

Canadian author interacts with Hampton Court students Ajay Ramola

Mussoorie, October 15

Robert Hutchison, the Canadian author of the book, 'Garden of Fools', today interacted with the students of Convent of Jesus and Mary Hampton Court School and shed light on the life of Proby Cautely, the builder of the Ganga canal that still irrigates the Ganga-Yamuna doab.

The programme was organised by the Alumni Association and the school administration to inculcate the habit of reading among the students.

The Principal of the school, Sister Lucy, presented a bouquet and Anna Dilawar presented a shawl on the behalf of the association to the author.

While addressing the students, Hutchison said he was inspired to write a book on Proby Cautley while he was working for his other book, 'Raja Of Harsil'.



Robert Hutchinson presents his latest book to Sister Lucy in Mussoorie on Monday.

Proby Cautely was a man on the mission and accomplished the rare feat of building the Ganga canal from Haridwar despite severe opposition.

He further said Cautley was the son of a humble village clergyman in England. He became an East India Company cadet and arrived in India in October 1819 at the age of 17. As a young artillery lieutenant stationed at Agra in 1825, he was transferred to the Bengal Engineers and began work on restoring the Eastern Yamuna Canal. At 23, he knew nothing about canal engineering but managed to learn quickly.

In 1826, while stationed at Saharanpur, he made his first visit to Mussoorie, where he met District Magistrate Captain Frederick Young. He helped Young find new township by constructing Mussoorie's first water supply system. In 1831, Cautley acquired Dumbarnie Cottage on Blucher Hill, marrying Fanny Bacon in All Saints Church on the Castle Hill estate in 1838.

During the Great Famine of 1837-38, he was devastated by the agony of people who were dying and decided that the only way to overcome famine in the north was to harness the water of the Ganga for irrigation. Such a project had never been attempted before as the natural hazards were thought to be insurmountable. The venture found approval of the Governor General Lord Auckland and Cautley was provided with a small budget to survey the canal route from Haridwar to Kanpur. However, as the work progressed, obstacles were thrown in his path and because of the stupidity of the subsequent administrators, he had to fight for every inch of the canal. The stress broke his marriage and his heart, while the workload almost killed him until finally in April 1854 the 530-mile canal was inaugurated amid great fanfare. Shortly afterwards, Cautley returned to England. Queen Victoria rewarded him with a knighthood. His canal, acclaimed as the world's eighth engineering wonder, continues to function, having eradicated the plague of hunger in the doab. Sadly, Sir Proby Cautley has been forgotten.

"It was the story of his genius, perseverance and his betrayal which compelled me to write a fictional account based on factual research work on the life of the great man that forced him to write the book," added Hutchison.

The students asked why the book was titled 'Garden Of Fools'. Responding to the question, Hutchison said from a garden where fools tried to trip him at every step, Cautley's canal transformed the Doab into a garden of plenty and banished famine forever from the face of northern India, therefore it was titled *Garden Of Fools*.

Hutchison also advised the students interested in engineering that they should take inspiration from the life of Cautley and should show the same kind of commitment towards work they envisage in future that benefited not only them but the mankind also.

Hutchison's long affair with the Himalayas takes him through the foothills and on to the plains beyond where the Ganga begins its 1,569-mile journey to the sea.