

Letter from Pollok & Mauro to Samuel P. Langley, May 6, 1897, with transcript

Action to Mrs. Bell COPY Washington, May 6, 1897 Prof. S.P. Langley, Dear Sir:

As understood from your statements to our Mr. Mauro, the only object you have at the present time, in requesting an examination of your "aerodrome", is to obtain an expression of our opinion on the question whether your apparatus embodies patentable subject-matter of such character that a patent of controlling and dominating scope could be obtained thereon.

To form an opinion on this point requires no elaborate investigation or extended consideration. A patent to be dominating must cover effectually some definite constructive feature or features, essential to the attainment of the object of the invention. As understood by us the essential mechanical features of the aerodrome, whereby it sustains itself in horizontal flight, are (1) stationary wings, or aeroplanes, slightly inclined upwardly in the direction of movement; (2) means (such as power-driven screw propellers) for imparting to the apparatus a velocity appropriate to the angle of inclination of the wings. It is, of course, essential also that the motor should be such as to develop high power in proportion to its weight.

If it were possible to cover these features the patent would be of fundamental character; but this cannot be done. The possibility of mechanical flight by a combination of aeroplanes and screw-propellers has long been realized. Victor Tatin, Penaud and others, as long as twenty years ago, accomplished short flights with small apparatus embodying these general features. Harte in a British patent of 1870 (No. 1469) and many others in later patents have proposed air-ships based on these devices. Elaborate articles by Maxim and Holland in the *Cosmopolitan* for June 1892, have been brought to our attention, and without extended reference to the literature of the art with which you are

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familiar,we deem it quite certain that,at this day,no patent could be secured and enforced so as to arrest the work of others,who have long been engaged upon the development of plans for aerial navigation based upon the same general ideas as those embodied in the “aerodrome”.

In reaching this conclusion we do not lose sight of the fact that the aerodrome actually flies — a characteristic that distinguishes it from other “flying”machines. If this result were due to some radical and new feature of construction,or departure from existing or proposed structures,the problem of securing a broad patent would be simple. But from your explanations we understand that such is not the case,and that the result is attributed to the reduction of weight of the motor,and to the adjustment of numerous details in various parts of the apparatus. It is probable that in these different details there are features of patentable novelty. But inasmuch as it would require an extensive search and study to determine this,we have deemed it advisable to communicate at this 3 point views upon the main question presented, and to await further instructions.

Very respectfully, (Signed) Pollok & Mauro.