



NUGGET

Recitation, explanation and contemplation According to Fred & Charlie



Summary: While taking proper pride in the accuracy of one's memory, always remember that the Candidate is the most important person in the room.

This was Charlie's first attempt at the Second Degree Tracing Board. After the meeting, he hastened along to the bar to find Fred who was waiting for him with a pint of best and a brief well done! Hoping for perhaps a little more praise than that, Charlie enthused:

'Didn't pause, didn't miss a word, didn't need a prompt. Not bad eh?'

Fred sipped his pint reflectively.

'Well, Charlie, you've broken the Lodge speed record certainly - I can't recall hearing it done faster.'

There was a lengthy pause, as he searched for the right-words, which wouldn't hurt or deflate.

'If the Candidate was asked what your talk was about though, he might just reply - About seven or eight minutes? That wasn't really the purpose of the exercise, was it? Let's sit down and have a chat.'

Somewhat hurt, Charlie was nonetheless always prepared to listen to Fred.

'Like you, many new Masons find the actual act of memorising long passages difficult, especially when the Director of Ceremonies seems to demand complete accuracy. If one adds to this being the centre of attention of an audience of 40 or so jesting mates, in a large hall, and speaking in a louder voice than normal to fill it ...simply put it all becomes rather an ordeal. One's nerve goes, and you try to survive by accelerating towards that final sentence before memory fails completely.'

Charlie smiled ruefully. How true that was.

'As it was word perfect, Charlie, you can well be at the receiving end of some appreciative nods from your colleagues and even more warm words during the visitor's reply at dinner. You're entitled to feel it has been a very successful evening.'

Fred paused.

'Has it?'

Charlie was startled. He had been word perfect! What more did old Fred want?

Fred took a lengthy sip. Eyeing Charlie he explained.

'In Masonic circles the piece is known as 'an explanation of the Tracing Board.'

He continued.

'Remember, Freemasonry is a system of morality and the Second Degree Tracing Board was included not for the speaker to demonstrate his powers of memory, but to reveal to the candidate that even the pictures on a simple Tracing Board can offer him moral lessons for reflection. The focus of the evening should always be the Candidate, never the Lodge ritualists themselves.'

'Well' said Charlie, slightly peevishly.

'I gave him every single word included in Emulation. What more do you want?'

Fred put his glass down.

'Look. Charlie, that poor lad has been in Masonry only a few months or so, and was outside for two of those meetings. He knows diddly-squat about Masonry. Tonight, he has listened to an Obligation, an explanation of the Signs, a moral story in the South-East corner, the Working Tools and by now he is punch-drunk and mentally 'out for the count'. You are proposing to talk at him for a further five or more minutes. Have some mercy and give him some consideration.'

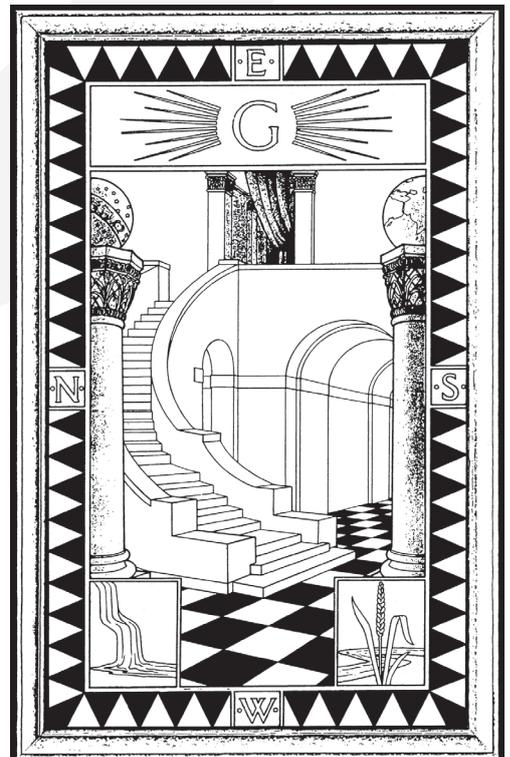
'Look at the challenge for him' said Fred.

'The Second Degree Tracing Board contains about half a dozen stories which are only loosely connected. They're drawn from unfamiliar Chapters of the Old Testament and sprinkled with equally unfamiliar names. Every candidate needs time to absorb the little story you've just told, before you switch to the next. Speed has no place in good ritual, Charlie. Remember there are three ages of Mason: the young; the middle-aged; and the 'you're still looking well for your age, Mike.' Ideally all those hard-of-hearing 'Mikes' need to be allowed a decent pause to absorb and inwardly digest anything new before they listen to the next tale.'

Charlie while not disgruntled was still not entirely grunted. He remembered all the miles he had walked reciting the words to his dog. (At least Fido seemed to be more appreciative than Fred). He was a reasonable chap though. It was true that, obsessed by remembering the words, he hadn't actually given any thought to their purpose or consideration for the Candidate. Swallowing his pride, he asked Fred for some ideas.

