CONCLUSION

From the discussion of "Christianity and social changes in Agasteeswaram taluk" so far made, it may not be difficult to conclude that the nineteenth century was a formative period in the history of the Christian Missions in the south as it was in the north. Though Christianity had been introduced probably from the days of St. Thomas and it received an encouraging spurt from St. Francis Xavier in the 16th century, the Christian Community remained backward and degraded as ever before in Agasteeswaram taluk. Slavery and servitude in which they had been steeped for centuries deprived them of meaning and value of life. With the advent of William Tobias Ringeltaube, a new chapter was opened not only in the religious history but also in its social, intellectual and economic history.

The Mission-field in this taluk was not a bed of roses. The missionaries had to encounter several formidable obstacles in the land of the Hindus. The doctrine of Christianity, no doubt, attracted the depressed classes in large numbers that they could secure a sizable chunk of the society to be
witness to Christ and to suffer for Him. In this crusade the Christian Missionaries were the first to participate and labour among the downtrodden and oppressed.

With the establishment of a large number of Churches and congregations, even non-Christian realised the advantages and availed themselves of the opportunity for their good. Taking advantage of the social and economic problems which existed in this taluk the Church Mission took deep root in the soil and enlisted a large number of followers mostly from the depressed section of the society. The allegiance of the less privileged to the church helped them to understand their ignominy and evils inflicted upon them by the caste-dominated administration.

The educational efforts of the missions not only dispelled darkness in which the masses were immersed but also opened up opportunities of employment for thousands of people, both Christian and non-Christian, who passed out of the numerous schools and the Scott Christian College so efficiently run by the missionaries. The pioneer work of the missionaries in the Scott Christian College was an eye opener even to the Government of Travancore. Those who passed through the portals of this institution rose to a state of equality with the higher castes. As the institution was open to the students of the high and low caste without distinction, even the very poor
students had the opportunity to undergo their education along with the children of the wealthiest and the most influential government officers belonging to the higher castes. Similarly work by the zenana teachers brought about tremendous changes in the outlook of women in general. Standards and values of life came to have a new perspective. Women not only learnt the art of writing and reading but also practical lessons in cleanliness and hygienic life. It is not too much to say that the zenana work and female education presented a new conception of womanhood and contributed to the women’s movement in the country.

Intellectual upliftment liberated both mind and body from a state of servitude and enabled the lower classes to develop in themselves a spirit of independence and a desire to lead an honourable living. Besides, the educational institutions of these missions provided employment opportunities to quiet a large number of their church members, it may be noted that the non-christian people were not completely excluded from these opportunities. They occupied very high positions in the academic, political and commercial fields. The two Dewans of Travancore namely Nanupillai and Rama Rao were the old students of the seminary. The involvement of the L.M.S., Catholic, Salvation Army and Lutheran Mission Churches in the field of education considerably reduced the state’s burden in the cause of education.
The Christian Missions also never failed to take care of their health and sanitation. It is a known fact that the health and sanitation of the people of those days was far from satisfactory. Common ailments and occasional epidemics made life weary and miserable for the common man. Women had to endure terrible suffering at the time of child birth for want of qualified mid-wives. Tradition and superstition prevented the high caste women from going out of the house for child delivery. To put an end to these evils the L.M.S started a hospital at Neyyoor in 1838. It was the first hospital for the whole State of Travancore including Agasteeswaram taluk.

However in the case of Agasteeswaram taluk, the medical work of the Salvation Army began in 1893. It was started as Bathroom dispensary. Very shortly it rose to prominence as the Salvation Army Catherine Booth Hospital. The C.B.H has been rendering meritorious service in the cause of the health and sanitation of the place. It’s service to the people and the state caught the latter’s attention. The State came forward to help the hospital with financial assistance and representation in the Medical Board of Travancore. The branch hospital of the L.M.S at Nagercoil was of great help to the local people. The Leprosy Home at Udayarvilai became an asylum for men and women suffering from leprosy. The nursing and other paramedical courses offered in these hospital also provided job opportunities to many members.
Another indirect influence of the mission work was that it paved the way for the economic empowerment. Profits from the Lace industry were appropriated for the education of poor children, most of them being orphans or slaves. In order to secure the freedom of such slave girls, they were trained to make lace. It offered employment to a large number of poor christians. These institutions, besides being a source of help to the poor women of Agasteeswaram taluk, served as a good source of income for the mission too. It is not far from truth to assert that the people of this taluk, in consequence, came to have a sophisticated outlook never before experienced. Opening of new branches increased wages to workers and gave a better chance to workers to mingle with all sorts of people more freely than ever before. Altogether, the support from the Government, integration of the workers, introduction of new style and the deep involvement of the missionaries enabled the mission to achieve great heights in spite of its difficulties.

