

## A Singular Imposture.

A NARRATIVE OF ACTUAL FACT.



It was somewhat late in the evening, on the 3rd of April, 1817, when the overseer of the poor of the parish of Almondsbury, Gloucestershire, called upon Samuel Worrall, a magistrate of the same county, to ask his advice with regard to a young woman, who, speaking a language which neither he nor any of the inhabitants could understand, had entered a cottage in the village, and had made signs that she desired to sleep under its roof. The worthy magistrate thereupon ordered that she should be brought up to Knole Mansion, where he resided, in the hope that either he or his servant, a Greek who spoke several languages, might be able to learn who she was and what she wanted. But upon the overseer attempting her removal, she showed signs of strong reluctance and apprehension, and it was only after much entreaty and gesticulation that she was prevailed upon to go to the magistrate's house. Here she was received by Mr. Worrall, his wife and servant, all of whom, after much questioning, were unable to understand the language in which she addressed them. They intimated to her by signs that they wished to ascertain if she had any papers in her possession, upon which she took from her pocket a few halfpence and a bad sixpence, and implied by signs that she had nothing else.

Her dress consisted of a black stuff gown

with a muslin frill round the neck, a cotton shawl on her head, and another round her shoulders, both loosely and tastefully put on in the Oriental manner. She had black eyes and hair, dark complexion, very white teeth, and lips large and full. Her height was about 5ft. 2in., and she was apparently about twenty-six years of age. The general impression from her person and manners was attractive and prepossessing.

After a short consultation, Mr. and Mrs. Worrall deemed it advisable to send her for the night to a house in the village, and as Mrs. Worrall felt much interested by her

apparent distress, she ordered her own maid and footman to accompany her, it being now late, and to say that she herself would call the next morning. The young woman walked with difficulty, and appeared much fatigued. Upon being shown into the parlour of the house she was taken to, she seemed particularly pleased with a print on the wall, representing the banana, and made those present understand that it



MARY WILCOX—"CARABOO."  
From an old Print.

was a fruit of her own country. After partaking of some tea, she was shown into a sleeping apartment, but appeared reluctant to go to bed, and pointed to the floor; but upon the landlady's little girl getting into the bed, and making her understand the comfort of it, she consented to lie on it, after having first gone through certain forms of devotion.

At seven the next morning Mrs. Worrall



called, and found the stranger sitting by the fire, apparently very disconsolate, but she expressed much joy upon seeing her. Soon after this the clergyman of the parish, who had heard of the stranger's arrival, came in, bringing with him several books of travel, thinking it probable she might show some signs of recognition in looking through the plates they contained. This was attended with some success, for she gave the spectators to understand that she had some knowledge of those descriptive of China; but made signs that it was not a boat, but a ship that brought her to this country. Gaining very little information, Mrs. Worrall determined to take her back with her to Knole, and keep her there till something satisfactory transpired concerning her; but upon inviting the young woman by signs to follow her, she again appeared timid and apprehensive.

Upon their return to the Hall, Mrs. Worrall attempted to ascertain the stranger's name by writing her own upon paper and intimating that she should do the same; but this the young woman declined to do, shaking her head, and crying, "Caraboo, Caraboo," pointing to herself. Upon showing her some of the rooms at Knole, she appeared delighted with some pieces of furniture with Chinese figures upon them, and signified that they belonged to her country. At dinner she declined all animal food, and took nothing to drink but water, showing much disgust at meat, beer, cider, etc.

On the following day she was taken before the Mayor of Bristol, but with no better result, for still no discovery could be made of whence she came or whither she was going; she was therefore committed to an institution for the destitute, where she received the most humane treatment. Finding she rejected the usual food, eggs and other delicacies were provided for her. But she neither ate nor drank, nor slept on the beds of the institution during the short time she remained there.

