THE EPISTOLARY FORM OF SEN. EP. 102

BY

A. D. LEEMAN

1. THE COMPOSITION OF EP. 102

The admirable and vivid introduction of the 102nd letter (§§ 1-2) gives its two principal topics: first, Seneca will answer a request by Lucilius for a refutation of a dialectical sophism about glory (§§ 3-19); then, Seneca will resume his 'dream' about the immortality of the soul, from which Lucilius' letter had 'awakened' him so cruelly (§§ 21-28). The connection between these two themes, given here as determined by the outer situation only, is strengthened as follows.

The transition between the two parts (§ 20) is effected by a violent attack on the narrowness and the pusillanimity of dialectical reasoning, which is unworthy of philosophy. It is not the base and circuitous ways of dialectics, says Seneca, but the immense cosmos, which is the true home of the human mind and the sphere of philosophy. By these words Seneca brings about a transition from the dialectical part of the letter to the theme of the liberation and the immortality of the soul, for which philosophy is the true preparation. The opposition between the characters of the two themes, which, at the same time, establishes a close compositorial connection between them, is entirely different from the opposition of glory and cosmos in the Somnium Scipionis. In the 102nd letter, true glory is a 'good', and is not affected by Seneca's criticism, which is merely directed against dialectics 1).

1) We stress this point, because Heinemann (Poseid. Metaph. Schr. I, p. 189) assumes a common source for the Somnium Scipionis and Ep. 102 as a whole, on account of these similarities: '...erst das Somnium zeigt, wie grossartig P. der Bedeutungslosigkeit des irdischen Ruhmes die Herrlichkeit des Lebens im Kreise der Sterngötter gegenüberzustellen verstand'. There is, certainly, a relation between the 102nd letter and the Somnium, but this relation is of a much more complicated character; for this, I refer to my thesis: Gloria. Cicero's opvatting van de roem en haar achtergrond in de Hellenistische wijsbegeerte en de Romeinse samenleving, with an extensive summary in English (Rotterdam 1949), p. 105 sqq.
This may be confirmed by the concluding passage of the letter (§§ 29-30). After having finished his resumed 'dream' on the immortality of the soul, Seneca awakes once more and sums up, in a sober manner, the moral lessons to be drawn from it. 'This thought', he says, 'banishes all baseness from the mind and teaches us to prepare ourselves for Eternity by living a pure life under the eyes of the Gods. If we do this, the fear of death will vanish and even give place to a desire for death 2).

As a consequence of textual corruptions, the meaning of the next words (§ 30) has been difficult to understand. In my opinion, the reading of the ms. q, though generally rejected, gives the only acceptable solution 3). If we are right, the line of thought is as follows: 'He, too, however, who does not believe in the immortality of the soul (like Seneca himself, despite his wishful 'dreams'!) endeavours to be useful to posterity'. What is meant by 'being useful', here, is clarified in the next sentence: 'He must be a good example to posterity, and his memory will last for ever'. Thus, the end of the letter clearly refers to the idea of glory after death, discussed in the first part of the letter, whilst the whole concluding passage draws the moral from both parts: namely, whether we believe in the immortali-

2) *Mori sperat* is about the same as *mori cupit*. In this thought, 'do not be afraid for death', Heinemann (I, p. 187) sees a link between this letter and Epp. 77 and 78, where, too, the fear of death is attacked. This link, thinks Heinemann, points to a connection in Seneca's source in these passages. In Ep. 102, however, this thought is clearly of a secondary character and apparently derives from Seneca himself.

3) The best mss. give: *sperat sed quoque*, or *se quoque*. The editors, from Erasmus to Haase, read: *sperat, si is quoque*; Beltrami: *si et is quoque*. Buecheler and Hense, followed by Axelson (Neue Senecastudien, Lund 1939, p. 120 sq.) and Alexander (Seneca's Epistulæ Morales, Univ. of Calif. Publ. Class. Philol., Vol. XII, 1933-34, p. 190 sq.): *sperat? Is quoque*. All modern editors and emendators conceive the idea that he, too, who does not believe in the immortality of the soul, hopes to be useful after death, as a support for the principal thought, i.e.: he, who believes, does not fear death. This is unadmissible, for it is the idea of being useful, that is uppermost in the rest of the end of the epistle and is worked out as an independent theme with its own moralising character (*scies!*). For this reason, we are obliged to consider this passage as a second primary thought, which refers to the first half of the epistle and is aptly introduced by the words *sed ille quoque*, the reading of the highly important ms. q, which has been discovered by Beltrami.—Accordingly, we must also read: *spargi, id agit ut* (comp. Axelson, l. cit.).