Copied from an unpublished letter of Stanton to Hon J. M. Ashley. In Mss. of Frank Flower. Not to be used until this is published or Ps permission is obtained.

When Grant telegraphed that Lee must and would surrender in a few days, I went to Mr. Lincoln, like a bird set free, and told him that my work was done - the task set for me when I accepted office finished - and handed over my resignation.

Putting his hands on my shoulders, tears filling his eyes, he said: "Stanton, you can not go. Re-construction is more difficult and dangerous than con-struction or de-struction. You have been our main reliance; you must help us through the final act. The bag is filled, but it is not tied; it must be tied, and tied securely. Some knots slip; yours do not. You understand the situation better than anybody else, and it is my wish, and the country's wish that you remain."

I instantly begged the President to understand that I had not proposed to leave him with any probable troubles or tasks in my domain unprovided for; that I had made the full outline of a plan of reconstruction (which he had already received) with briefs more or less elaborate explaining the varying circumstances to be considered in carrying out the reconstruction act (which Congress must provide) in each of the several States and localities; that I had prepared detailed instructions for the use of the quartermaster-general in turning over to their rightful owners, tentatively or fully, the railways, locomotives, rolling stock and other property seized or acquired during the military operations of the United States, and had also made memoranda in reference to

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reestablishing National post-offices, postal facilities, Federal Courts and revenue service and preparing generally to reopen commercial and social intercourse between the sections on a proper and enduring basis.

NOTE.- The incident referred to by Mr. Ashley is thus mentioned in President Johnson's opening remarks at Cleveland: "Fellow-citizens: It is not for the purpose of making a speech that I appear before you. I am aware how great is the anxiety to see strangers who have notoriety and distinction. I know a large number of you desire to see Gen. Grant and hear what he has to say, but you cannot see him tonight. He is extremely ill. (Three cheers for Grant.)"

Mr. Lincoln was never a good projector and frequently not a good manager; but his intuition was wonderful. He was one of the best of men to be by the side of a projector or manager. He steadily opposed arming and freeing slaves for reasons that will probably never be written, for nearly a year and a half, but usually his mind was as free from bias as any I ever knew, and it was a genuine pleasure to consult him on new matters.

As I began to relate the preparations I had made for conducting the Department after my resignation, a curious and interesting expression of his face disclosed that he had discovered a summary reply to my argument. The moment I finished he put his hand on my shoulder and observed triumphantly: "Stanton, you have given the very reasons why you should not resign. You admit that you have looked into the future, foreseen trouble and tried to prepare in advance for it for my relief, and the benefit of the Nation. Your recitation sustains me exactly.

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You must stay."

I had hardly returned to my desk, for of course an appeal like that, could not be overridden, when Mr. Lincoln was ~~was~~ murdered.

When the resulting confusion had somewhat subsided, the members of the cabinet (except Mr. Seward) informally tendered their resignations to take effect at the convenience of the new President. Perhaps I was first to make that suggestion. He replied: "No, you must keep the machinery moving. We must retain the chief engineer by all means. I hope you will not think of resigning." *

*NOTE.- Maj. A. E. H. Johnson, Stanton's confidential clerk, says (February 1897): "I know that Mr. Stanton did not want to stay in the War Department, but it is a fact that President Johnson compelled him to remain, and I have heard the Secretary so state."

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