THE DAILY EVENING TELEGRAPH PHILADELPHIA, WDENESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1819.

Can living substance ever be evolved out of non-living substance? It is an old—a very old—question, to which the philosophers of successive centuries have given different auswers, and it is not yet certain when the time will come that the final verdict of science shall be absolute and conclusive. It will be in the recollection of many of our readers that the distinguished President of the last meeting of the British Association put his foot down (as the Yankee phrase is) solidly, and almost savagely, upon one of the rival hypotheses, and pronounced that the maxim Omne pivum ex vivo was victorious all along the line. Strangely enough this authoritative assertion on the part of one of the most eminent of our modern school of science has served only to revive the controversy which he endeavored to stamp out, and the pages of our scientific contemporary, Nature, bear witness to the keenness with which the issue is still contested. So warmly indeed has the battle raged that we are compelled to deplore the conversion into controversial heat, and the consequent dissipation, of a vast amount of energy which, under more favorable influences, might have manifested itself in the form of sound and lasting scientific work. This affords one more illustration of what is almost a truism, that it pays better to answer opponents than to try to stamp them out. But passing by, for the present at any rate, the manner in which the warfare has been waged, we propose to consider what the result of the evidence is up to the present time on this question, which has engaged the attention of mankind from the earliest dawn of science, which in successive ages has received conflicting answers in accordance with the knowledge and temper of the time, which is still, as some think, almost as unsettled as ever, and which, for aught we know, may remain unsettled to the end of time.

The most prominent champions who have recently entered the lists in this great quarrel are Professor Huxley, who maintains that all living things without exception are the products of previously living matter, and Dr. Bastian, who maintains that his own experiments and those of others who have preceded him in the same field establish the possibility, if not the probability, that living organisms are sometimes evolved out of non-living

Before discussing the points of difference between the two schools thus represented, it will be well to note the extent to which they are agreed. Professor Huxley and Dr. Bastian both hold that there is no difficulty in conceiving the development of protoplasm step by step into higher organisms, and the only issue is whether it is or is not possible that protoplasm itself, or forms of life which are little more than undefined living substance, can under any conditions be evolved from non-living matter without the presence of pre-existing life. Again, Professor Huxley concedes so much to his opponent as to admit that if he were permitted to look back "beyoud the abyss of geologically recorded time to the still more remote period when the earth was passing through the physical and chemical conditions" of its infancy, he should expect, not as a matter of belief, but as an "act of philosophical faith," to see "the evolution of living protoplasm from non-living matter;" but he seems to rely (apart from direct experiment) on the analogy of the known mode of reproduction of all the higher forms of animal and vegetable life as a strong a priori argument that in the lowest forms also the rule Omne vivum ex vivo may be presumed to hold good. Dr. Bastian, on the other hand, of course admits that, so long as we keep out of the regions which the microscope with all its modern improvements has revealed, there is no known origin of life without a previously living parent; but he considers the analogy of what, even according to Professor Huxley, must once have happened on the earth to be a more cogent argument (on the principle of continuity) in favor of the present existence of the same mode of evolution of life than the parallel sought to be drawn from the rule which palpably governs the genesis of the higher orders of organized beings. If we are called upon to pronounce judgment upon these a priori reasonings from analogy, we must say that they are equally worthless. Professor Huxley's faith that there was once an age of abiogenesis (as he terms the origin of life from non-living matter), which has now finally passed away, has too much resemblance to the theological theory about the age of miracles to be very attractive to a scientific mind; while Dr. Bastian's reliance upon the law of continuity seems to us to be strained too far to have any appreciable value. To our minds the question is a pure question of fact, depending on the results of scientific investigation. We see no a priori considera-tions which would weigh a feather in the scale against any well-established scientific experiments, and we approach the examination of the evidence without the faintest prejudice for or against the possibility of the occasional evolution of life from non-living

