

Caraboo

An imaginary script

*created in 1817 by Mary Willcocks
digitized in 2019 by Tim Cassedy*

VERSION 1.0
3 JANUARY 2019

INTRODUCTION

In 1817, a 25-year-old English beggar named Mary Willcocks was picked up for vagrancy and interrogated outside Bristol, England. Hoping to avoid arrest, she pretended not to speak English and identified herself only as “Caraboo.” Through an extraordinary comedy of errors and some brilliant pantomiming by Willcocks, local authorities came to the surprising conclusion that the woman they had detained was not a working-class Englishwoman but an Asian princess who had been kidnapped by pirates from her home in the South Pacific.



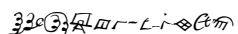
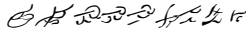



To substantiate her developing backstory, Willcocks quickly invented an elaborate faux-language that “Princess Caraboo” spoke and wrote. More than two months went by, with Willcocks speaking only in “Caraboo’s” language, before her hosts determined that Willcocks was not an actual princess and that her language was of her own invention. The story became one of the biggest transatlantic media events of 1817. Willcocks moved to Philadelphia and briefly became a minor celebrity.

Willcocks’s Caraboo writing survives in seven known documents, all of which have been incorporated into this TrueType font: one manuscript document in Mary Willcocks’s actual hand, and six engravings of Willcocks’s writing that were printed in newspapers and broadsides in 1817. These sources contain a total of between 180 and 195 “characters”; the precise number is impossible to determine because in some cases it is unclear where a character begins or ends. This digitization construes them as 182 glyphs. Because computer keyboards contain fewer than 182 keys, the characters are









Mary Willcocks (1791–1864).
Engraving by Nathan Cooper Branwhite (1817).

accessed by typing in both uppercase and lowercase in the Regular, Italic, Bold, and Bold Italic font faces. The Caraboo Bold typeface is not “bolder” than Caraboo Regular; it is simply used to access a different set of characters:

	how to type	source
1. THE THANK-YOU NOTE 	Caraboo Regular lowercase	ORIGINAL SOURCE: written by “Caraboo” to William Mortimer, April–May 1817 PRESERVED AS: woodcut in <i>Bristol Mirror</i> , 21 June 1817
2. THE SOUVENIR 	Caraboo Regular uppercase	ORIGINAL SOURCE: written by Willcocks for an admirer, June 1817? PRESERVED AS: manuscript at Houghton Library, Harvard University, *EC8.B1752.817C
3. THE GUTCH WOODCUT 	Caraboo Italic lowercase and uppercase	ORIGINAL SOURCE: written by Willcocks for journalist John Mathew Gutch, June 1817? PRESERVED AS: woodcut in <i>Bristol Journal</i> , 21 June 1817; and copies discussed below
4. THE NUMBERS 	Caraboo Regular numerals Caraboo Italic numerals	ORIGINAL SOURCE: written by Willcocks for journalist John Mathew Gutch, June 1817? PRESERVED AS: woodcut in <i>Narrative of a Singular Imposition</i> (London, 1817), p. 59
5. THE CHARLES ENGRAVING 	Caraboo Italic uppercase	ORIGINAL SOURCE: written by Willcocks for printmaker William Charles, Sept. 1817? PRESERVED AS: copperplate engraving, <i>Miss Carraboo</i> ([Philadelphia], [1817])
6. THE MIRROR WOODCUT 	Caraboo Bold lowercase and uppercase	ORIGINAL SOURCE: written by Willcocks for journalist Harry Bonner, June 1817? PRESERVED AS: woodcut in <i>Bristol Mirror</i> , 21 June 1817
7. THE BONNER BROADSIDE 	Caraboo Bold Italic lowercase and uppercase	ORIGINAL SOURCE: same as #6 PRESERVED AS: woodcut in <i>Full Particulars of the Life, Character, and Adventures of Carraboo...</i> ([Bristol], [1817])

If you know of another source of “Caraboo” script, I would be grateful to hear from you about it. Write me at cassedy@gmail.com.

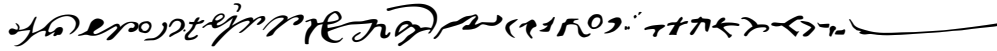
With a few exceptions discussed below, the pronunciations and meanings of the Caraboo characters are unknown, if indeed they had any in the first place. In this digitization, therefore, the glyphs have been assigned to the letters of the Latin alphabet not with any view to representing their phonetic values but simply so that the QWERTY keyboard layout replicates the order in which they appear in the source material. For example, in the Caraboo Regular face, the first six letters of a standard U.S. English keyboard layout — q, w, e, r, t, and y — are assigned to the first six characters of THE THANK-YOU NOTE (source #1): , , , , , and .

