

THE GROWTH OF RAVENSTHORPE.

If evidence were needed to prove the phenomenal development that has taken place during the last half-century in the manufacturing industries of the West Riding, it is surely supplied by the remarkable growth, which, almost without exception, has characterised the various centres in the Riding where these industries are carried on. Towns which but a comparatively few years ago were not deemed of sufficient importance to have any direct representation in the councils of the nation have grown into great and populous industrial centres, and, by a similar process of evolution, what were insignificant villages have been converted into busy towns, with a commercial reputation the wide world o'er. Forty or fifty years ago, where the prosperous little town of Ravensthorpe now stands, only a few isolated habitations existed, and the land in the neighbourhood was little better or more inviting than a marsh. Indeed, for several years it seems to have retained that reputation, for about 1861 or 1862, when the inhabitants of the village were urging their neighbours at Mirfield to join with them in an application for the old Mirfield parish to be constituted a Local Board district, the then Vicar of Mirfield, in a speech condemning the proposal, described Ravensthorpe as "a swampy, unhealthy area, a hot-bed of disease, unfit for human habitation." But before this time some enterprising manufacturer, recognising the advantage of a plentiful supply of water to be obtained from the Calder, erected a factory on the banks of that river. Others speedily followed, and in a very few years a good-sized village had sprung up around these hives of industry. The earliest efforts of the Local Board were directed to draining the district, and in a short time after the constitution of the board a very effective scheme, one of the first of the kind in the country, was carried out. After this dwelling-houses multiplied, and the residents became more numerous. Indeed, during the last thirty-five years the population has just about doubled. The census returns of 1871 showed the population as 2,910; ten years later it was 4,363; in 1891 the residents numbered 5,134; and the result of a census taken for the Local Board this year shows the population at present to be about 5,740. The future prospects of the town are very cheering, and the extent of the building operations that are now going on and are in contemplation indicate that a considerable further increase in the number of residents is at no distant date expected. Only a few months ago the Ravensthorpe Self-help Industrial Society purchased an estate of five acres situated off North-road for building purposes. At present they are only proceeding with the erection of twenty-six houses, but before many years have rolled away they expect to have about a hundred and twenty houses built on the estate. The fancy cloth trade, in which a considerable number of the inhabitants are engaged, has for some time past been very busy, and one or two factories in the neighbourhood are working day and night. Just over the Ravensthorpe border, in Thornhill, the Mirfield Coal Company are engaged sinking a new shaft, and when the pit is finished it will no doubt bring a number of additional workmen into the district. In the matter of railway service Ravensthorpe is particularly favoured. Within a radius of about half a mile there are already three stations, whilst the London and North-Western Railway Company contemplate providing a fourth on their new line, which is to run from Heaton Lodge to Leeds. The poor rate in the town is 2s., and the district rate 3s. 4d. The water supply is obtained from Dewsbury, and the gas undertaking is in the hands of a local company.