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Building for the Future (2).

SITUATED on a low coastal plain facing the Irish sea, midway between the Mersey and the Dee, the small and somewhat untidy township of Moreton was not, in the nineteen-twenties, a very impressive place. Geographically it was largely at the mercy of high tides and heavy rains; socially it was notorious for its caravan settlements and ephemeral population; religiously only one Free Church served a population of 8,500. Now, all is changed. Extensive housing estates spread along the coast and far inland; many sites are reserved for the large stores, cinemas, community centres and garages that betoken a modern developing community. The population has almost doubled, while schemes already in operation provide for a planned population of 26,500. To the religious forces of the district has been added a Baptist Church over one hundred strong.

Credit for considerable foresight and faith, in these unpromising conditions, must go to the Liverpool Baptist Union, which in 1927 purchased an excellent site on the main North Wirral road, and appointed three local Baptists a Committee of Management. A Garden Party at the home of one of these stalwarts rallied wider support, and the decision to form a Church was taken in the drawing-room of the same home, where evening services and "working meetings" were held for some months. The site was dedicated in October 1927, and public services began next day in a hired hall, twenty-one people attending. Here only Sunday morning and evening services were possible, and conditions were far from pleasant, for all the paraphernalia of a dance hall distracted worshippers. After a year the building was declared unsafe, and the little cause migrated to the Legion Hall where, despite the advantage of a fire, an incredibly noisy gas-meter, mice and the impatience of rival tenants again made concentration difficult. Nevertheless real progress was made, and here on July 3rd, 1930, fourteen members formed the Church.

Meanwhile a mortgage on the site provided funds for a brick and asbestos building seating about 120 people. It was no architectural landmark, but to faith and love it was transfigured. "No one who had not waited with us for three long years can realise all that it meant to us, a place of our own, no people waiting at the door to come in as soon as our service was over, room for a Sunday School and for a women's meeting. It was

the realisation of a dream for some of us, and how we enjoyed every minute of it!" The "Church" was opened on November 8th, 1930; Sunday School began next day with a rather undisciplined congregation of "caravan" children; and various auxiliary organisations soon made their appearance. Bibles, primary chairs, instruments and cheques gave evidence of the support of neighbouring Churches and friend, while most of the Baptist Churches of Merseyside had some share in purchasing the site or clearing the mortgage, which was achieved by 1934. Within a year ten new members had been added, and a great experience of blessing in 1932 made a Baptistery necessary. Already, the need for larger accommodation was felt, but it was 1935 before the Church, "feeling the tide under it," launched a scheme for a School-Chapel, tastefully designed, to seat 150. This was opened in 1938, the cost (£1,577) being cleared by 1942.

From earliest days Missionary giving had been a marked feature of the little Church's life, and many missionaries found a welcome in its fellowship. All through these years, too, Lay Preachers had given excellent service: without them such spiritual and material progress would have been impossible. But now the Church began to think of pastoral oversight. The Building Fund became overnight a Ministerial Fund, and by June, 1943, the first Minister was invited to the charge. Today the membership stands at 107, youth organisations and other special groups have been formed, independence of the Sustentation Fund was achieved in three years, a Constitution has been adopted consolidating the cause on strictly Baptist lines, the area has twice been canvassed, the School has outgrown the older building, and the Church has taken its full share in Association and district life. But when God is leading, achievement rarely means rest. There is still no Church, and the need grows with the population. South and West lie sixty square miles without a Baptist church. West Kirby permanent R.A.F. camp, is two miles away. A new generation, with new energies and a new devotion is coming into leadership, their eyes on the future, not the past. In 1945 another Building Fund was created, and in 1949 plans for the Church were adopted and a wide appeal launched. To date some £3,200 is in hand towards an estimated cost of £20,000.

There is no room here to tell of lives changed, of times of spiritual power, of the quality of the Church's witness: but those who are nearest to the Church's heart often exclaim, "This is the Lord's doing: it is marvellous in our eyes."

R. E. WHITE.