THE FIRST FORAY OF ARISTOMENES.

The following is a fragment of a poem, called 'The Story of Aristomenes.' Aristomenes, the son of one of the Messenian exiles, settled in Arcadia, when about nineteen years of age, happens to be wandering by the sources of the Alpheus with a few other Messenian exiles, and is told by some Arcadian shepherds that on the other side of the mountains lay the rich valley of the Eurotas. Aristomenes urges his companions to make a raid into Laconia, avenge the wrongs of their fathers, and raises a revolt in Messenia. Roused by his words, they set out:

On toiled the sons of the exiles up the steep,
And early that same night were laid asleep
Far down the southern slope; then with the day
Rose up and gazed adown, and there it lay,
The land that bred their tyrants; homestead fair,
Pasture and wood and cornland gathered there
About the hid Eurotas: orderly
And rich seemed all; and these were young to die,
Yet young to think of dying or of fear,
Or what the slow revenge of time might bear.

So downward went the youths, till the slopes grew
Wooded and tilled, and here and there a few
Of early-stirring folk they met, who fled
As though Arcadian hill-thieves they did dread;
But none made question to them, till at noon,
They passed an oak-wood heavy with the June,
And came upon a great man's house, whereby
There stood the shrine of some divinity:
Plenteous the place was, orchard, garden-close,
Rick-yard and barn spread round, and high o'er those
The pillared house, through whose court-gates flung wide
Came sound of folk at meal in hot noontide.
Great looked the place and lordly, the young men
Gazed each on each, and certainly by then
The morn's vague rashness had grown somewhat dull;
Poor seemed they in a place so plentiful,
Beardless and light-limbed by the ponderous gate.
But in their leader did the heart wax great;
Fair visions passed before him, as he said,
Like one who knew their thoughts:

"Let nought be weighed,
But all be dared to day! — time later on,
When with the Gods' help great things we have won,
Will we be wise: not hard now to be brave,
For in each Spartan house good friends we have, —
If not our kin, yet foes of our kin's foes;
And this shall be no woeful day to those—
Men torn from home and fair life, having nought
Save the one hope to vengeance to be brought.
No words, but follow swift unto the hall!"

Into the court they passed then; down did fall
The brazen jar from off a maiden's head,
And flashed in the hot sun; a boy who led
A horse from hall to stable stpped and stared,
And durst not flee, while restless, unafeared,
The lastest doves before their swift feast brushed,
The peacock's twixt the close-set yew-stems pushed;
Nought looked like war, as all doors round about
The band bestet. But tumult and great doubt
In the hall, when they say there stood
Staid Ariostomene, his golden hair
Bright with the sun, and through the locks of it
Might men behold the noonday sunbeams fill
From thence to spear behind them, and fell there
Upon those half-farmed and unwary men,
Till over all his loud clear voice was heard.

"Men in this hall, be ye no more afeard
Than if the Gods, who sent us here, were come!
Behold, we have a will to get us thither
To Messenia; from the Arcadian land
We come last, bearing little wealth in hand,
For ye Laconian folk our stews are made
This many a year; so we go now to bid
The house of our own store, harmless we
Will go our ways; who yet this side the sea,
Yea in our fathers' fields, have mind to dwell;
Moreover on this day these Hosts' were t'other
If here abide perchance folk of our kin,
Or strangers, who have found it hard to win
From out this house, that with this company
They now should send would more fields of Greece to see.

Nay, let your weapons be—I we are enough
To slay all here, if once the play wax rough;
Take life, and meet us on another day!

And whoso goeth to Sparta, let him say
That this Ariostomene his priestess bid
Wending his way to what of old hath been
A happy land, that either he may live
Some joy to folk downtrodden there to give,
Or yet the least die not with a hidden eye.

—Now master of this house, speak forth thy name,
And once more, if he be Messenian folk,
Or strangers bowed down 'neath the Spartan yoke
Now let him come with goodly heart to dwell
As this God meant them, or live happily!

A sullen hush, mid scowl of angry brow
And clenching of hard hands; and then uprose
 Glad clamour from the many bondmen there,
'Gainst whom the Spartans not a stroke might dare.
Then spake the master of the house;

"O youth,
Beardless, unknown thou art; and yet in sooth
One good day hast thou won in thy life days,
While I, Cleombrotus, must lose the praise
That once I had, of being fatherless.

—Beard I fought, scourged slaves, get forth from this my house,
Where no more meat ye gorse from this day forth.
Dogs bought with money!—Dogs bought at a goodly price,
Dread messengers from the feet of Messenia, go,
Lost ye to mort the stocks and whipcord know!
—Take them, bold youth, and blame thyself, when they
From the first clash of steel shall flee away.
But for thy wealth, if thou take their lives,
The lessest not more than the Gods one day shall.
Lo, thou, my daughter! wilt thou take her then?
One day I deem she shall bear warlike men
To fall at last, and come to misery!

As he spake he drew forth from his knee
A growing maiden, some twelve wanting year old,
Who with great eyes yet and as a tear did behold,
With great eyes yet and as a tear did behold,
Thrumbling, and clinging to her father's knees.
Who smiled upon her. Ariostomene
Would fain have spoken, and a threatening sound
Rose from the slaver, who gathered close around;
But the Lord cried:

"Thou hast begun a war,
Knowing but little who thy foesmen are;
And if thou thinkest thou hast gained great things
This day from me, the soul and friend of kings,
Yet dost thou think ere thou hast gained the end
How many joys thou from the world didst send,
—My joy the first, and thine perchance the last.

Therewith back to the wall behind he cast
His high hand suddenly, and caught adown
A hunting knife, thin bladed, sharp, and brown,
And to his own heart they thrust both stroke,
And down dead silent, from the folk
A mingled murmur rose, and pale and wan
The little one stood gazing on the man
Greater was than the greatest man she knew.
But Ariostomene unto him said,
Saw, but pale and saw what sick at heart, and said:

"In brave wise hast he played his part,
Yet better had he lived to hinder ours!
But go, ye freed Messenians, to the wavers
Where arms are stored, and raiment and good grain;
And gather from the home-fields the best gain
Of neat and sheep and horses, nor delay
Our setting forth three hours; because this day
I fain would tread on the Messenian soil.
But here shall sit these Spartans free from toil
Till we are on our way."

So here and there
Ransacked the slaves just freed, of whom there were
Some thirty men; but the Messenians stayed,
Guarding the sullen home-folk: the young maid
Stood by her mother and some women, late
Come from their chambers in most sad estate,
And she wept too; but mid her sobs, no less
Gazed on the strange and new-born stateliness
Of the rough-clad Messenian, as he passed
To and fro through the hall.

And so at last
In the very hottest of that day of June,
While the great brazen trumpets' clattering tune,
And clash of arms broke through the drowsy hum
Of scarce-seen things of summer, did they come
Into the courtyard, armed now gloriously,
All save their leader; therewith could they see
Out in the highway waggons tilted o'er
The victuals and the goodly things that bore,
And further on steeds, sheep, and lowing neat.
Forth went they joyous; yet with lingering feet
Out of the hall passed Aristomenes,
Half sad at heart, the very last of these,
And as he passed the sun scorched threshold o'er,
Still were the maiden's eyes upon the door,
And she forgat to weep till he was gone.

W. Morris.