Now what are the facts? This is the only question worth discussing. From 1668 to 1870 a series of experimental investigations stands recorded, in the course of which results arrived at by one inquirer have been overthrown by his successor, to be set on their legs again by a still later experimentalist. Which way the beam is at present in-elined is the inquiry to which we shall briefly address ourselves. The task is happily not so difficult as it would have been a few months since. In the address with which he fascinated the assembled savans of the British Association, Professor Huxley has given an admirable summary (seen of course from his own point or view) of the work which was done by successive biologists from the year 1668 to the year 1862. At this epoch he closes his narrative, for reasons which he has since partially explained, and which we shall presently consider. But seekers after truth need not be dismayed, for whatever they may have lost by the silence of Professor Huxley has been supplied by the very ample account which Dr. Bastian has given in the pages of Natura of the work accomplished since the year 1862, which closes the Professor's charming history. Need we say that the balance of evidence in 1862 inclined more strongly than at any other period to the side of biogenesis, or that the subsequent experiments, whatever their weight may be, point exclusively in the opposite direction? Just as it needed a Hume and a Smollett to complete the history of England, so we must combine the writings of Huxley and Bastian to get the whole story of the protracted controversy as to the origin of life.

In the early dawn of scientific thought, when authority counted for more than experiment, and a priori fancies took the place which belongs of right to inductive investi-gations, a kind of philosophical faith was the only representative of scientific opinion. With or without reason, however, the world

THE SPONTANEOUS GENERATION CONTROVERSY.

bourly evolved out of non-living matter. | spect of the controversy, unless it can which which was not palpable to the eye, it was explained ther with the analogous results of Wyman, at once as a case of abiogenesis. Having small means of observation, and making little use of what they had, it is not surprising that these early theorists attributed to spontaneous generation the appearance of many living creatures which a little care would have traced to pre-existing germs. The maggot developed in putrid meat was allowed no parent except the carcass on which it fed, and other blunders, equally gross, were made (as was natural) by inquirers who did everything except inquire.

About two centuries ago, when the spirit of induction had laid a firm hold of the minds of men, even biological science felt the revolution. Redi seems to have been the first to test the accepted doctrine of spontaneous generation. By the simplest process in the world he proved that putrid meat did not generate maggets. He kept the blowflies away, and the maggots did not appear. He collected the blowflies' eggs, and hatched his maggots without the presence of the flesh which had so long been their reputed parent. Similar results followed in other like cases, and having shown that gentles and other creatures, whose origin he investigated, certainly were not the products of spontaneous generation, Redi conceived the theory that spontaneous generation was a fiction from beginning to end, and that the exclusive method of nature was expressed by what has since become the familiar maxim Omne vivum ex vivo. As a working hypothesis to tested by future experiment this was legitimate enough. As a scientific conclusion it would have been a

very audacious generalization. Until the commencement of what may be called the microscopic age there were no means of carrying the investigation further. By this time, however, the maxim Omne vivum ex vive had got associated with ideas now almost exploded about distinctive vital forces, and had become as firm an article of faith as the opposite doctrine had been before Redi discredited it. A new era was commenced, and it is to the revelations of the microscope during the last century, and especially in quite recent times, that both parties to the controversy appeal. The programme of all these experiments has been the same. First destroy and exclude every trace of life-then see if under any influences life can be evolved. At each successive stage the stringency of the methods employed has steadily increased. In all of them, however, heat has been the destructive agent employed. Needham took a solution of hay, boiled it to destroy all life within, and corked and sealed his flasks to exclude all access of life from without. Nevertheless his solutions bred animalcules, and he ascribed the fact to spontaneous generation. Spallanzani repeated the experiment with severer precautions. He boiled his solutions longer, and hermetically sealed his flasks instead of cooking them. No animalcules appeared, and so far the inference seemed irresistible, that the source of life in Needham's experiments was something which might be destroyed by heat and excluded by a film of glass. If so, what more likely than a germ? Schwann followed on the same side. He calcined air and allowed it to approach his boiled solutions, and no life appeared. He admitted ordinary air, and life abounded. Thus it seemed to be proved almost to de-

