

VI. *An Extract of a Letter from Mr. Thomas Luffkin of Colchester to Dr. Wallis, concerning the use of the Numeral Figures in England, as old as the Year 1090. And, concerning the Application of an Air-pump, to Cupping-glasses.*

Colchester, June 22. 1699.

*Reverend Sir,*

I Having lately taken notice of your accurate Treatise of Historic and Practic Algebra, and finding therein that you cannot Trace the use of *Numeral Figures* amongst us in *England* lower than the Year 1133; and I meeting with an undeniable instance of their exceeding that Age by 43 Years amongst us, I thought the Communication of it to you could not but prove satisfactory. And if it really do so, I shall enjoy the utmost of my ambition. The account take as followeth; Over against our Market-place, stands the House of Mr. *Furly*, a Linnen-Draper; some of the backmost part of which is an Ancient *Roman* building, but the Front is of Lesser standing, and Timbered. Upon the bottom Cell (which is almost in the form of a Triangular Prism) of one of the Windows of the Front, between two Carved Lions, stands an Escutcheon, containing only these Figures 1090 (as near as my rude hand can delineate them.) They are of a Secretary form [*or rather square Text,*] the Periphery of the Ciphers, and Nine, are rather Fracted than Flected, prominent, large, and very fair; but to make them the more perspicuous, they are Gilded by the Proprietor. The Window looks directly North; the Date being thereby preserved from

from the scorching heat of the Sun ; and by its inclination (falling from the Verten [or *perpendicular*] by an Angle of about 60 degrees) from Rain, Snow, &c. It's possible that it may be objected, that the Second and Fourth Figures, may represent that amongst the *Arabians* (from whom we seem to have received our Numeral Figures, and they theirs, from the *Indians*.) which is with us a 5 ; To this I answer, that the Window is in *England* and not in *Arabia* ; nor is there any likelihood that ever it was imported from thence ; [nor is o with all the *Arabs*, used for 5, but with some for a Cipher, and so it was used by the *Moors* in *Spain*, who first brought these Figures into our parts ; nor is the Square o an *Arabick* Letter, but an *English* Letter, of that Age.] And the form of these Figures soon degenerated from that of the *Arabs*, into such as we now use, if not at the first reception from the *Arabs* [or *Moors*] certainly long before 1595 (as this construction would make it.) Sir, about three Months since I received your Letter in Answer to one of mine. In order to compensate which favour, I shall (if you testify your willingness to receive it) oblige you with a description of an improvement, or rather invention (of my Brothers) of a neat, compact, very portable *Air-pump*, applyed to Cupping ; with 2 or 3 Suctions of which, a person may exhaust the Air from a Large Cupping-Glass ; and, by the pressure of the External Air upon the Circumiacent parts of the Body (and not by *suga vacui*) the Flesh shall be admirably forced up into the Glass ; and, by continuing of the Suction as need shall require, he may take away what quantity of blood he pleaseth. It is an Invention of extraordinary advantage to Mankind, &c.

Your most obliged Servant

Thomas Luffkin.

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