
Science.

Much of the value of Mr. Darwin's labors is obscured by the sensational style in which some of his followers dress up his ideas; and yet it may be that, because of the use of terms common in animal life, he has drawn much more attention to interesting matters in the vegetable world than could have been done in any other way. When every-day people are told that plants "eat meat," that they have "carnivorous appetites," and so on, the most stolid human being is led to stop and think over it. There has been no doubt for years past that plants derived nitrogen from the atmosphere, but it was a question whether the plant absorbed it through its leaves or through its roots. In Mr. Darwin's work on "carnivorous" plants much prominence is given to the insect-catching parts of plants, and the way in which the plants "ate" and "digested" the insects they had caught. But to the thoughtful student the most valuable part of his book was that to which the author had given the least prominence—namely, the use of glandular hairs in the absorption of ammonia. If these hairs and glandular structures can take in ammonia in this way, the whole mystery of "flesh eating" is explained. There is no more reason why a plant should not absorb nitrogen from a piece of flesh where it abounds, than from the atmosphere; and this is all the "eating" there is about it. It is the same old idea under a new name. These reflections occur to us just now in consequence of a discussion going on in European scientific circles, in consequence of M. Heckel having announced that he finds the leaves of our common garden zonal geranium capable of "digesting" and "assimilating" meat through the glandular hairs on the surface of the leaves. The objection to Heckel's views comes from those who believe that plants do not need to "eat meat" in this way, when they can get nitrogen through the roots. But yet this was simply the great discovery of Mr. Darwin, and nothing else, that plants absorbed nitrogen as well through these glands in the leaves as through the roots. And this is really all "flesh eating" by plants amounts to.
