

Oct. 16, 1895

Capt. H. W. L. Moedebeck

My dear Sir

I duly received your kind letters of 10th & 16th of September, and it has taken me some little time to sent over and cut out some of my data for you.

I am very glad to have the interesting account which you give of your aims and methods of work in writing your history, as it will enable me to supply you some information without overloading you with trash. The clippings I have already sent you I consider of little value.

From what you tell me of your collection of materials, I infer that you are fully supplied with the French and British publications, as well as the German, and that I had better confine myself to sending you American "ephemeris." My own collection chiefly consists of recent magazine articles referring to Aviation, and the information about balloons I will have to get later, in some other way.

I now send you a file of the "American Engineer" from October 1894 to October 1895 (save the November 1894 No. which I order sent to you from New York) in which you will find, at the back, the department of "Aeronautics" (now abandoned to my regret) which may interest; particularly the references to recent publications. This file you may keep permanently.

I also send separately my collection of American Magazine articles, which I must ask you to return to me when you have taken such notes from them as you desire. They well illustrate the principle, which you want to make prominent, about the origin, development and disappearance of ideas.

For instance: about the year 1885, the problem of Aerial navigation began to be considered in the United States, by a number of men who were not quacks, (See article by Prof. T. W. Mather of Yale college in Pop. Science monthly of Nov. 1885) and this around the combativeness of other scientific men who considered their leadership in peril. Among these Prof. Joseph Le Conte, of the University of California, who had been

President of the "American Association for the Advancement

[Seite 2]

of Science," published an article in Pop. Science Monthly (which see) in Nov. 1888, taking the ground flatly "that a pure flying machine is impossible." This was replied to by Mather, but the only convincing answer, of course, is to produce such a machine.

Then Prof. Thurston, Director Sibley College, Cornell University, published an articles in the "Forum" of January 1890, expressing general hopes. (article sent) Meanwhile, Maxim, Langley, Hargrave, Lilienthal and others experimented and published papers, and in Pop. Sc. Monthly of April 1894 (which see) Prof. Le Conte stated that he had seen new light, took back the assertion as to impossibility, but still held that the difficulties were so great that they are not likely to be overcome except in the distant future.

If now, success should be achieved in this generation, he will be in the position of Dr. Lardner, who predicted that a steamer could never cross the Atlantic, a few years before it was done.

Since then the Pop. Sc. Monthly, which looked askance on the subject, and generally refused articles upon it, has published the articles which I send on the "Avitor flying machine" of Trouvé, and the "Sail-wheel" of Wellner.

Again, we may take the instance of the "North American Review" our most serious publication. This Review treated Aerial navigation with contemptuous silence until 1892, when, other publications having made some noise about it, the N. Am. published in 1892 in its "Notes and Comments" a brief article by A. M. Cummings on "the Uselessness of flying machines." In 1893, J. St. Potolphe, also in "Notes & comments," expressed some doubts and some amiable hopes, while in Sep. 1894 the N. Am. Review published, in the body of the magazine, an article on "Development of Aerial Navigation" by Maxim, followed in Oct. 1895, by an article on "birds in flight and the flying machine" by the same author. (all sent)

There lacks but the 3rd stage of adverse comment upon human endeavor – 1. It is impossible. 2. It is useless. 3. It does not amount to much after all.

[Seite 3]

I will give you another instance of a somewhat different idea. In January 1892 the Cosmopolitan offered prizes for essays. (see cover) In March 1892 the Editor of the Cosmopolitan Magazine wrote and published an article on "The problem of Aerial

Navigation,” in which he reviewed the state of the art, spoke in much too flattering terms of myself, and announced his determination to attempt the solution of the problem. His first predilections were towards navigable balloons, and I believe that he conferred with some inventors, and with the Navy department to obtain the use of ship sheds at Washington to house the proposed airship. Estimates however showed that the navigable balloons would be very costly. Moreover, one object probably was the legitimate one of increasing the circulation of the magazine, but I fancy that the new subscribers were not forthcoming in large numbers for although the fact that prizes were offered had been widely commented on, and indeed other periodicals had proposed to shine by reflected light, “see advertizement of “Electricity” of Feb. 3, 1892, pasted on) it was proved once more that while the subject appeals to the imagination, the latter is not ready to respond with cash.

A good many essays were received, but only two were found worth publishing. (I was asked, but did not respond because I dislike notoriety.) These essays were the one by M^r Maxim, June, 1892, and one by J. P. Holland Nov. 1892, which you will find under a separate cover. They were introduced by brief paper from Professor Langley, (May/92) which was not offered for a prize.

At any rate, the Cosmopolitan Magazine did not try any experiments that we know of, and has allowed the subject to droop; its publications since Holland's paper having consisted in one page from Tissandier in January 1894, and an article on “Gliding Flight” from Mouillard in Feb., 1894.

The proposal of the New York World, which you ask me about is less discreet. That newspaper has taken up the “air bicycle” of M^r Myers, a good aeronaut, who has been exhibiting it at county fairs, has painted its name on it, sent it up when the wind was less than 4 miles per hour, and claims that the problem is solved. I send these papers also.

The other papers do not need any special comment. They show for themselves that M^r Maxim is the best noticed man among the experimenters and students of the subject.

[Seite 4]

I wrote an article myself for the Engineering Magazine in October 1891, but I cannot send it to you at present. I will try to get a copy from New York. I enclose a list of what I send to be returned, so that you may check it off.

I thank you very much for your photograph, and am much pleased to have it. I will add it to a little collection which I have already. I regret to have no recent photograph of myself, but I send an engraving which published the year (1891) that I had honor of being President of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

As to Andrée's proposed North pole journey, I look upon it as a fool-hardy expedition, not worth risking two lives. It is, of course, possible that he may get back, whether he sees the Pole or not, but I think the chances are all against him. The chief fallacy that I see in the project is that he cannot trust to the same means, (wind and gas) for getting out, that he proposes to use for getting in.

With best regards

Yours truly

O. Chanute