

# PROPHET OF AVIATION

**I**N FEBRUARY there was unveiled near Cairo, Egypt, a monument to Louis Pierre Mouillard, a French pioneer of aviation. Altho he did not succeed in flying himself, he was a potent factor in inspiring others with the belief that aviation was a possibility. He belongs in the class with Lilienthal, Chanute, and others who did valuable preliminary work without which the actual achievement could not have come so soon. They led the way to the promised land, but were not suffered to enter it. It has been claimed by zealous Frenchmen that the Wrights obtained from Mouillard some of the information that enabled them to succeed. In an article contributed to *The Bulletin* of the Aero Club of America (New York, April), Wilbur Wright denies this, while giving credit to Mouillard for his work. Says Mr. Wright:

"The erection at Cairo, Egypt, of a monument to L. P. Mouillard, recalls attention to one of the greatest missionaries of the flying cause which the 19th century produced. Mouillard was a Frenchman who passed a large part of his life in Algeria and Egypt, where his attention was attracted by the wonderful soaring of vultures on fixt wings. His imagination was greatly excited by what he saw, and during the remainder of his life he was like a prophet crying in the wilderness, exhorting the world to repent of its unbelief in the possibility of human flight. In 1881 he published a book called 'The Empire of the Air,' which is one of the most remarkable pieces of aeronautical literature that has ever bene published. In his introduction he says:

"If there be a domineering, tyrant thought it is the conception that the problem of flight may be solved by man. When once this idea has invaded the brain it possesses it exclusively. It is then a haunting thought, a walking nightmare, impossible to cast off. If now we consider the pitying contempt with which such a line of research is appreciated, we may somewhat conceive the unhappy lot of the poor investigator whose soul is thus possesset.'

"He deploras the incredulity of the world and exhorts it to cast aside its unbelief:

"O! blind humanity! open thine eyes and thou shalt see millions of birds and myriads of insects cleaving the atmosphere. All these creatures are whirling through the air without the slightest float; many of them are gliding therein, without losing height, hour after hour, on pulseless wings without fatigue; and after beholding this demonstration, given by the source of all knowledge, thou wilt acknowledge that aviation is the path to be followed.'



A GREAT MISSIONARY  
OF THE FLYING CAUSE.

The statue erected to  
Louis Pierre Mouillard at Heliopolis.

"His observations upon the habits of vultures led him to the conclusion that flight without motors was possible to man, and this idea he presented to his readers with an enthusiasm so inspiring and convincing that his book produced results of the greatest importance in the history of flight. . . . .

"Throughout the book are to be found passages of high literary quality, and the charm is so great that more than one cold-blooded reader has been incited to emulate the example of the birds. There is no doubt that the reading of this book was one of the main factors in inducing Mr. Chanute to undertake his experiments, and I know that it was one of the inspiring causes of the efforts of the Wright brothers. Compared with this book, which is devoted almost entirely to observations relating to birds, the ordinary books on ornithology are childish. With the possible exception of Lilienthal, none of the men who wrote on aviation in the 19th century possess such power to draw recruits to a belief in the possibility of motorless human flight."

But while as a missionary Mouillard stood at the top with Lilienthal and Chanute, as a scientific student of aerodynamics Mr. Wright does not class him with such men as Cayley, Wenham, Penaud, Langley, Lilienthal, Chanute, and Maxim. He was a careful observer of birds, and possess a genius for expressing his thoughts and feelings in words, but beyond that he was mediocre. He made a few feeble attempts to construct soaring-machines, but their design and construction were crude. It remained for Lilienthal to definitely employ this mode of experiment, and thereby win for himself a glory which the world will never forget. Mr. Wright goes on:

"It is most unfortunate that the project of erecting a monument to a man well worthy of the thanks and the remembrance of the world should have become entangled with an unworthy attempt to seek to add to the glory of France by filching the credit justly due to Lilienthal, and by falsely accusing Mr. Chanute, the benefactor of Mouillard, of having stolen the latter's secrets and

transmitted them to the Wright brothers. There is in France a little group of misguided individuals who bring disgrace upon their country by their too zealous attempts to add to its glory. Fortunately they do not represent the real France, which has shown by numerous manifestations of various kinds its high appreciation of the work of foreigners, including even Lilienthal, a native of a country greatly disliked by French people. . . . .

"The fact that the Wright brothers had been using wing-warping several years before Mr. Chanute became acquainted with them, effectually disposes of the part of the story accusing Mr. Chanute of transmitting any of Mouillard's secrets to them. The fact that Mouillard never had the idea of warping the wings to control lateral balance, and never communicated such an idea to Mr. Chanute, is also sufficient of itself to refute the charge."

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