For, as he rightly points out, whether we suppose idealism or realism to be true, in neither case do the things them­selves pass into our knowledge. No standpoint is possible from which we could compare the world of knowledge with such an independent world of things, in order to judge of the conformity of the one to the other. But the abstract doubt “whether after all things may not be quite other in themselves than that which by the laws of our thought they necessarily appear ” is a scepticism which, though admittedly irrefutable, is as certainly groundless. No arguments can be brought against it, simply because no arguments can be brought to support it ; the scepticism rests on nothing more than the empty possibility of doubting. This holds true, even if we admit the “ independent ” existence of such a world of things. But the independence of things may with much greater reason be regarded as itself a fiction or prejudice. The real “ objective ” to which our thoughts must show con­formity is not a world of things in themselves, but the system of things as it exists for a perfect intelligence. Scepticism is deprived of its persistent argument if it is seen that, while our individual experiences are to be judged by their coherence with the context of experience in general, experience as a whole does not admit of being judged by reference to anything beyond itself.

To the attack upon the possibility of demonstration, inasmuch as every proof requires itself a fresh proof, it may quite fairly be retorted that the contradiction really lies in the demand for proof of the self-evident, on which all proof most ultimately depend. It is of course always possible that in any particular case we may be deceived ; we may be assuming as self-evidently true what is in reality not so. But such incidental lapses are found to correct themselves by the consequences in which they involve us, and they have no power to shake our trust in the general validity of reason. It may, however, be granted that the possibility of lapse throws us open to the objections, ingenuous or disingenuous, of the sceptic ; and we must remain exposed to them so long as we deal with our first principles as so many isolated axioms or intui­tions. But the process of self-correction referred to points to another proof—the only ultimately satisfactory proof of which first principles admit. Their evidence lies in their mutual interdependence and in the coherence of the

system which they jointly constitute.

Of a scepticism which professes to doubt the validity of every reasoning process and every operation of all our faculties it is, of course, as impossible as it would be absurd to offer any refutation. Here, as Butler incisively put it, “ we can go no further. For it is ridiculous to attempt to prove the truth of those very perceptions whose truth we can no otherwise prove than by other per­ceptions of exactly the same kind with them, and which there is just the same ground to suspect, or to attempt to prove the truth of our faculties, which can no otherwise be proved than by means of those very suspected faculties themselves.” This absolute scepticism, indeed, can hardly be regarded as more than empty words ; the position which they would indicate is not one which has ever existed. In any case, such scepticism is at all times sufficiently refuted by the imperishable and justifiable trust of reason in itself. The real function of scepticism in the history of philosophy is relative to the dogmatism which it criticizes. And, as a matter of fact, it has been seen that many so-called sceptics were rather critics of the effete systems which they found cumbering the ground than actual doubters of the possibility of knowledge in general. And even when a thinker puts forward his doubt as absolute it does not follow that his successors are bound to regard it in the same light. The progress

of thought may show it to be, in truth, relative, as when the nerve of Hume’s scepticism is shown to be his thoroughgoing empiricism, or when the scepticism of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is traced to the unwarrantable assumption of things-in-themselves. When the assump­tions on which it rests are proved to be baseless, the parti­cular scepticism is also overcome. In like manner, the apparent antinomies on which such a scepticism builds will be found to resolve themselves for a system based on a deeper insight into the nature of things. The serious thinker will always repeat the words of Kant that, in itself, scepticism is “not a permanent resting-place for human reason.” Its justification is relative and its func­tion transitional.

*Authorities.—*Ancient scepticism is fully treated in the relative parts of Zeller’s *Philosophie der Griechen,* with which may he com­pared Zimmermann’s *Darstellung d. Pyrrhonischen Philosophie* (1841), and *Ueber Ursprung u. Bedeutung d. Pyrrh. Phil.* (1843) ; Wachsmuth, *De Timone Phliasio* (1859); Geffers, *Be Arcesila* (1849); Norman MacColl, *Greek Sceptics from Pyrrho to Sextus* (1869) ; Haas, *Be Philosophorum Scepticorum Successionibus* (1875). Among other works may be mentioned Stäudlin, *Geschichte und Geist d. Scepticismus, vorzüglich in Rücksicht auf Moral u. Religion* (1794); Tafel, *Geschichte d. Scepticisrnus* (1834); E. Saisset, *Le Scepticisme: Ænésidème, Pascal, Kant* (1875). (A. SE.)

SCEPTRE. Though the sceptre is now used prin­cipally as one of the insignia of royalty, the word origin­ally had a more extended meaning. Among the early Greeks the *σκητττpοv* was simply a long staff used by aged men (*Il*. xviii. 410 ; Herod., i. 190), and thus came to be used as a sign of authority by officials of many kinds —judges, military leaders, priests, heralds, and others. It is frequently represented on Greek painted vases as a long staff, tipped with metal in some ornamental fashion, and is borne by some of the gods. Among the Etruscans sceptres of great magnificence were used by the kings and also by the upper orders in the priesthood. Many repre­sentations occur on the walls of the painted tombs of Etruria. Some specimens which still exist are among the finest examples known of ancient jewellery. The British Museum, the Vatican, and the Louvre possess Etruscan gold sceptres of the most minute and elaborate workman­ship. Some of these are hollow gold batons, about nine to twelve inches long and half an inch in diameter, com­pletely covered with that very delicate ornament for which the Etruscan goldsmiths were so famed, produced by soldering thousands of microscopically minute globules of gold arranged in rich patterns on to the plain gold cylinder which forms the ground. One magnificent speci­men in the gold-ornament room of the British Museum has its top formed like a fiower, with outer petals of beaten gold and an inner core made by a large emerald ; it is of the greatest beauty both in workmanship and design.

The sceptre of the Romans, like most of their insignia of rank, is said to have been derived from the Etruscans. An old and more Latinized form of the word is *scipiο* (see Liv., v. 41). Under the republic an ivory sceptre *(sceptrum eburneum)* was one of the marks of consular rank. It was also used by victorious generals who re­ceived the title of *imperator,* and this use still survives in the modern marshal’s baton. In Roman paintings the long staff-like sceptre is frequently represented in the hands of Jupiter and Juno, as chief of the gods.

Under the empire the *sceptrum Augusti* (Suet., *Galba,* i.) was specially used by the emperors. It was often of ivory, tipped with a gold eagle (Juv., *Sat,* x. 43), and is frequently shown on medallions of the later empire, which have on the obverse a half-length figure of the emperor, holding in one hand the short eagle-tipped sceptre and in the other the orb surmounted by a small figure of Victory. The older staff-like form of sceptre still survived under