monstration that the presence of unburned

air contributed largely to the production of life, and no explanation of this was so natural as the hypothesis that the air is laden with myriads of floating germs of life. The negative conclusion that this access of germs was the only mode by which life could be produced, was from its nature less easy to prove. So far as Schwann's experiments went, it seemed likely, but they supplied too slender and, as it afterwards proved, too unsound a basis for so large a generalization. Pasteur, himself a strong opponent of spontaneous generation, repeated Schwann's experiments, and though he too at first obtained only negative results, he found that when the solution contained certain alkaline fluids life appeared in spite of the boil-ing and the calcining. This showed that to generalize from Schwann's results would have been at least premature, but further experiments satisfied Pasteur that if the heat applied was raised from C. 100 to C. 110, the power of evolving life disappeared even from the alkaline solution. No visible germs, un-less specially protected, have ever been shown to require so high a temperature to destroy them in solution, and the necessity of assuming this degree of vital resistance appreciably weakened the germ hypothesis. Still up to this point it did seem to be established that the power of vital evolution could not survive a fluid temperature of C. 110; and the further inference that connected this temperature with the presumed limit of vital resistance in germs was at least as likely as any other explanation. We say this without being unmindful of Dr. Bastian's suggestion that heat may be conceived as preventing vital evolution by affecting the molecular arrangement of matter as well as by the annihilation of germs. Pasteur's experiments on this subject were announced in 1862, the date at which Professor Huxley closes his history. For our remaining facts we have to draw upon Dr Bastian's continuation of the story. Professor Wyman, of Cambridge, U. S., Professor Mantegazza, of Turin, and Professor Can-toni, of Pavia, have all tried similar expariments, in which temperatures of from C. 120 to C. 142 were employed, and, notwithstanding this, they have found living organisms in their solutions. Finally, Dr. Bastian, in an elaborate paper published in *Nature*, very shortly before Professor Huxley's address was delivered, minutely describes and pictures the living organisms which he obtained from hermetically-sealed flasks, some of which had been subjected by Professor Frankland to a temperature of C. 150 for several hours. What makes the experiments the more startling is that the fluids employed in several of them were not infusions of organic matter, but mere solutions of crystals of salts, containing of course the necessary elements of

In one of these, figured at p. 200 of Nature for July 7, 1870, the solution was composed of tartrate of ammonia and phosphate of The air was exhausted, and the flask soda. hermetically sealed and kept for four hours at a temperature varying from C. 146 to C. 154. Professor Frankland's name sufficiently attests the care with which these processes were performed. When cooled, the fluid was clear, but after many days floceuleut masses appeared. The flask was broken by Dr. Bastian in the presence of Dr. Sharpey; one of the flocculent masses was taken up, mounted, and placed under the microscope. What Dr. Bestian and Dr. Sharpey saw is drawn in Nature, at the page we have mentioned. There is a mass of spores with filaments issuing from them, and a large fully-dayeloped fungus.

organic substances.

An experiment so star ling as this-and it had satisfied itself that the true faith was is only one of many, though perhaps among that hordes of living creatures were daily and the most remarkable—must change the whole mends everything.

Mantegazza, and Cantoni. If these are sound experiments, free from any error that can be assigned, they are not met by the fact that Pasteur and others, though working under less stringent conditions, and with substances presumably more favorable to the production of life, nevertheless failed again and again to discover a trace of living matter. Professor Huxley thought it enough, in his address, to dispose of all the modern experimenters whose results differed from Pasteur's, by saying that there might be some error. Undoubtedly there may be error in the experiments of any man, especially upon such a subject, and the moral which unprejudiced minds would draw is not that all the evidence on one side is to be disregarded, but that it will be well to suspend one's judgment until other investigators have repeated the process with analogous or discordant results, as the case may be. But Professor Huxley has in a recently