The Brush-making industry of the Lutheran Church was a humble attempt of that Church to extend economic benefit to its poor converts. The nuns of the Immaculate Congregation of Mary started an embroidery industry, it gave work to more people. The establishment of Mission industries gained a special place in fighting against the social evils of caste distinction. This happened mainly due to the fact that in the caste-
dominated society all people gathered together under the same roof of the industries. Their learning in the industries changed their mental make up and moral outlook. They gave up their bad habits and developed a new culture. Missionaries taught the young boys composing, book binding etc. It extended and offered employment to many people. Due to the efforts of the Christian Missionaries nearly one hundred and ten peculiar and abnoxious taxes were abolished. The people of the lower castes were allowed to tile the roofs of their houses.

Under Missionary guidance and support, the Shanar converts struggled for social equality denied to them by their Sudra masters. The victory of the Shanars in securing the right of their women to wear upper cloth emboldened other degraded people also to emulate the example of the Christian converts. By 1859 the fury over the upper-cloth controversy died down and a sort of equality with other classes was established in this regard. Since the L.M.S had succeeded in bringing about a social re-generation in Agasteeswaram taluk much before the advent of other Protestant Missions such as the Salvation Army and the MELIM, there was little to be left done by the late-comers for social upliftment.

It is true that the Protestant Missions won converts from the depressed sections of the community in general. But their activities which had
the immediate goal of serving the downtrodden converts, had however, an incidental, though important target and that was the winning of the higher castes for Christianity. Christian messages, no doubt, appealed to ever higher sections. However, they hesitated to come out openly to confess the faith for fear of losing their caste privileges. The Christian Missions, as the most prominent and reforming agencies, brought about healthy changes in the native society by endeavouring to eradicate evil customs, manners and even superstitions to which they were immeasurably susceptible. Much of social segregation disappeared, leading to social mobility. Outmoded customs like Ooliyam, trial by ordeal, and lingering feudal obligations were substituted by a social order founded on justice, freedom and equality. And this was really the stepping stone for greater solidarity evinced by the people at the time of freedom struggle. The high literacy of the region and educational progress of women offer great potentialities for involvement of people in social health training and service to the community.

The role of the Missionaries in the abolition of slavery was unique. It was they who first raised their voice of protest. "It was their drive and initiative which shook the conscience of all. It was their enthusiasm and zeal which was later championed by the General Cullen, the British Resident. But they did not depend on Government action alone; they acted as vanguard
of the reform movement by striking at the root of the evil through a pragmatic approach of the education of the slave children. The political climate of the time and the positive interest shown by the British Resident favoured them and Providence granted that the performance of an age-old drama of cruelty and injustice should be brought to a close through their instrumentality. A people who had been in the grip of poverty, ignorance, apathy and oppression were beginning to respond to the liberating efforts of the missionaries. The task had been difficult and strenuous. The lives of many men and women missionaries who toiled restlessly and relentlessly had been cut short by the tropical climate and lack of essential facilities. But they had their own reward, the happiness of knowing that a people who were a 'no-people' were becoming a 'new-people' responding to their efforts towards liberation.

Another indirect influence of the Mission work was that it paved the way for the reformation of non-christian also. The marvellous strides made by the converts in education, medical service and industry posed a threat to the non-christians. The Hindu Shanars, therefore, struggled hard to catch up with the progress made by the converts, once despicable and long neglected. Thus emerged a longing in all to draw on the bounties of the western culture articulating through the missionaries. This contributed in a large measure to the modernisation of the Agasteeswaram taluk.
In short, the Christian missionaries in Agasteeswaram taluk, like their counterparts elsewhere, strove hard to make available to the people of this taluk the fruits of modern civilized life, along with the Gospel. The innumerable Churches and other institutions built by them have ever been the torch bearers of the culture. This fact justifies the statement of Clements that "the Government of India cannot but acknowledge the great obligation under which it is laid by the benevolent exertions made by these 600 missionaries whose blameless example, self denying labours are infusing new vigour into the stereotyped life of the great populations placed under English rule and are preparing them to be in every way better men and better citizens of the great empire in which they dwell".