

FLYING MACHINE DISASTER.

Yet another name has to be added to the long list of experimenters killed in attempting to solve the problem of how to fly, which has dominated the mind of men from the earliest recorded periods. This latest victim is Mr. Percy S. Pilcher, a gentleman well-known in scientific circles by reason of his many experiments in aerial navigation, some of them fairly successful, at Mr. Maxim's establishment in Kent and elsewhere. The accident occurred on Saturday, the 30th September, in the park at Stanford Hall, the seat of Lord Brave, near Rugby. The flying, or, as Mr. Pilchner himself termed it, the soaring machine, is one with which the unfortunate aeronaut had made, during the last few months from Stanford Park, flights of from the three hundred to four hundred yards at altitudes of from twenty to fifty feet. Its principle is that of the aeroplane, a modification of the kite, offering a big surface to the atmosphere. Mr. Pilcher's machine is bird-shaped, as opposed to the wedge-shape of the first aeroplanes, and somewhat resembles a great eagle with wings of sail-cloth, having a spread of 170 feet. The rudder is shaped like a bird's tail, with sails that can be set at various angles, and is fixed about two feet from the machine body. The latter is a frame of light bamboo with wire ribs like those of an umbrella, carrying stretched sail-cloth. The weather was totally unfavourable for the trial, heavy rain alternating with stormy gusts of wind. The machine was raised after the fashion of a kite by a cord drawn by horses, the inventor, it is understood, intending to apply a specially constructed oil motor to propel it when he had obtained perfect control in mid air. With a sharp run by the horses of 160 yards the machine had risen some sixty feet, when a violent gust of wind snapped the cross bar extending the wings. The latter at once collapsed and folded up, the whole apparatus coming down with a terrible thud, and burying Mr. Pilcher beneath it. He died without recovering consciousness.

In 1273 Friar Bacon maintained that flying was possible, and that it would become a general art; while Bishop Wilkins in 1651 said it would some day be usual for a man to call for his wings, as he does now for his boots. Van Groof, the "flying man" who, with a wing-shaped apparatus, tried to fly from a balloon at Chelsea on July 9, 1874, came down like a stone and was instantly killed. There has never yet been anything approaching a successful flying machine, though, apparently, the aeroplane, invented by Mr. Maxim, designates the lines on which the problem will be eventually solved.