None of the characters in Willcocks’s Caraboo documents appear to represent punctuation. To facilitate typesetting, the present font provides basic punctuation, replicating the type used in an 1817 pamphlet about Willcocks, the *Narrative of a Singular Imposition* compiled by John Mathew Gutch and Elizabeth Worrall.

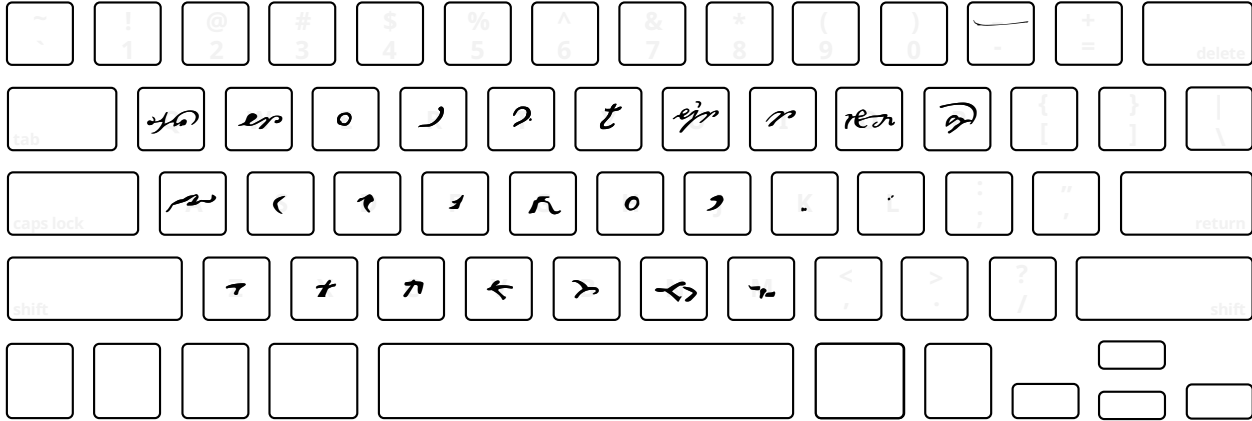
For more on Mary Willcocks and the Caraboo story, see my *Figures of Speech: Six Histories of Language and Identity in the Age of Revolutions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019).

—Tim Cassedy
January 2019

I. THE THANK-YOU NOTE



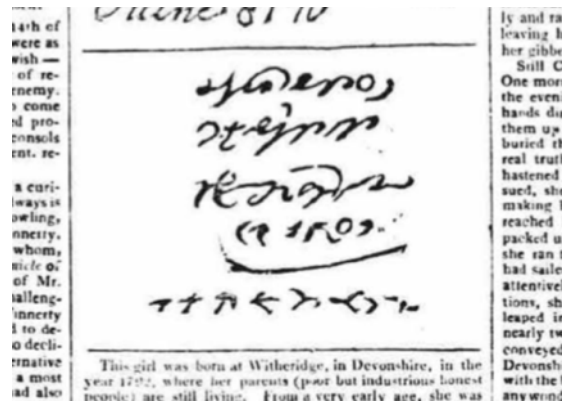
TYPEFACE: Caraboo Regular (lowercase)
 KEYS: qwertyuiopasdfghjklzxcvbnm_



These characters appeared in a woodcut engraving of Caraboo’s “Letter of Thanks to her Medical Attendant, with the Signature,” in the 21 June 1817 edition of the *Bristol Mirror*. The letter in question was written by “Caraboo” to Bristol surgeon William Mortimer, who treated her for an illness in April or early May 1817. Copies of this letter were displayed at the Bath Literary and Philosophical Society and the Kingston Pump-Room by physician Charles Wilkinson, and circulated to experts at the University of Oxford and the East India Company headquarters in London.

This is the only surviving specimen of Caraboo writing that was recorded prior to Caraboo’s identification as Mary Willcocks. Willcocks’s Caraboo writing may have continued to evolve after she composed this note. This specimen differs aesthetically from the others in terms of proportion, resemblance to Latin characters, and the apparent conjunction of individual characters via cursive ligatures. Due to the uncertainty of deciding where conjoined characters begin and end, however, character boundaries have been interpreted here only in terms of whitespace. Thus “ejn” — which could be considered as two, three, or more characters — has been interpreted here as one. It is unclear whether the marks following the character “j” (· and ´) are characters, punctuation, or printing imperfections.

