

# *JOHN ASHWORTH*

HIS LIFE AND STRANGE TALES

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## **FOREWORD TO REPRINT**

Reading this book proved to be one of the most heart-warming experiences I have enjoyed for a long time. Praise God it is back in print and that it is now in your hands. John Ashworth is a largely forgotten figure, but his exploits in the gospel were wonderfully owned of God. Born into poverty, saved by grace and then with a mighty burden for the poor, he began his evangelism in the Lodging Houses of his home town.

Whoever heard of a place of worship being called ‘The Chapel for the Destitute,’ but such was the name given by Ashworth to describe his new work. The conversions were many and lasting, so much so, a bigger ‘Chapel for the Destitute’ had to be built. Some of these astonishing stories are told here for our encouragement and spiritual delight. You will not find any difficult theological terms, nor even mention of any denominational affiliation, but just amazing works of God’s good grace in saving those whom many considered to be impossible cases. The book is so very easy and straightforward to read, it was, in another age, used in churches as a Sunday School prize. It will prove a joy, an inspiration and a challenge to all who love God’s work in saving sinners.

Alun McNabb  
Great Bridgeford,  
Staffordshire.

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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The first section of this book consists largely of extracts from a biography of John Ashworth published in 1875 by A. L. Calman who was a close friend and also the successor of Mr. Ashworth as minister at the Chapel for the Destitute.

Since this biography, entitled 'The Life and Labours of J. Ashworth,' contains so much original material it is the intention of the present publishers to retain most of that material and gather it together to form a more concise outline of the life of this outstanding Christian minister than that of Mr. Calman.

Following this biographical section there is a selection of John Ashworth's 'Strange Tales' which have a particular bearing on his own life and work.

These 'Strange Tales' were published by the author in five series containing twelve stories in each book and they first appeared during the years 1865 to 1874. Great pains were taken by the author to ensure that all the accounts were perfectly true since this was questioned in his own lifetime.

The publishers have made a few minor alterations and omission in some of the Strange Tales but these in no way alter the facts recorded.

It is hoped that a further selection of 'Strange Tales' will be published at a later date to form a companion volume to this.



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The Life of  
*JOHN ASHWORTH*  
OF ROCHDALE

1

A Poor Boy in a Poor Family

**1813–1832. A Fine Lad, But One Too Many**

On the western slopes of the Pennines, often called the backbone of England, lies the town of Rochdale situated on the banks of the river Roche. It has long been noted for its manufacture of woollen and cotton goods and is still (1972) a busy industrial town.

The subject of this biography lived at the time of great change in the life of Lancashire towns like Rochdale. The social condition of John Ashworth's parents was typical of so many in the area where flannel weaving was still a home based industry. However, mechanisation of the industry forced inevitable change and, instead of a cottage industry, there sprang up the 'dark satanic mills' which still form so characteristic a feature of the Rochdale landscape.

From this hidden corner of England have sprung strong and notable characters like John Bright, the Christian statesman, John Kershaw, the Baptist minister of Hope Chapel, and John Ashworth the founder of the Chapel for the Destitute and editor of 'Strange Tales' which literally sold in their millions a century ago.

## JOHN ASHWORTH

Two miles north-west of Rochdale used to lay the hamlet of Cutgate bordering the road leading to Edenfield and Haslingden. On the right stood a few humble cottages in one of which John Ashworth was born on July 8th, 1813.

In speaking of that memorable event, he was accustomed humorously to repeat the story, that on the day he was born an old woman took him up in her arms, kissed him, and looking him in the face, said, "Aye bless thee, thou'rt a fine lad, but thou'rt one too many."

This "fine lad," however, lived to prove that what seemed to the old nurse a useless encumbrance was not "one too many," an encouraging fact for struggling parents with large families. He was the second son and eighth child of John and Alice Ashworth, natives of the neighbourhood, and by trade woollen weavers.

Many of the villages and hamlets in Lancashire were notorious in those days for the rude manners and degrading sports of their inhabitants, but none more so than those of Cutgate and Bagslate. Bull-baits, cock-battles, dog-fights, trail-hunts, drinking and gambling had been for half a century their popular amusements, in which even the female portion of the community would engage with as much zest and delight as the men\*.

Amidst all these unfavourable surroundings, John Ashworth spent his early days, and it would have been no wonder if he had, to some extent, acquired a taste for such objectionable amusements as were indulged in at that time. He had, however, two more powerful and counteracting influences, to which, under God, he attributed his preservation in youth, and the formation of his religious character in after life—a pious, praying mother, and the Sunday-school; and when speaking of the latter he used to say, "Thank God for Sunday-schools; the Sabbath-school has been a blessing to millions, but to none more than myself."

\* 'Niff and his Dogs' (page 119) refers to such events at Cutgate.