while the item "paid Tyler for drawing the Lodge," indicates that the ancient custom was still in vogue and resorted to on this occasion, thus proving that the art of drawing was known and practised at that date, and that the old custom of "drawing the Lodge" still prevailed at any rate in that Lodge. Had any other custom been adopted, it would in all probability have been in some way recorded, especially on so important and unique an occasion, or there would have been no necessity for the item "for drawing the Lodge." Grand Lodge also possesses a set of Tracing-boards similar to those now in use, dated 1810, which belonged to a Lodge, No. 262, now and for many years extinct, attached to the 7th Regiment of Light Dragoons (afterwards the 7th Hussars). This renowned regiment played a conspicuous and distinguished part in the Battle of Waterloo.

The Lodge became extinct shortly after the return of the regiment, viz., in 1824, when it sent its Tracingboards and other articles to the Grand Lodge. Another set, dated one year later, viz., 1811, belongs to and is still in use in the " Union " Lodge, NO. 36 Chichester ; it belonged originally to a Lodge, No. 624, warranted in 1811 at Chichester, of which the 4th Duke of Richmond was the first Master, and which, in 1828, united with No. 52, both surrendering their warrants and receiving a new one as " Union " Lodge. The Minute-book records in September of that year, " that tressel boards with emblems painted thereon be obtained from London," and the Boards were painted, dated, and signed by the artist, Bro. J. Bowring, of London,[ Bro. J. Bowring was a portrait painter ; he was initiated in 1795, and his address was " Dove Court, Moorfields." ] and are still in use in the Lodge. We have here two genuine Tracing-boards, over go years old, on the other hand we have the record of the initiation of the Prince of Wales 116 years ago, and I accordingly think it was between these dates that the Tracing-board was adopted, although its use was not general until some years later.

I referred just now to the connection between Tracingboards and Tracing-cloths, and in order to illustrate the connection between the two, there is the set I have just mentioned as belonging to the 7th Regiment of Light Dragoons, which may be claimed under either, though strictly speaking they would I think be classified as Tracing-cloths, as they are painted on strips of canvas of various sizes, but in design and depiction they will be found to correspond with the ordinary Tracing-board of that period.

To revert however to the subject of Tracing-boards, Tracing-cloths and other terms, I must own to being in some doubt, whether the distinction we should now draw between " Tracing-boards," " Tracing-cloths," " Floor-cloths." and other expressions, existed in those early days, and whether such terms were not then used indiscriminately. It is easy to say there is a considerable difference between boards and cloths, and one could not possibly confuse them, but a reference to entries in different minute books, unfortunately discloses a curious mixture of these terms, and examples could be quoted, showing that these and other expressions are used to indicate the same thing. In the case of "St. John the Baptist " Lodge at Exeter, No. 39, in 1833, there is a resolution on the minutes, that the Lodge procure " floor cloths," and a certain Mr. Sharland offered to paint them. This fell through, and the next year it was proposed that tracing boards be procured, and a Mr. Hake was commissioned to paint them. In 1839 a Bro. Hawkes was instructed to call on Bro. Hake, to know if he can finish-not the tracing boards mark you ! -but the "floor-cloths" immediately, if not, what was to happen ? You would naturally expect the term "tracing board " or " floor cloth " would be used again, but no ! if not, the "panes" be sent to a Bro. Pridham for completion.

In the previous minute in which the term " Lodge " is used to indicate a board, probably this word was omitted, but the minute goes on, that Bro. -- would produce " apparatus " for the purpose. We are told that a man who could only spell a word one way in olden times was considered no scholar, whether this applied to his ingenuity to call one thing something else, or by some other name, I cannot say, but it certainly looks as if " Tracing-board " and " Floor-cloth " meant the same thing, as also " panes." With regard to the set I mentioned as formerly belonging to the Lodge of the 7th Light Dragoons, -No. 262, exception might be taken that this is hardly a fair illustration, since belonging as it did to a Military Lodge, exigencies of storage and transport would have to be taken into consideration, and it may be alleged the reason they are in this portable form is, they occupied but little space when not in use, could be easily moved with the regimental baggage, when transported from place to place as the Regiment moved its quarters, and equally easily unrolled and placed on the floor or some other part of the Lodge when required.

