

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors of 'The Observatory'

A Classic Problem Concluded

In Martin Beech's excellent review¹ of the history of the gravity tunnel, I was surprised that the following piece of Victorian fiction was not mentioned:

"They run their railway-trains without any engines — nothing is needed but machinery to stop them with. Is that wonderful enough, Miladi?"

"But where does the force come from?" I ventured to ask.

Mein Herr turned quickly round, to look at the new speaker. Then he took off his spectacles, and polished, them, and looked at me again, in evident bewilderment. I could see he was thinking — as indeed I was also — that we must have met before.

"They use the force of gravity," he said. "It is a force known also in your country, I believe?"

"But that would need a railway going down-hill," the Earl remarked.

"You ca'n't [*sic*] have all your railways going down-hill?" "They all do", said Mein Herr.

"Not from both ends?"

"From both ends."

"Then I give it up!" said the Earl.

"Can you explain the process?" said Lady Muriel. "Without using that language, that I ca'n't [*sic*] speak fluently?"

"Easily," said Mein Herr. "Each railway is in a long tunnel, perfectly straight: so of course the middle of it is nearer the centre of the globe than the two ends: so every train runs half-way down-hill, and that gives it force enough to run the other half up-hill."

"Thank you. I understand that perfectly," said Lady Muriel. "But the velocity, in the middle of the tunnel, must be something fearful!"

Like many other contributions mentioned in Beech's review, this was published² under a pseudonym, that of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.

Yours faithfully,
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References

- (1) M. Beech, *The Observatory*, **133**, 311, 2013.
- (2) L. Carroll, *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (Macmillan and Co., London), 1893.