published letter given his interpretation of these extraordinary experiments, and the question is now reduced to the narrowest and simplest issue in the world. Dr. Bastian believes that he saw organisms which grew in the solutions after all life had been destroyed by the heat to which they had been subjected. Professor Huxley believes that what was seen in the microscope consisted merely of impurities the original solutions which had sustained the heat applied to them and retained the forms which Dr. Bastian has figured. Certainly in the absence of experiment to justify it this seems an hypothesis of portentous difficulty. Has it ever been shown that it is possible for such things as are drawn in the figure we have referred to, to say nothing of the other experiments, to escape disintegra-tion under a temperature of C. 150? The experiment has been tried. Professor Frankland has repeated his process upon a flask in which was a fluid containing spores and a fungus as nearly like those in the impugned experiment as Dr. Bastian could procure. When examined in the microscope, Dr. Bastian, as might have been expected, found them utterly disintegrated. Unless Professor Huxley can reverse this last experiment, his explanation of the former series of results must be wrong, though it by no means follows that Dr. Bastian is right. It is quite conceivable that closer investigation may explain these results without either admitting the doctrine of spontaneous generation, or the equally astonishing theory of Professor Huxley as to the power of resisting heat possessed by delicate fungi and their spores. At present we cannot guess whether such an explanation will be discovered, or, if so, what it will be. We wait for the repetition by independent inquirers of Dr. Bastian's experiments, and suspend our judgment; and here we would leave the sub-fect had not Professor Huxley used one more argument the motive of which is more apparent than its point. He tells us that, in an unpublished experiment privately exhibited to himself, Dr. Bastian had allowed a fragment of sphaguum leaf to get into the solution, and that when it appeared in the field of the microscope it was some time before he could be brought to recognise it. Even if this circumstance had been less irrelevant than it seems to us as affecting Dr. Bastian's conclusions, it would still leave the results of Wyman, Mantegazza, and Cantoni unimpeached and unanswered. But even as to Dr. Bastian, what does the sphagnum story prove? Simply that dead foreign matter, capable of standing a temperature of C. 150, might fairly be looked for in any of the specimens examined, and moreover that sphagnum was tough enough to survine the ordeal. But how does that touch the question, unless Professor Huxley is prepared to day and to prove that such things as Dr. Bastian and Dr. Sharpey saw were matter of this description? The point relied on throughout the investigation was, not the exclusion of foreign matter, but the destruction of vitality; and the force of the experiments would be in no way weakened if Dr. Bastian had never seen sphagnum in his life. Like many greater men, Dr. Bastian no doubt made a blunder when he failed io recognise a common enough object. But Professor Huxley committed a greater blunder in the use he made of his adversary's slip-a blunder, we may add, so little in his manner as to encourage the hope that it may remain unique. Of all men in the world Professor Huxley is surely the last who would wish to substitute authority for experiments, or desire to crush an opponent whom he fails, we think, to answer.

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SEMI-MONTHLY LINE TO WILMINGTON, N. C. The PIONEER will sail for Wilmington on Saturday, November 25. at 6 A. M. Returning, will leave Wilmington Saturday, December 3.

Connects with the Cape Fear River Steamboat Company, the Wilmington and Weldon and North Carolina Railroad, and the Wilmington and Manchester Railroad to all interior points.

to all interior points.

Freights for Columbia, S. C., and Augusta, Ga., taken via Wilmington, at as low rates as by any other route.
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Steamers are appointed to sail as follows:

City of London, Saturday, Nov. 19, at 2 P. M.
City of Brocklyn, Saturday, Nov. 26, at 8 A. M.
City of Limerick, via Hulifax, Tuesday, Nov. 26, at 11 A. M.

at 11 A. M.

Oity of Brussels, Saturday, Dec. 3, at 8 A. M.

Oity of Brussels, Saturday and alternate Tuesday, from pier No. 45 North river.

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Payable in currency.

Payable in gold. Payable in currency.
First Cabin. \$75 Steerage. \$3
To London. \$80 To London. \$55
To Paris. \$90 To Paris. \$38
To Halifax. \$20 To Halifax. \$15
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at 12 o'clock noon, from FIRST WHARF above MAR-KET Street.

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