330 Candler Building,
Atlanta,Ga.,
Feb.33,1923.

Mr.J.K.Smith,
251 Cherry St.,
Grand Rapids,Mich.

My dear Mr. Smith:- Your letter of Feb.10th received in due time and you will have to pardon my seeming neglect in answering,but part of the time I have been exceedingly busy and part I have been sick.

I note that you request that I give you a written statement of what I know "concerning the Civil War relations between Alex.H.Stephens and Abraham Lincoln", and also that I weave my "thoughts into a reminiscence" concerning these two men. In reply will say that all I know concerning these two men is from reading or from hearing others talk. I am a young man, born long after the Civil War and after Lincoln was dead and gone,and was about two years old when Stephens died. You can now very readily see that I could have no "recollections" nor "reminiscenses" to offer about these two distinguished men.

From reading I know that Stephens and Lincoln knew each other when in Congress before the war and that they seem to have had high regard for each other. After Lincoln was nominated to the Presidency he wrote to Stephens to ask for a copy of a speech he (Stephens) had made and they had an interchange of letters at that time, the nature of which can be gotten verbatim from either Johnson's Life of Stephens or from Stephens' "War between the States". They exchanged ideas of existing conditions, but the exchange lead to nothing as far as I can tell. If there was ever any other communication between the two,after this interchange of letters just before the war, until they met at the Hampton Roads conference in Jan. or Feb. 1865, I do not know of it. Stephens in his "war between the States" says he had never mentioned his previous correspondence with Lincoln nor their earlier friendship until the Confederate commissioners were on the way to the Hampton Roads conference and he mentioned it to Judge Campbell, so as to let him know that he really knew Lincoln and that they had been friends back in the old days before the war.

Now, growing out of this Hampton Roads Conference was the incident related to you by Mr. DuBose. It relates to my father, who was John A. Stephens and who was a nephew of Alex H. Stephens. John A. Stephens was a Lieutenant in the Confederate army and was in service with the Western Army. He was captured along with many others at the fall of Port Hudson, La., July 9, 1863, and was sent to prison at Johnson's Island in Lake Erie.

After accomplishing nothing at the Hampton Roads Conference in Feb.1865 Lincoln and Stephens turned to personal matters and conversed in friendly terms. Lincoln asked Stephens if there was anything of a personal nature he could do for him; that he would like to do him any personal service he could. Stephens told him he knew of nothing unless he could do something for a nephew of his who, upon last intelligence, was in prison at Johnson's Island. That the family had heard nothing of him in a long time and that he might be dead; but anything Mr. Lincoln could do for him would be taken a s a personal favor.

Mr. Lincoln immediately made note of the name and place of imprisonment and said he would inquire into the case when he got back to Washington. He and Stephens then separated, one going back to Washington the other to Richmond.

Along about the 5th of February young Stephens at Johnson's Island received orders to report to the Commandant of the prison. He did so and was told that orders had just come for him to report to the President of the United States at Washington and for him to get ready to leave about a certain time. He did so, of course, but with sorrow at leaving his friends, because he knew not his mission nor what fate awaited him. He had seen men called out who never returned and whose fate was never known. At the appointed time he was ready and he was placed in a sleigh and driven across frozen Lake Erie, being pulled by a couple of mules, to Sandusky and there he took the cars which carried him to Washington.

Upon reaching Washington he reported as soon as ~~possible~~ possible to the White House. His name was written upon a piece of paper and was sent into the President from the waiting room. After a time he was asked to come into the inner room. He did so and for the first time came face to face with Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was lying full length upon his office table with his face resting upon his hand and talking to Secretary Seward. As young Stephens entered he got up and came toward him, taking him by the hand and manifesting a very cordial welcome. He explained to him that he was just back from a conference in which he had had conversation with his uncle, Alex. H. Stephens, and that he had promised him he would send him to him. He also told him that Mr. Stephens had told him that his(young Stephens') Mother and Sister were well at a certain time, which was the first the Confederate prisoner had heard from home in a long time. He also told him to make himself home in Washington and stay as long as he wished and whenever he got ready to go South to come to him and that he would give him passes and passage through the Union lines. Stephens remained in Washington a day or two and had his photograph taken while there; the picture of a Confederate Lieutenant taken in full uniform of the Confederacy in the capital of the United States in early '65!

When he got ready to leave he reported again to the President. Mr. Lincoln turned to his desk and penned the following letter;

"Executive Mansion
Washington, [redacted]
Feb. 10, 1865.

"Hon. A.H.Stephens,

[redacted],

"According to our agreement your nephew, Lieut. Stephens, goes to you bearing this note. Please in return to select and send to me that officer of the same rank imprisoned at Richmond whose physical condition most urgently requires his release.

Respectfully,
A. Lincoln."

This letter was folded while it was wet and is blotted below with a kind of reverse of the writing above. Mr. Lincoln handed this letter to Stephens and told him to give it to his Uncle. He then turned again to his desk and said, "Here, suppose you take this with you; it might prove a curiosity down South", and he picked up a photograph of himself taking a pen and writing his autograph below the likeness, and handed it to Stephens. He then wished him well and told him goodbye as he let him out the door.

John A. Stephens was transported through the Union lines and instead of coming direct home, he joined the Confederate army again in West Virginia and served on the staff of Gen. John Echols until the surrender in April. Then he rode through from Virginia to Georgia on a horse given him by Gen Echols. It was in May sometime before he saw his Uncle, A.H. Stephens, and delivered Lincoln's letter to him. Lincoln was then dead and gone and Stephens in his diary says that when he saw this letter it brought the tears to his eyes. He gave the letter to John A. Stephens and he had it framed with the autograph photograph in one of the lower corners. As I said, John A. Stephens was my Father, and I have the picture and letter hanging on the wall of my home.

I am sorry I can do no better for you about Stephens and Lincoln, but you can find all that is known about their relationship from the books that I have indicated before.

Very truly yours,

Col. R. Stephens

This great character in American history, who attained his position after passing through the school of adversity-for he sat beside the flickering light of a tallow candle laboriously studying from his small library of four volumes, the knowledge that was to fructify into the statecraft, that served during a great crisis in American history. When his task was completed and he stretched out his hand to garner the reward for his labors, it drew forth a mandate to commit the supreme sacrifice, for it was ordained he had to die, in order to receive it from the lips of his chief antagonist. President Davis proved to be a man of chivalry, for when he heard the news during the negira from Richmond-it called forth an instant ejaculation

WE NOW HAVE TO DEAL WITH A HARDER MAN

He meant one that came from his own section of the country, in the person of Vice-President Andrew Johnson.

This is unpublished information from the original manuscript owned by Mr William K. Bixby of St Louis, Mo

Mr Bixby was in his day, the greatest collector in America, when it came to original information.

A Reminiscence of Abraham Lincoln
By Dr Robert L. Stephens

From the red marks, this is unpublished information. This information is supplemented by unpublished data bearing on the observation of President Davis, when he heard of the assassination. This manuscript is owned by Mr William A. Bixby of St Louis, Mo.