There is however an item recorded in the " History of the Phoenix Lodge, Portsmouth, No. 257," which bears on this subject. It appears from the minute books, that pursuant to a resolution passed in 1832, a set of Tracing-boards was purchased in the year 1834 of a Mr. Calcott, and that at a meeting of the Lodge in April 1845, it was proposed by Bro. E. Scott, P.M., seconded by Bro. Minchin, P.M., and carried unanimously, " That the most cordial thanks of the Members of the Phoenix Lodge, No. 319, Portsmouth, are eminently due and are hereby given to W. Bro. Major Ferris Charles Robb, P.M., for his very handsome and valuable present of a Symbolical Floor-cloth, &c." A note of the Editor states, he is informed this same cloth is now in use in the Lodge. It represents the three Tracing-boards on a very large scale, beautifully painted and surrounded by a Tesselated Pavement. It fills the centre of the room between the pedestals, and no other Tracing-boards are in use in the Lodge, those painted by Mr. Calcott being now hung on the staircase.[*Vide* "History of Phoenix Lodge, No. 257," by Bro. Alexander Howell, pp. 100 and 132].

Dr. Oliver in his work "History of the Royal Arch," page 129, 1867 ed., gives an illustration of a R.A. floor cloth, which he describes as follows:-Cli. VII, " I have had the good fortune to meet with a very curious Floor cloth of the R.A. Degree, as it was practised in the Grand Lodge of England, at the period of its introduction into what was denominated ` Modern ' Masonry by Bro. Thomas Dunckerley. It is described as belonging to ` St. Michael's ' Chapter No. 24 Chester, and as painted on Silk 22 inches x 18 inches in size ; the plate is 'Drawn and lithographed by Bro. Harris.' "

[Bro. John Harris was a well-known member of the Masonic Fraternity and distinguished as a Tracing-board artist and designer. He originally designed, lithographed and registered a set in the year 1820, but these being pirated, he designed and registered a second set in 1824, for which he obtained the approval of the Grand Master, H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex. Bro. Harris was initiated into Freemasonry in the year 1818, in "The Lodge of Good Intent," No, 479 London, and died in the Asylum of the Royal Masonic Benevolent Institution at Croydon in December 1873, having been elected an annuitant in 1858, and admitted a resident with his wife in 1860.]

In addition to these, there is the illustration in Vol. X. of the Transactions of the " Quatuor Coronati " Lodge, of a very curious scroll belonging to " Kirkwall Kilwinning " Lodge No. 38, which occasioned considerable interest when published, and the late lamented Bro. Speth suggested, in his description and notes on it, " It may be worthy of consideration whether the original purpose of the scroll was not to serve as a floor cloth for the Lodge, for which its size would be suitable. The earliest form of our modern movable tracing-board, was that of a floor cloth, consisting of various symbolical designs, of which the mosaic pavement was usually, though not always, a feature. The actual tracing-board, sometimes called also a square, was blank. Gradually the design was transferred to the board, and the floorcloth preserved only the pavement." The scroll it may be mentioned is 18ft. 6in. in length by 5ft. 6in. in width, and appears to comprehend illustrations of the degrees of St. John's Masonry, R.A., Red Cross of Babylon, K.T., and possibly other degrees, but which I cannot pursue as it raises other questions outside the subject of Tracing-boards and Floor-cloths.

I should like however to briefly call your attention to the first lecture on the Tracing-board as illustrating its use. In the lecture it is described as one of the three immovable jewels " for the Master to lay lines and draw designs upon," and after describing the rough and perfect ashlar, goes on " they are called immovable jewels because they lie open and immovable in the Lodge for the Brethren to moralize upon." Again " as the Tracing-board is for the Master to lay lines and draw designs upon, the better to carry on the intended structure with regularity and propriety, &c.," it would thus appear that two distinct boards must have been referred to, otherwise the description is irreconcilable and incongruous, since it would not be possible or

feasible for the Master, or anyone else, to attempt to lay lines and draw designs upon such a board as now in use, and on the other hand, there would be no sense in moralizing on a perfectly plain blackboard. Again in an earlier paragraph of the lecture, the present form of Tracing-board is clearly indicated, as we are told "there is not a character or emblem here depicted, but serves to inculcate the principles of piety and virtue among all its genuine professors." I think the explanation undoubtedly is, that two Boards are referred to, one the plain Trestle-board as we now term it, and the other a Board with the emblems painted on it. These lectures, as now delivered, are only about eighty to ninety years old, and differ essentially from those in use a hundred or more years ago.

In Scotland it would seem that such aids to Masonic instruction were prohibited,[ Vide " History of the Lodge of Edinburgh (St. Mary's Chapel), No. o" ; by Bro. Murray Lyon, p. 194.] while in Ireland, Bro. Dr. W. J. Chetwode Crawley informs me, the custom of the " chalked floor " continued much later than in England, and Floor-cloths and Tracing-boards never really took root in Ireland. He adds " I have never met with a specimen which I could unhesitatingly describe as an indigenous production ; any I have come across in Ireland were clearly of English origin."