Mrs. Worrall, still feeling a lively interest in the wanderer's fate, after two days, had her again removed to Knole, where daily efforts were made to discover her language and country, but without success. After some weeks, it chanced that a Portuguese, named Manuel Eynesso, from the Malay country, was introduced to her, and undertook to interpret her language, which he said was not a pure dialect, but a mixture of languages used on the coast of Sumatra and other islands in the East.

Her story he gave as follows: Her name was Caraboo, daughter of a person of rank, and of Chinese origin. Her mother, who was killed in a war between the Boogoos (*Cannibals*) and the Maudins (*Malays*), was a Malay woman. Whilst walking in her garden at Javasus, attended by three samens (*women*), she was seized by the people of a pirate prow, gagged, bound hand and foot, and then carried off. Her father swam after her, and, shooting an arrow, killed one of the women who were taken on board with her. Caraboo wounded two of the men with her crease when she was seized, one of whom died, but the other recovered.

After eleven days she was sold to the captain of a brig, whose name was Tappa Boo, and the brig sailing during the transaction, she was conveyed from one ship to the other in a boat. After four weeks the brig anchored at a port (Batavia?), remained there two days, and having taken on board four female passengers, sailed again, and in five weeks more anchored at another port (Cape of Good Hope?), where the four female passengers were landed. Here they stayed three days, and then sailed for Europe. Arrived there, and suffering much ill-usage, she resolved to jump overboard and swim ashore. This she accomplished successfully, and found herself on English soil.

The dress she had on at this time consisted of a gown worked with gold, and a shawl of the same description, which she afterwards exchanged with an English woman for a black stuff gown, a cotton shawl, and several other articles, in which dress, after wandering about for six weeks, she found her way to Almondsbury.

Her father's country she called Congee (*China*); her own island, from whence she was taken, she called Javasus, and that of her mother, the Maudins (*Malay*). She described her mother's teeth as being black, her face and arms painted, and said she wore a jewel at her nose with a gold chain from it to her right temple, which decoration her mother wished to have adopted for her, but her father would not consent.

Her father had three more wives, and was carried on the shoulders of Macratoos (*common men*) in a kind of sedan or palanquin, wore a gold button in his cap, three peacock's feathers on the right side of his head, and a gold twisted chain round his neck, to which was suspended a large, square ornament of amber-coloured stone, set in gold. She herself wore seven peacock's feathers on the left side of her head.



Upon some calico being given her, she made a dress in the style she had been accustomed to wear, which she implied by signs was very richly embroidered. She wore no stockings, but open sandals with wooden soles on her feet. She pronounced her father's name, *Jessu Mandu*, and her own, *Sissu Mandu*, which, she said, was afterwards changed to Caraboo, in consequence of her father having conquered his enemies.

Her father had command of soldiers, and when any people approached him, they made their salaam on both knees, lifting the right hand to the right temple. They presented fruit on a dish balanced upon the points of their fingers, kneeling on both knees to her father, and on one to herself as princess.

She gave her father's age as forty-seven, which she explained by tying knots on a string, and described his complexion as light or white, while her mother's was yellow or brown.

When shown the drawing of an idol, she expressed the greatest abhorrence, and gave those present to understand that she worshipped Allah Tallah (*God*), as her mother did. She described the pirate prow as having only one mast and no guns; the commander as being copper-coloured and wearing a turban, short petticoat trousers, and a kind of scarf thrown over his shoulders; but that Tappa Boo's complexion was dark, and he had long black hair plaited down his back; that his brig had guns, and there were about forty men on board, among whom was a justee (*surgeon*). She was very ill after Tappa Boo bought her, which was caused by her great unhappiness and miserable situation.



CARABOO, IN THE DRESS MADE BY HERSELF.  
From an old Print.

Such was the story of the princess's life until her supposed arrival in England.

Upon being requested to point out from a number of flags the colours of the different ports at which she stopped, she placed her fingers on her closed eyes and shook her head, at the same time implying that she was kept below on the ship.

She expressed much pleasure at the sight of a Chinese chain purse which was shown her, and which she instantly recognised as belonging to her father's country.