The *Mirror* presents these characters in five rows, with the last row separated from the others by a swash (—), which is typed as an underscore: . If the characters that follow this swash in the *Mirror* are indeed “the Signature,” they presumably mean “Caraboo”: tttkt>>kt>.






Bristol Mirror, 21 June 1817, p. 3

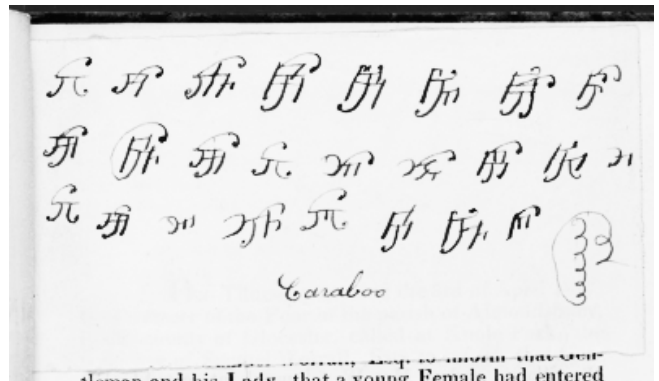
II. THE SOUVENIR

TYPEFACE: Caraboo Regular (uppercase)
 KEYS: QWERTYUIOPASDFGHJKLZXCVBNM



These characters appear in the only known surviving original document in Mary Willcocks's hand: a slip of paper containing these 26 characters and the word "Caraboo" (in Latin letters) inserted into a copy of John Mathew Gutch and Elizabeth Worrall's 1817 pamphlet about Mary Willcocks, *A Narrative of a Singular Imposition*, now held at Harvard's Houghton Library. Given the presence of the word "Caraboo" in Latin letters, this was probably written by Mary Willcocks for one of the many curiosity-seekers who visited her after the debunking of the Caraboo persona.

No effort has been made here to consolidate duplicate characters. For example, the glyphs , , and , which might be three versions of a single character (as Willcocks conceived it), are included here as three separate glyphs.

