

We are told that the tracing board is for the Master to lay lines and draw designs upon, the better to enable the brethren to carry on the intended structure with regularity and propriety, and doubtless this is a very proper description of its use in Operative Masonry, but in Speculative Masonry it has, as you know, like all the rest of our emblems a symbolic and moral signification. Down to the latter part of the last century—I cannot say how long before—it was customary in our lodges to have a design somewhat similar to the one before you, only much larger and more elaborate, marked out on the floor of the lodge room, the principal ingredients used being chalk, charcoal, and stone blue. Old writers tell us “this had a very pretty effect, especially in some of the lodges where they sprinkle the floor with powdered resin mixed with shining sand, and the room was brilliantly illuminated for the occasion.” We can well imagine the extent of the brilliancy of the illumination at that period. No doubt the Treasurer would be called upon to pay for an extra pound or two of the best tallow-dips, requiring a frequent and judicious use of the snuffers wielded by a steady hand. This operation was called “drawing the lodge,” or “forming the lodge,” and was usually done by the Tyler, or some one employed by him, for in reading old minute books I have frequently seen entries of various sums paid to the Tyler for “drawing,” or “forming the lodge.” It was considered quite the proper thing in those days for the candidate, no matter how exalted his station in life, to take a mop and pail of water at the conclusion of the ceremony, and carefully clean out all traces of the drawing on the floor. (Laughter.) I regret my inability to say definitely whether this was a practice in the Operative lodges, but I think it not at all unlikely; it seems to me just the sort of job that an Apprentice would be set to do after his admission and probably there was a reason for it and a meaning in it. I have no doubt that something of the kind was

done, which led to its continuation in the Speculative lodges. Just imagine if you can, brethren, what would be the effect on some of our candidates of the present day if they were ordered to take on a job of that sort. (Loud laughter.) In the course of time this old custom fell into abeyance, probably on account of carpets coming into general use, or through laxity on the part of the Tyler fraternity, who may have neglected the art of drawing. A writer in 1806 gives a different reason, and there may be some truth in it. He says: “People had taken notice and made game of them about the mop and pail, so some of the lodges use tape and little nails to form the same thing, and so keep the world more ignorant of the matter.” I should say this latter practice is not likely to have been either extensive or popular, especially with the proprietors of the houses where the lodges met, who would naturally object to nails being driven all over their floors. A more common and popular practice, I believe, was the use of a plain blackboard of the kind used in schools, on which the various emblems of the Craft were depicted. This, no doubt, gave rise to the term “lodge board,” a name still used instead of “tracing board,” in the Stability Lodge of Instruction, which is, I believe, the oldest lodge of instruction in continuous working, and in my opinion, that should be the proper name for it, as it really represents the lodge, and includes the real tracing board with the other emblems. I have in the Grand Lodge Library the Tyler’s bill for the “making” of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, afterwards King George the Fourth, in the year 1787. One of the items is, “Drawing a Lodge 3s.,” and another, “Portridge of a Large Drawing Board 3s.” On the floor are some of the materials of another substitute for the old custom of “Drawing the Lodge.” If there were others amongst them, and I have no doubt there were, I regret to say, they are lost beyond hope of recovery. Some years ago I found