

**THE MARTYRDOM
OF KELAVANE: A
POEM**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649517572

The Martyrdom of Kelavane: A Poem by William Forsyth

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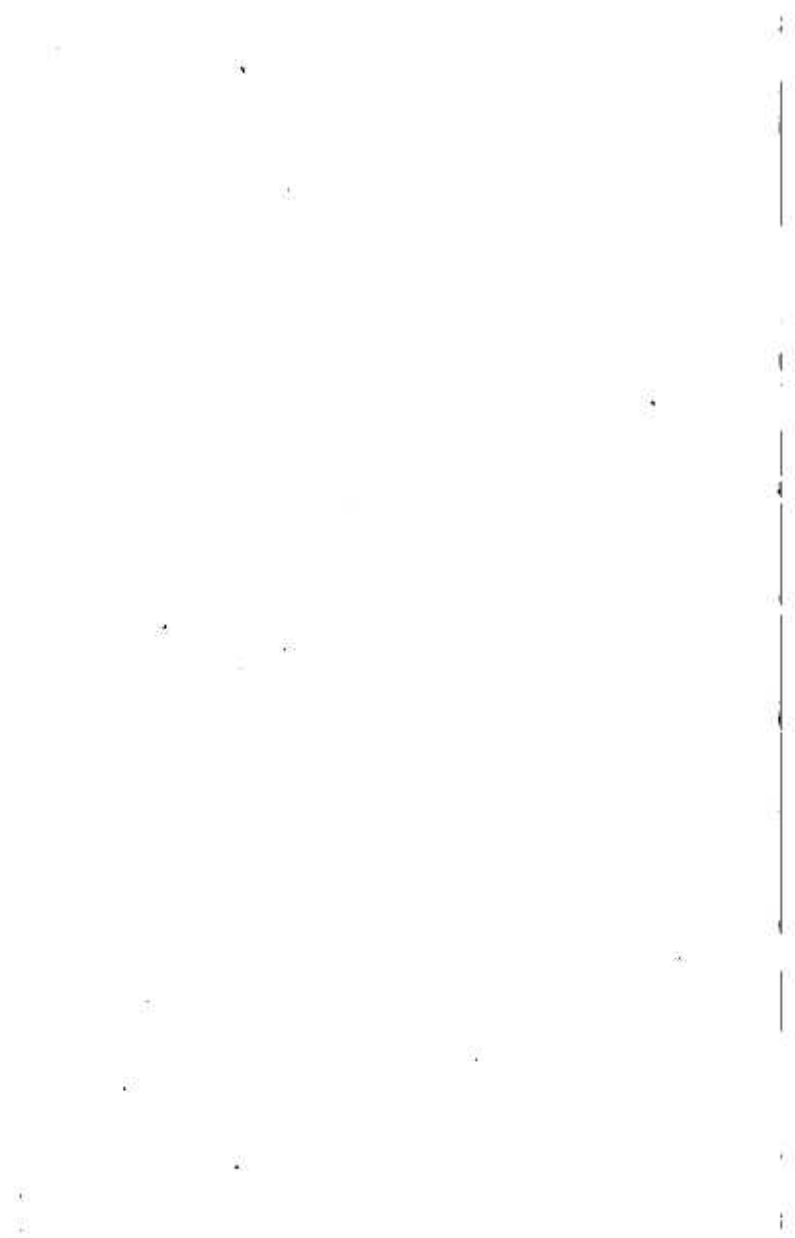
WILLIAM FORSYTH

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THE
MARTYRDOM OF KELAVANE.

A Poem.

LONDON:
ARTHUR HALL, VIRTUE, AND CO.,
25, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1861.



PREFACE.

