

With a good glass and careful concealment in the lantern-top, a very near view was obtained. Humboldt and Darwin—the latter in *The Voyage of the Beagle*—have given some attention to the subject, but express an inability to comprehend it. The fact that these birds soar, or remain apparently motionless, only when the wind is considerable, seems to have escaped their notice. For therein lies the secret. The *Tachypetes* represents the most spread of wing and the least proportionate body of any bird, and is, consequently, one that possesses the greatest faculty for maintaining the curious position in mid-air. Another fact is, the bird always faces the wind. We have, then, the same conditions as in the case of a boy's kite. It rises precisely as a kite does, and it moves only as it does—not by any movement of feathers, but a gentle swaying, and a trifle of tilting on the wing, to maintain its balance. What keeps it from being blown away—for the kite has its string? The intelligence of the bird causes it to tilt forward just enough to counteract the force of the wind, and thus the smallest space is presented to the wind; it is merely a thin edge. Tipping forward causes the body to fall against the wind; the two forces—gravity and the wind—are opposed, and a perfect rest is the result.

The writer received a note from Mr. Darwin, in answer to one suggesting this explanation. In this answer he says: "I have thought of some such explanation, but the mathematicians say it is not possible; that the two forces do not operate in a direct line, opposite to each other." Now, there is the qualifying power of buoyancy, which operates to prevent the bird from dropping directly down like a dead weight. We must regard the bird as it is—a thin, exceedingly light object, that is kept up by a strong wind, and that, by its intelligent attention, keeps the outspread wings and body rigid and always edge-wise to the wind, with a slight tendency downward. These conditions observed, the bird *rests* upon the wind as the kite does, the force of gravity operating as the string. It is not uncommon to see a stiff piece of paper balanced in the air by the wind, and when inclined even directly against the wind, to shoot forward until it goes obliquely to the ground. Now, could this paper, just at the moment of falling, while inclined against the wind, act to tilt its face a trifle, the wind would send it backward and upward again. Thus, if the two forces were opposed by intelligent action, the result would be as in the bird, a complete balancing on the wind.

ALCA IMPENNIS. *Great Auk*.—This bird is notable in the sense that it has ceased to exist, so far as its history is cognizant, and is