Fred paused for thought.

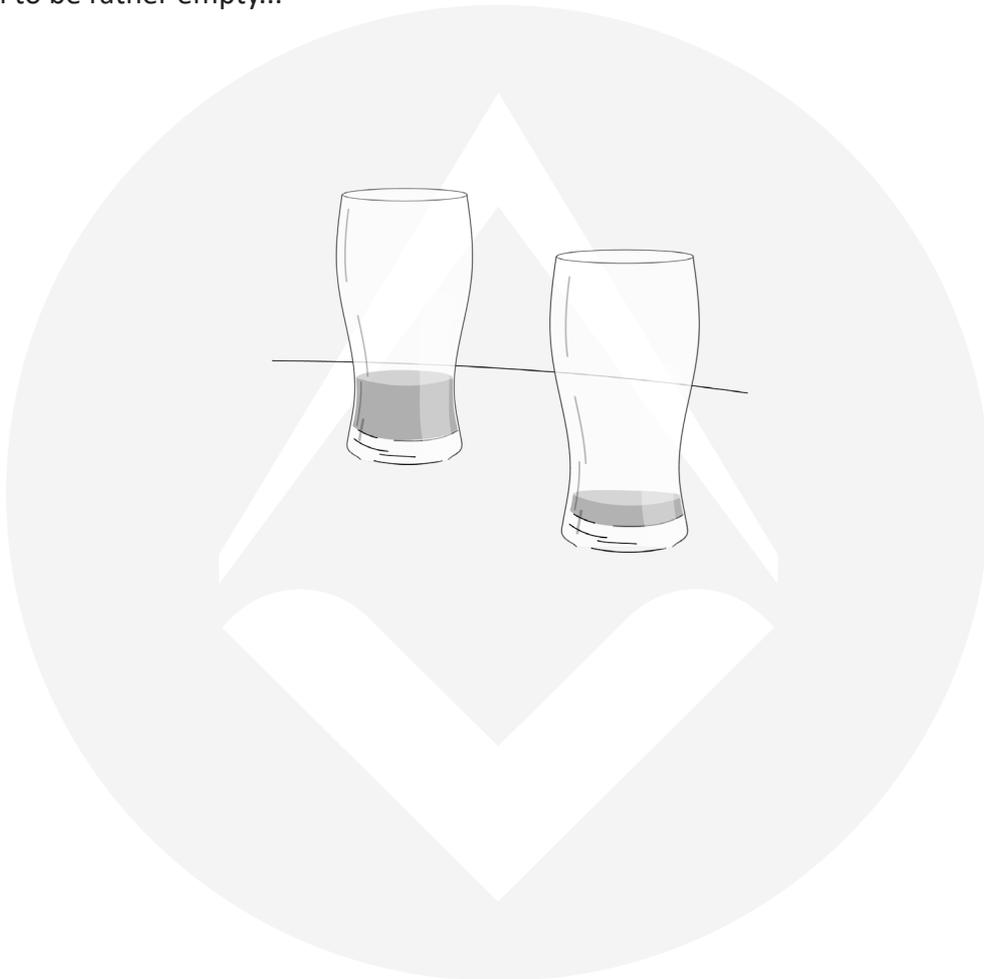
'Always put the Candidate first, second and third. Never be a prima-donna, Charlie, and hog the limelight. All that work you, and Fido, have done mastering the ritual is never wasted. It gives you the confidence to take things slowly and to explain, not recite.'





'Ideas? Hmm, firstly, get him to relax with a few friendly introductory words. Secondly, talk conversationally and always to him, not to the Worshipful Master or the Lodge. Make sure he can see the Board's detail. Thirdly, pause slightly at the end of each little story, let him take stock, then move on. Lastly, at the very end, you can shake his hand and offer to meet at the bar and explain anything he doesn't understand. Remember, you were in his shoes once. Always be a Brother to him.'

'That Second Degree Tracing Board was fine, but I know it'll be even better next time, Charlie. By the way, our glasses do seem to be rather empty...'





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Nuggets offer a short, simple and readily absorbed means of progressing Masonic knowledge and an easy way to introduce learning to Lodges and Chapters. It is hoped that they will become a regular feature of Lodge and Chapter meetings as well as a source for private-study.

Nuggets can be included as an item in the summons and read at most Lodge/Chapter meetings. They can be:

Read by either a new or an experienced Mason with the minimum of preparation and practice; though ideally, they need to be read a few times beforehand.

Themed with the meeting or activity.

Used to initiate a discussion within a Lodge/Chapter, LOI/COI, or group.

Read at home and shared as a topic for a future discussion.

Used as a focus for an unplanned, informal discussion.

*Note: All biblical passages are taken from the Authorized King James version and any reference to ritual will be from Emulation unless otherwise specified.

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Fred and Charlie character drawings courtesy of Eddie Wildman.

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