

Personal

August 8, 1896

A. A. Merrill, Esq.

Dear Sir

I have your letter of 6 and the clipping from the "Boston Globe," which, as is not unusual, is more sensational than accurate.

It refers to some precursory experiments which I tried over a month ago to develop the question of stability in accordance with some advice which I tendered to experimenters in an article which you will find in the "Engineering Magazine" for April, 1896.

For this purpose I had built two gliding (not flying) machines. One, of the Lilienthal type, as designed by M Herring in 1894, and one of my own. On the 22 of June, we went to the desert sand hills on the shore of lake Michigan, about 30 miles from here, and tested both machines as aerial toboggans, by running on a ridge, jumping into the wind, and gliding as far as possible.

We made about 150 such jumps during the two weeks that the experiments lasted, and got more valuable information concerning the behavior of an apparatus in the wind, than I had accumulated by all the previous years of experiment with models.

The Lilienthal machine is safer than I had expected; because the ribs act as springs when an awkward landing is made, and by springing or breaking save the operator from harm. We did however break the ribs a number of times, patched them up with splints and got more glides, but finally injured the apparatus so that it could not be repaired in the field. I shall not rebuild this machine.

My own apparatus seems to promise to be steadier and safer. We got many glides of 50 to 80 ft. each, and could have extended them by starting from higher and steeper slopes, but my chief effort has been, thus far, to develop absolute safety. We met with no accident whatsoever to the operators, and did not break this machine.

It still being in process of evolution, I do not care to describe its present form, but I send you a photograph showing one of the modifications which you will observe has been distorted by the newspaper in redrawing. I also enclose a clipping from the Chicago Record which is less inaccurate than the other accounts given by the press, whose reporters found us out in spite of our endeavors to avoid observation.

I am now rebuilding two forms of my design, and also an apparatus somewhat resembling that of LeBris, on page 105 of "Progress in flying machines," so that we will have three machines to test in two or three weeks. I expect to break them, but perhaps not

before we have evolved some information which will enable us to do better next time.

I have written this as a personal letter, which you are free to communicate privately to the members of your society, but not to print; as I do not think I have progressed far enough to publish any description of my experiments over my own signature.

Reply

O. Chanute