

MR. WHITEHEAD'S SOARING TRIP.

A Very Ambitious Effort to Imitate the Birds.

The flight of half a mile through the air by Gustave Whitehead, of Bridgeport, Connecticut, a few days ago, has given more hope to scientists than have the achievements of the Brazilian flyer in Paris. It is true that M. Santos-Dumont flew higher and farther than did Mr. Whitehead, but the former used merely a balloon with a motor. The fact that he was able to direct the movements of the balloon (until there came a wind) does not change the fact that his appliance is essentially a balloon and not an airship. Mr. Whitehead used no balloon. He was kept in the air at a height of about fifty feet by the power of his engine. Scientists who have studied the subject of air navigation have reached the conclusions that no balloon with its great load of gas can ever be managed in a wind, and that the airship which shall be anything more than a plaything must be sustained and propelled by its own power. The Whitehead invention is particularly pleasing because it has been constructed after the manner of birds of flight, and it looks like a monster bird. By accident, or rather by a sudden inspiration, Mr. Whitehead in a moment of danger found how he could steer the course of his machine.

As in the case of the airships which seemed most promising a few years ago (the Lilienthal, the Maxim and others), the Whitehead invention runs along the ground until it acquires speed enough for a gradual rise, as the bird does. Unlike that which caused the death of Herr Lilienthal, the machine of Mr. Whitehead does not show a mad desire to upset and plunge toward the earth. The driving engine forces the airship on the ground for a short distance at the rate of fifty miles an hour, the wings being motionless until the other engine is started. In the recent trial the instant the wings were made to move the apparatus darted upward. As the inventor, while at a height of fifty and going furiously, was in danger of striking a clump of chestnut trees he threw the weight of his body to one side, and the ship careened and sailed safely around the trees. In alighting everything went as well as in starting, and it may be said that so far the American invention is far superior to any other construction for sailing the air. At any rate, if we are to have a satisfactory airship it must be built after the general plan of Whitehead.