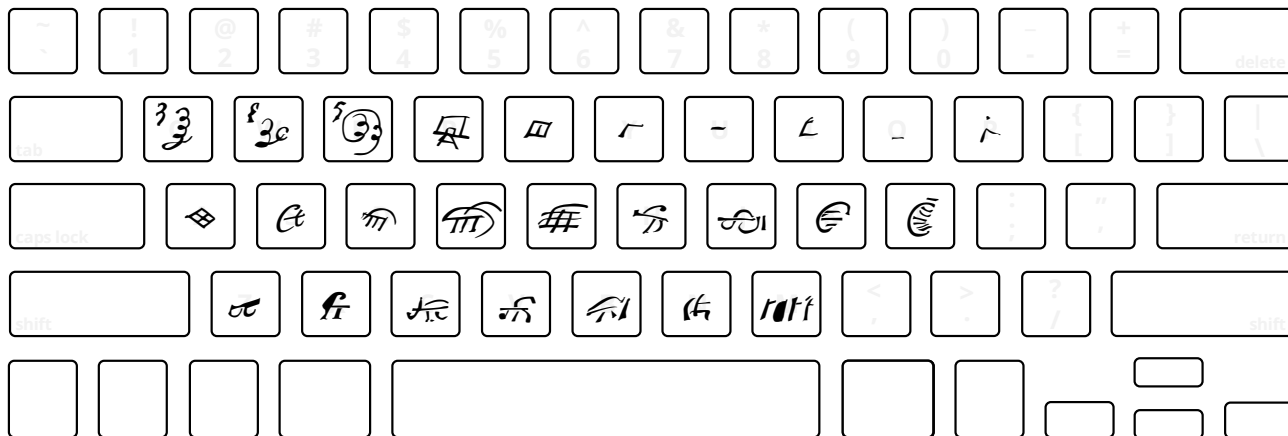


Houghton Library, Harvard University
 call number: *EC8.B1752.817C

III. THE GUTCH WOODCUT

٣٤٤ ٣ ٤ ٥ ٦ ٧ ٨ ٩ ١٠ ١١ ١٢ ١٣ ١٤ ١٥ ١٦ ١٧ ١٨ ١٩ ٢٠ ٢١ ٢٢ ٢٣ ٢٤ ٢٥ ٢٦ ٢٧ ٢٨ ٢٩ ٣٠ ٣١ ٣٢ ٣٣ ٣٤ ٣٥ ٣٦ ٣٧ ٣٨ ٣٩ ٤٠ ٤١ ٤٢ ٤٣ ٤٤ ٤٥ ٤٦ ٤٧ ٤٨ ٤٩ ٥٠ ٥١ ٥٢ ٥٣ ٥٤ ٥٥ ٥٦ ٥٧ ٥٨ ٥٩ ٦٠ ٦١ ٦٢ ٦٣ ٦٤ ٦٥ ٦٦ ٦٧ ٦٨ ٦٩ ٧٠ ٧١ ٧٢ ٧٣ ٧٤ ٧٥ ٧٦ ٧٧ ٧٨ ٧٩ ٨٠ ٨١ ٨٢ ٨٣ ٨٤ ٨٥ ٨٦ ٨٧ ٨٨ ٨٩ ٩٠ ٩١ ٩٢ ٩٣ ٩٤ ٩٥ ٩٦ ٩٧ ٩٨ ٩٩ ١٠٠

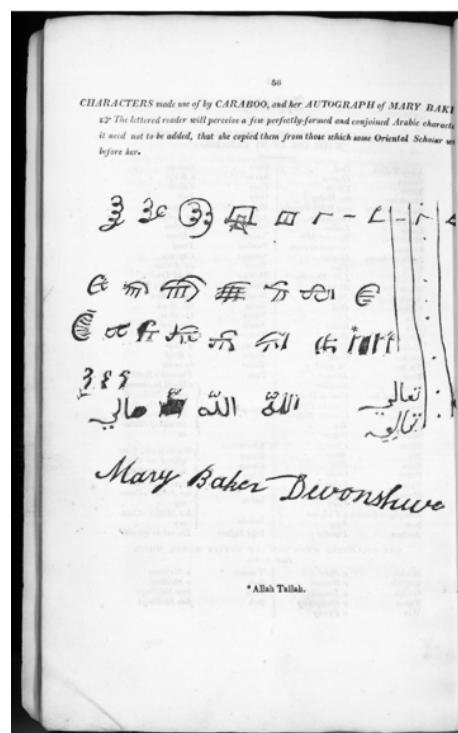
TYPEFACE: Caraboo Italic
 KEYS: qwertyuiopasdghjklzxcvbnmQWE



This range contains the most widely circulated Caraboo writing, drawn from a woodcut of approximately 29 Caraboo characters, as well as some English and Arabic words: “Mary Baker” (one of Mary Willcocks’s alternyms), “Devonshire” (her home county), “الله” (Allah), and “تعالى” (May He be exalted). The original manuscript from which this woodcut was engraved was apparently created between Tuesday, 10 June 1817 — when Elizabeth Worrall confronted Mary Willcocks about her identity — and Friday, 14 June, when this illustration was teased in John Mathew Gutch’s *Bristol Journal*. The illustration first appeared in the *Bristol Journal* on 21 June 1817, and the same woodcut was used in the *Bristol Gazette* (26 June 1817) and in the Gutch–Worrall pamphlet (published in late August 1817; shown at right). The illustration was also replicated in the following decreasingly precise facsimiles:

- *Bath Gazette*, 25 June 1817 (copied from *Bristol Journal*)
- *Weekly Entertainer* (Dorset, England), 30 June 1817 (copied from *Bristol Journal*)
- *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia), 6 Sept. 1817 (copied from *Bath Gazette*)
- *Boston Intelligencer*, 27 Sept. 1817 (copied from *Freeman’s Journal*)
- *New York Daily Advertiser*, 29 Sept. 1817 (copied from *Boston Intelligencer*)
- *Albany Gazette*, 4 Oct. 1817 (copied from *N.Y. Daily Advertiser*)

An asterisk appears beside the sequence “٢١٢” in the Gutch–Worrall pamphlet, with a corresponding footnote reading “Allah Tallah,” which was Caraboo’s word for God. This appears to correspond to the character(s) “٢٢٢” in THE MIRROR WOODCUT (source #6) which the *Bristol Mirror* explains “signified ALLA TALLAH in her father’s country.”