She also at a rose-coloured scarf, which she put on, first in Chinese and afterwards in Javasu fashion, in both instances veiling her face. She described the dead as not being buried in coffins in Javasu, but placed in the ground; and when made to understand that, if she were to die here, she would be buried flat in a box, she expressed much horror and disgust. She marked time by tying knots on a string in a peculiar manner, and by the same means pointed out the periods and distances of her voyage. A chart of the supposed places she stopped at, as drawn by herself, is here given, as are also the characters made use of by her to express words and numbers, and these resemble in some particulars the letters of the Arabic alphabet.

Many singular occurrences happened during her residence at Knole which tended to confirm the description she had given of herself, as well as of the manners and customs of the country from which she represented herself as coming.

The gibberish language in which she made herself understood was aided in a striking manner by gesture and animation of counte-



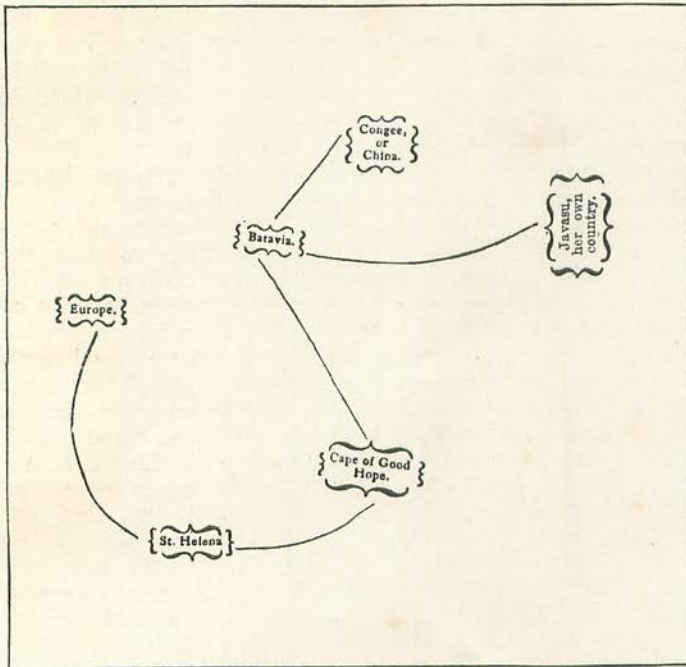


CHART OF CARABOO'S VOYAGE TO EUROPE, DRAWN BY HERSELF.

nance. In the choice of food she was very consistent and uniform, and affected much peculiarity and nicety. She dressed everything herself, preferred rice to bread, ate no meat, drank only water or tea, and was very fond of Indian curry, which she made very savoury.

During her stay she frequently exercised herself with bow and arrows, and made a stick answer for a sword on her right side, the bow and arrows being slung on her left shoulder. When dancing she would assume an infinite variety of graceful attitudes, bend her body in numberless shapes, occasionally dropping on one knee, and then, rising with uncommon agility, perform a species of waltz with most singular twists and contortions.

Her story naturally excited a good deal of attention, and many of the surrounding gentry and members of the fashionable world at Bath came to visit her, among whom was a Dr. Wilkinson, who, animated by a love for the marvellous, and with a desire to distinguish himself, determined to try his skill at discovering the character and nation of the unknown foreigner. And it was the publicity which the doctor gave to his visits, by detailing in the public prints a description of her person and manners, which eventually led to the detection of the imposture.

It was at the doctor's suggestion that more

effectual measures were taken for the relief of this *interesting creature*, and an appeal to the East India directors was determined upon, Dr. Wilkinson himself being dispatched on this charitable mission, to be followed soon after by Caraboo.

But one of the doctor's letters on the subject in a local paper happening to meet the eye of a Mrs. Neale, of Bristol, with whom Caraboo had lodged previous to her escapade, she recognised in her, with no little surprise and amusement, the character of her quondam lodger. Whereupon she called on a Mr. Mortimore, of the same city, and informed that gentleman of her suspicions, and produced such irrefragable proofs of her knowledge of Caraboo, that

he at once communicated the intelligence to Mrs. Worrall, who, though much surprised, was still unwilling to believe herself the victim of an imposture. Mrs. Worrall therefore determined to test the evidence for herself.