There still remain two or three points to which I wish to draw your attention. One is the diversity of form of the earlier specimens, as compared with those we are familiar with now. I must remind you here that under the Grand Lodge of England there has never existed any law, constitution or regulation prescribing what may or may not be depicted on them, at the same time, there has always existed certain unwritten but well recognized requirements, which have to be complied with in designing and painting a set, and it is in consequence of the artist endeavouring to comply with these unwritten requirements, so much uniformity exists and so little genius has been displayed ; it is quite exceptional to find an artist rising to the occasion, so to speak, and displaying originality and real genius. This may be accounted for by the fact, that the artist painted either to order, or what he knew was required to be depicted, and felt he had no great scope, beyond depicting what he was so told or knew in some common form, or with which he was familiar or saw depicted elsewhere, and it is therefore easy to criticise these efforts as crude, and characterize some of them as incongruous. But we do not know how far the artist was bound down by instructions, and how far he was left to exercise his own individuality in painting a new set.

An hour or more might be interestingly spent in comparing the different forms, and tracing the development of the Tracing-board, but time will not permit me to do more than direct your attention to say the first set as designed by Bro. Harris, and what is termed an " Emulation " set of the present day, when you will at once see how great a difference exists, in the artistic skill with which the symbols are displayed. There is just one other point I wish to draw your attention to, and that is the board for the Third Degree, and the hieroglyphics there depicted ; you all probably know what they mean, but you may not possibly all know what they are.

Exception may be taken to the form of what one sees depicted on that board, and one is led to speculate on the reasons which led the artist to adopt such an object, unless he was in some way actuated by the earlier form of making-cloth. The legend, it should be noted, is of Eastern extraction, and of very early date, and to be consistent, the custom of that country and age would be more appropriate, instead of which the incident is Anglicised, so to speak, and there is a striking likeness to the early form of making-cloth, which would lead one to question, whether " making-cloths " have not some affinity to and do not come under the designation of Tracing-boards. There is also a considerable difference between the tools depicted on the earlier and later specimens, which are only explicable by a reference to the ritual in vogue at the period they were painted.



In conclusion, I may perhaps not inappropriately quote the concluding words of Bret Harte's poem " The Stagedriver's Story " :

"This is my story, sir ; a trifle indeed I assure you.  
Much more, perchance, might be said  
But I hold him, of all men, most lightly  
Who swerves from the truth in his tale."

The Paper was illustrated by the following Tracing Boards, Photographs, Prints, &c.

1. Set of Lodge Tracing Boards, in general use at Freemasons' Hall, Leicester. These were probably in use in St. John's Lodge, 279, as early as the year 1829.[ Vide " History of St. John's Lodge, 279 Leicester," p. 87.]
2. A miniature Set of Tracing Boards, painted, belonging to the Lodge of Research, No. 2429 Leicester ; circa 1820.
3. Set of Tracing Boards (card-board), mounted and colored, 1820. Harris' design.
4. Set of Do.-1825.
5. Set, as used in the "Lion and Lamb " Lodge, No. 192 London.
6. Prints of a Set used in the " Emulation " Lodge, London; circa 1845.
7. Chromo-litho of the last Set supplied to the Grand Lodge of England.
8. Prints of a Set which, in 1810, belonged to a Lodge held in the Seventh Regiment of Foot.
9. Photographs of a Set belonging to the " Lodge of Union," No. 38 Chichester ; circa 1811.
10. Photograph of an old Tracing Board of inlaid wood, supposed to have come from Cowdray, and now in the Masonic Museum at Brighton.
11. " Ahiman Rezon," Dublin, 1803, the Frontispiece of which is an old form of Tracing Board.
12. The " Kirkwall Scroll " ; A. O. C.. Vol. 1.
13. Set of Four Colored Boards, "Engraved by F. Curtis.-Printed by F. Cole. 1801."
14. Set of seven French Engravings of circa 1745, skewing Floor Cloths in use.
15. Two large French Engravings of Tracing Boards ; circa 1745.
16. Three French Engravings of circa 1745, skewing Floor Cloths in use. (These are different from No. 14).
17. Numerous Photographs of old Tracing Boards.
18. " Le Macon Demasque " of 1757, containing two Sets of Tracing Cloths.
19. " M--e " of 1766, the Frontispiece of which is a Floor Cloth.
20. "Solomon in all his Glory " of 1768, containing two Tracing Cloths.

*Extracted from*

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