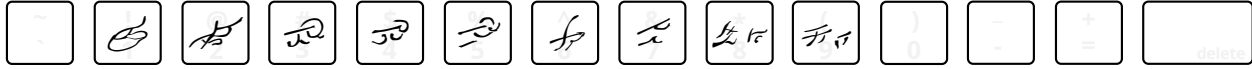
[John Mathew Gutch and Elizabeth Worrall], *Narrative of a Singular Imposition* (London, 1817), p. 58

IV. THE NUMBERS

𐄂 𐄃 𐄄 𐄅 𐄆 𐄇 𐄈 𐄉 𐄊 𐄋 𐄌 𐄍 𐄎

TYPEFACE: Caraboo Regular

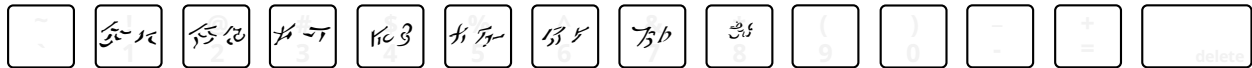
KEYS: 123456789



𐄏 𐄐 𐄑 𐄒 𐄓 𐄔 𐄕 𐄖 𐄗 𐄘 𐄙 𐄚 𐄛 𐄜 𐄝

TYPEFACE: Caraboo Italic

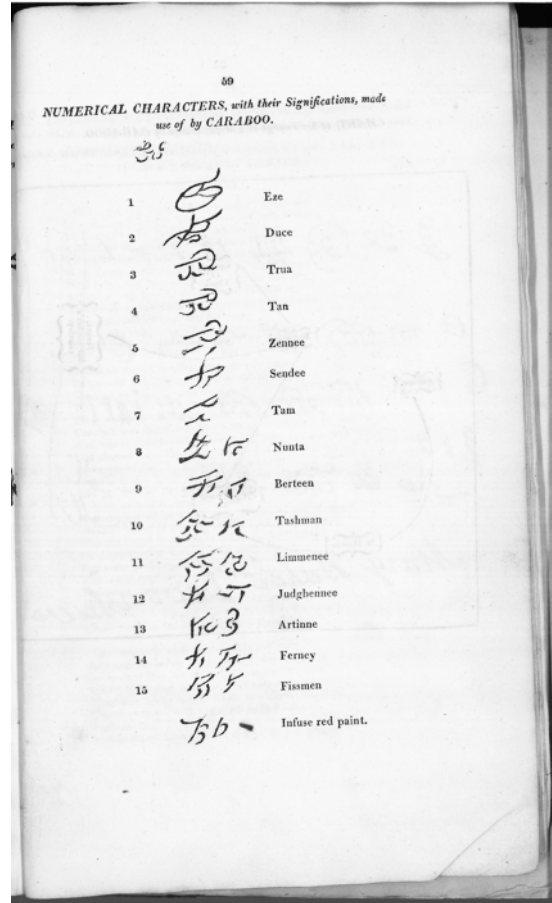
KEYS: 12345678



These 17 characters appear in the Gutch-Worrall pamphlet under the heading “NUMERICAL CHARACTERS, with their Significations, made use of by CARABOO.” Fifteen of the characters are glossed with the Arabic numbers 1 through 15 as well as transliterations of their pronunciations in Caraboo’s language: *eze, duce, trua, tan, zennee, sendee, tam, nunta, berteen, tashman, limmenee, judgbennee, artinne, ferney, fissen.*

The numbers 1 through 7 appear to comprise one character each, while the numbers 8 through 15 comprise two each, suggesting that Caraboo’s numerals could be understood as a base 8 system.

This source also contains two additional character sequences with unclear relationships to the numerals: 𐄝, which appears above the numerals, and 𐄛, which appears below them. The former character is printed with no semantic or phonetic gloss, but its placement above the numeral 𐄂 (1) suggests that it might represent zero. The latter character appears below the numeral 𐄛𐄜 (15), next to the perplexing English gloss “Infuse red paint.” This may be an error of some kind — perhaps a misunderstanding in the print shop — as none of the other surviving Caraboo text takes the form of a sentence, nor is *Infuse red paint* a “numerical character,” nor is Willcocks otherwise recorded as having discussed paint.