Accordingly, next morning, in company with Caraboo, she set out for Bristol under pretence of going to Mr. Bird's, to finish the sitting for Caraboo's portrait which that distinguished artist was painting, but instead, they alighted at Mr. Mortimore's, where Mrs. Worrall had previously arranged to meet Mrs. Neale.

The discovery was speedy and decisive; for after conversing with Mrs. Neale and her daughters for a short time, Mrs. Worrall went alone into a room with Caraboo, who was still in ignorance of the discovery, told her of the proofs she had obtained of her being an impostor, and begged her to confess the fact herself, in order that she might hear from her own lips the real truth of the matter. Caraboo, taken by surprise, made one last effort in her gibberish to interest Mrs. Worrall, but, finding she did not succeed, acknowledged the fraud, and begged that she would not cast her off or suffer her father to be sent for. This Mrs. Worrall promised to do upon condition that Caraboo would instantly give her a faithful detail of her former life, and disclose her real name and parentage.



To this Caraboo agreed, and stated that her real name was Mary Baker, *née* Wilcox; that she was born at Witheridge, in Devonshire, in 1795, and being of a wild disposition, received no education. At the age of sixteen a situation was procured for her, where she remained two years, after which she returned home. Her father and mother using her ill on account of her leaving her place, she left them and went to Exeter, where she knew no one.

Being unable to obtain employment, she wandered from there through different parts of the country till she reached Bristol, having nearly put an end to her life by hanging, on her way thither, but was prevented from doing so by the timely interference of a

caused a fictitious letter to be sent to her mistress, in which the writer (a friend of her mistress) was supposed to ask if the servant might attend her child's christening, which was to take place on the same day as the wedding. The fraud was successful, the necessary leave was granted, and the young impostor attended the wedding instead.

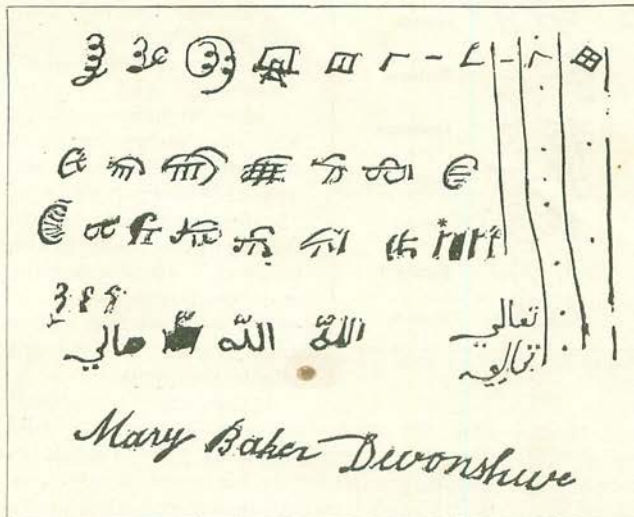
But upon being asked the child's name the following morning, and if the party was a large one, she appeared confused, which excited suspicion, and on her mistress making inquiries, she detected the whole procedure. In consequence of this she was discharged, and once more she resolved to return to Witheridge; but instead of going directly there, and being afraid of walking over Hounslow Heath on account of robberies and murders then prevalent, she changed her own clothes for male attire, and, thus equipped, presented herself at a house to ask if there was a place vacant for a young man, in order to ascertain if her sex would be detected.

Apparently suspecting nothing, the inhabitants directed her to some friends, who were wanting a man, and here she was introduced into a parlour where there were three gentlemen and four ladies, who asked her a number of questions, and how it was she was so short a man. They said they liked her appearance, but considered her hardly suitable for their service.

