

Fact File: Louis Pasteur (1822 - 1895)



Louis Pasteur

Pasteur was a French chemist and biologist who proved the germ theory of disease and invented the process of pasteurisation.

Louis Pasteur was born on 27 December 1822 in Dole in the Jura region of France. After several years researching and teaching, he was appointed professor of chemistry at the University of Lille. Part of his researches was to study the problems of local industries, particularly the wine industry. He was able to demonstrate that microscopic organisms such as bacteria were responsible for souring wine and beer. He proved that these harmful bacteria could be removed by boiling and then cooling the liquid. This process was named after him - Pasteurisation.

Pasteur was able to prove that these bacteria came from the air by conducting an experiment with two flasks of liquid. One was sealed and all the air removed, the other was left open. Some scientists argued against him, believing that the bacteria 'spontaneously generated' within the liquids.

The rightness of the germ theory soon became apparent and scientists accepted this interpretation of disease in humans. This started a race amongst scientists to find the germ causing many diseases of the time - Cholera, Tuberculosis and Smallpox and then their prevention by a suitable vaccine. On his death in 1895 he was given a state funeral as a hero of France.