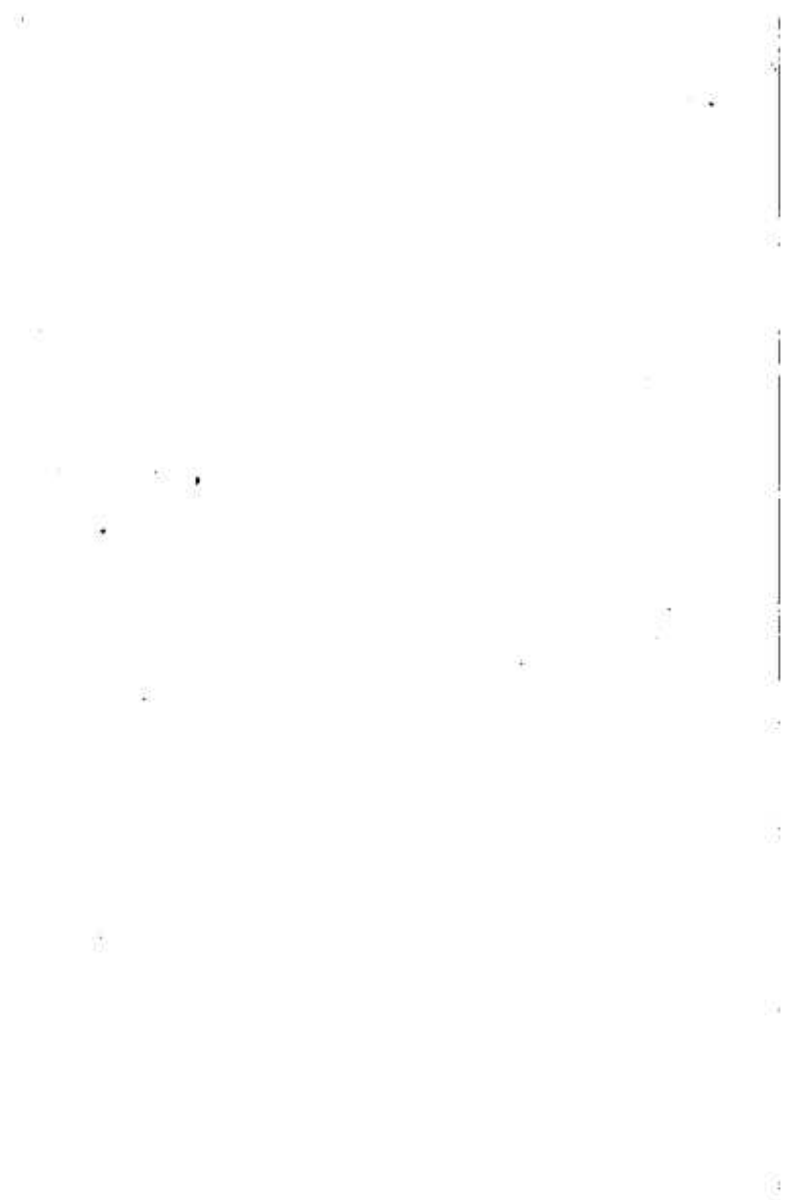
THE life of Kelavane, a princess of Georgia, who suffered martyrdom during the reign of Abbas the Great, is one of the many instances of truth that is "stranger than fiction." Her story is told by that enlightened, and instructive traveller, Chardin, who visited Persia and the Caucasus in the years 1670-72, and whose authority is uniformly respected by subsequent travellers and historians. He gives an outline of Circassian history, from the time of the conquest of Georgia by Ismail Sooffee, the founder of the Sooffavean dynasty, in the middle of the fifteenth century, down to the period of his visit. This history is one continuous narrative of persecution. Christianity appears to have existed among the Caucasian tribes from the earliest Christian times; but it was mixed up almost uniformly with a species of paganism. And even where the priests had most influence, their object was

less to regulate the faith and life of the people than to maintain the nominal universality of their Church. Chardin says that they told him they "do not maintain their embassies for any benefit which they reap, but merely for the glory of the Church." Yet, without any vitality of faith, the Georgians resisted temptation and persecution; and, in the days of Abbas the Great, the people were allowed to worship God according to their creed.

It is singular that during all these ages of persecution, and while Christianity existed only in name, the Persian kings never succeeded in erecting a mosque in Georgia, except one, within the fort; and then the priest never showed himself but once, to call the people to prayers, he having been greeted by a shower of stones when he made his appearance. In a short time popular zeal tore down the building. These circumstances induced Abbas to extend to Georgia that freedom of conscience which he boasted was one of the privileges of his reign. The ruling prince was alone excepted: it behoved him to profess the Mahomedan faith. The Princess Kelavane, who had been brought up a Christian, succeeded to the princely dignity on the death of her father and her husband, but refused to accept it on the condition of changing her faith. No threat could overcome her resolution; and, according to Chardin, the Shah, who

would neither retract his commands nor allow them to be evaded, sent orders to the Governor of Shiraz to make her a convert at any cost. The Governor omitted nothing to overcome her constancy. He made her suffer eight years' fearful persecution, by so much the more cruel that he renewed her tortures every day till she died at last on flaming coals, in the year 1624. Her body was thrown to the birds of the air; but the Augustines conveyed it secretly, to the young prince, her son.

Such is a summary outline of Chardin's account of events which occurred within the memory of living men at the period of his sojourn in the country; and to his narrative, and the facts contained in the general history of the time, the Author of the following story of the Princess Kelavane has done his best in the main to adhere.



THE
MARTYRDOM OF KELAVANE.

I.
PROEM.

Know ye the story of Queen Kelavane ?
She was no daughter of the days of joy ;
Her tears were countless as the stars of heaven.
The radiant beauty and the queenly grace,
That glorified the morning of her years,
Were sighed away in sorrow long ere noon.
The fervour of her solitary faith,
That burn'd like some lone beacon of the sea,
With no kind neighbourhood of hopeful hearts,
Kept shining through the tempest all night long,
Until it faded in the dawn of heaven.
And so it was, because she stood alone