Leaving them, she made her way as far as Salisbury Plain,

where she met two men on horseback, who asked her if she had any money. To this she replied in the negative, and added that she was about to ask them for some. Upon this they asked her—not suspecting her to be a woman—if she would enter their service. This she consented to do, but discovering the occupation of her new employers to be that of highwaymen, she availed herself of the first opportunity that offered to escape, and set out once more for Witheridge, where she arrived, in female attire, much to the surprise of her father and mother, who were under the impression that she was still in London.

Here she remained but a few weeks, for finding home-life somewhat monotonous after her recent experiences, she left again and returned once more to London, and took



CHARACTERS USED BY CARABOO.

\* Allah Tallah.

gentleman, who gave her five shillings and some very good advice.

From Bristol she proceeded on foot to London, but when within thirty miles of the town, she was overcome with fatigue and exhaustion, and sat down by the wayside, until a passing waggoner kindly offered her a seat in his vehicle, which she gladly accepted. Arrived at Hyde Park Corner, two women, fellow-passengers in the waggon, conveyed her to St. Giles's Hospital, where she remained some time, suffering from brain fever. As soon as she was able to leave, a situation was procured for her, where she stayed three years, during which time she learned to read and write. It was here that she carried out her first act of duplicity.
















Having been invited to a wedding by a friend, and leave having been refused, she



another situation; but happening to be sent one day to the stationer's to get some books, she was accosted by a gentlemanly-looking man, who asked her a number of questions, and appeared much interested in her. This man, who was a foreigner and had travelled much, afterwards became her husband, and it was from him that she picked up the Eastern words and idioms which she used, as well as the knowledge of some Asiatic customs, which so effectually enabled her to carry out her imposture. Her husband deserted her after some time, and being without means of subsistence, she again returned to Witheridge.

This time she stayed only a week and three days, for, overhearing someone speak of America and its opportunities, she determined to try her fortune there. She accordingly set out for Bristol, but falling in with a party of gipsies, who invited her to join them, she consented, and stayed with them several days, learning their habits and customs. It was whilst with them that the idea of personating a foreigner first suggested itself.

Wearying of their company and mode of life, she set off once more for Bristol, where she made her way to the quay, and learning from the captain of a vessel lying there that his ship would sail for America in fifteen days, and that her passage would cost five pounds, a sum she did not possess, she determined to put into practice her idea; and under the garb of a foreigner, try to get the remainder of the money required. She therefore changed her bonnet for a small shawl, which she put on as a turban, and adapting the remainder of her dress as nearly as

1		Eze
2		Duce
3		Trua
4		Tan
5		Zennee
6		Sendee
7		Tam
8		Nunta
9		Berteen
10		Tashman
11		Limmenee
12		Judgbennee
13		Artianne
14		Ferney
15		Fissmen

NUMERICAL CHARACTERS USED BY  
CARABOO.

possible to the Oriental fashion, started on her quest. It was while thus employed that she made her appearance at Almondsbury, as before related.

After hearing her story, Mrs. Worrall set about testing its accuracy, and having obtained corroborative testimony of the principal occurrences of the last eight years of the life of her *protégée*, she agreed, with the full approbation and consent of the girl, to procure her a passage to America, to which country she was fully bent on proceeding.

Before the departure of Caraboo, the public curiosity to gain a sight of her was rather increased than diminished, and she was visited by persons of all descriptions—natives, foreigners, linguists, painters, physiognomists, and craniologists—all of whom were anxious to see and converse with this female Psalmanazar.

It need hardly be added that the story of the Portuguese, who happened to be almost as great a cheat as Caraboo, was entirely his own invention, got up as was afterwards discovered with an eye to his own interest.

That an illiterate girl, unaided by education, should have so conducted herself both in the language she made use of, and in her general demeanour, as to induce hundreds to believe that she was no less a person than an unfortunate, unprotected, and wandering princess from a distant Eastern island, cast upon the shores of Britain by cruel and relentless pirates—and on no one occasion should have been found to lose sight of the part she was acting, or once to betray herself, is an instance of consummate art and duplicity, exceeding any occurrence in the annals of modern imposture.