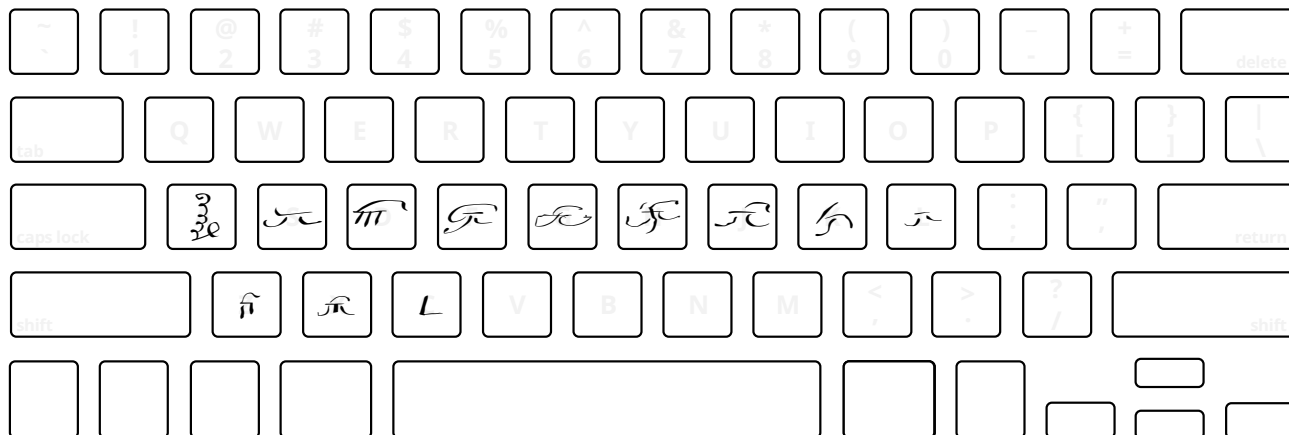
[John Mathew Gutch and Elizabeth Worrall], *Narrative of a Singular Imposition* (London, 1817),

V. THE CHARLES ENGRAVING

𐄂𐄃𐄄𐄅𐄆𐄇𐄈𐄉𐄊𐄋𐄌

TYPEFACE: Caraboo Italic (uppercase)

KEYS: ASDFGHJKLZXC

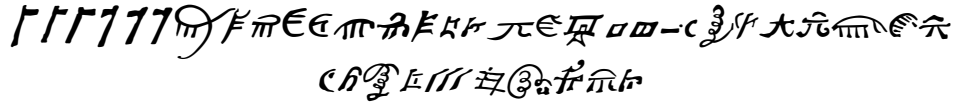


This specimen comes from a copperplate portrait of “Miss Carraboo” pasted into a copy of the Gutch–Worrall pamphlet at the Bristol Museum (object no. K6152). The twelve characters appear above the portrait with an engraved caption reading: “A facsimile of her writing in the Language of the Moon.” The engraver evidently had access to either THE GUTCH WOODCUT (source #3), or an original manuscript provided by Mary Willcocks, or both.

The portrait is a stipple engraving depicting a standing female figure wearing an empire-waisted dress with embroidered details, an elaborate high collar, a feathered headdress, and long gloves. The print is unsigned, but it is probably the portrait of Willcocks that was published in Philadelphia by printmaker William Charles (1776–1820) in September 1817, no other copies of which are known to survive. In a letter to Elizabeth Worrall dated from New York, November 3, 1817, Willcocks wrote: “My likeness was taken at Philadelphia and sold both there and here at all the shops, I have enclosed one of them to you.” The print in the Bristol Museum’s copy of the Gutch–Worrall pamphlet is probably that enclosure.

Charles’s range as a portraitist was not especially wide, and the subject bears no strong personal resemblance to the portraits of Willcocks by Nathan Branwhite and Edward Bird. It may represent a stylized representation of Willcocks-as-Caraboo more than an individualized representation of Mary Willcocks.

VI. THE MIRROR WOODCUT



TYPEFACE: Caraboo Bold
KEYS: qwertyuiopasdfghjklzxcvbnmQWERTYUIOP

These characters appeared in the *Bristol Mirror* on 21 June 1817, above THE THANK-YOU NOTE (source #1) and several words in Mary Willcocks’s English-language handwriting: “Mary Baker | Witheridge, devonshire | alias Caraboo | Princess of Javasu | June 1817.” The *Mirror*’s caption notes that “The six characters forming the upper line, were translated thus—the three on the left signified ALLA TALLAH in her father’s country—the three on the right the same phrase in her mother’s country.” (Compare the character “*ralf*” in THE GUTCH WOODCUT, source #3.)

The manuscript copy-text used for this engraving was apparently also used to create the woodcut discussed below as THE BONNER BROADSIDE (source #7). The two engravings contain the same English words and almost identical Caraboo characters, subject to different engraving styles. The stroke weight in the *Mirror*’s woodcut is more variable and probably more consistent with Willcocks’s actual handwriting (both in English and in Caraboo text) than the smoother woodcut accompanying the broadside.



Bristol Mirror, 21 June 1817, p. 3

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