



YOU'LL GO TO LONDON



LIONEL BALL







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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LIONEL BALL



LIONEL BALL

CHRISTIAN
FOCUS





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FOREWORD

By Rt. Revd Sandy Millar

When I first met Lionel Ball early in 1971 I little knew what fun we would have together in the years to come or how much I would learn from him and from the workings of the London City Mission.

In those days – before I was married and before I was ordained – I worshipped as a layman at Holy Trinity Brompton. Lionel bravely threw open the Medical Mission Hall in Short's Gardens and a team of us from Holy Trinity Brompton came together to help him Thursday by Thursday.

The world of the back streets, as it seemed to me, congregated on those evenings; the hall full of smoke and the smell of damp, unwashed clothing; faces the same, unshaved as well; often with a dog on the end of a string, teeth in short supply, thankfully, like those of their owners, and each had a particular tale to tell if anyone had the time or inclination to listen.

Lionel presided with his infectious good humour and great musical gifts. He would play and we would all help with the singing as best we could. 'Now I belong to Jesus...' 'What a Friend we have in Jesus', 'The Lord's My Shepherd'. I distinctly remember the look of wistful sadness that often came over some of the older





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street folk who had wandered in as they struggled to recall words long since forgotten in the challenges and failures in life that had led them to settle for homelessness and the wandering lifestyle to which they had fallen. Some of the younger ones were still not reconciled to a life from which there seemed no escape; their brash demands and constant threats of violence meant that the team spent much of the evening on tenterhooks, constant in prayer and conscious of our total dependence on God to keep us from being swallowed up in rows and brawls not of our own making. And yet, underneath, I think Annette (now my wife) and I always felt that somehow this was where God was.

In the Song of Songs (1:7, 8) the beloved calls out to her lover, *'Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep ...'* and her friends offer her the best advice you can ever be given: *'if you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds.'* I used to think that the tracks of the sheep at that time led to Short's Gardens and the Medical Mission Hall. It was there that I first formed a lifelong admiration for the patient work of the London City Mission and through Lionel came to meet some of the missionaries. They seemed to be close to the Lord, able to compensate for the disappointments and in so many ways the manifest unfairness of so much of life with a humour that reached across every sort of potential social barrier – or perhaps it was just Lionel that was like that. Every Thursday night, having tasted of God's love for the poor and with my hair and every article of clothing reeking of that Thursday evening fug, I and the team would return to our day jobs, leaving Lionel to deal with every sort of situation that had come up in conversations all over the hall, to all of which the only suggestion that I could think to make was, "Why don't you have a word with Lionel?"

Along with my increasing admiration for the work of the London City Mission, was growing at that time a, for me, quite





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new sense of the call of God on my own life. What we were trying to do in Short's Gardens was in so many ways what I felt I really wanted to do with the rest of my life: and so grew for me that sense of calling which led to ordination and full time ministry in the Church of England.

So you will understand how grateful I am to God and to the Mission, and to Lionel, and to some of the characters he describes in this book. As you read some of Lionel's descriptions of the things he has seen and the ways in which God has used him, Joan and his family, if you find yourself quietly praising God and, like me, gently wiping a tear from your eye, then I feel sure that Lionel will think that all his hard work in writing this book has been worthwhile. Praise God!







INTRODUCTION

In Ecclesiastes 12:12 we read, 'Of making many books there is no end' and a certain wit has responded, 'For the reading of many books there is no time'. I trust, however, that you might find some time to read this one. I can honestly say, hand on heart, that I had no personal intention of writing a book on any subject, and most certainly not one about myself. The personal pronoun aspect of such an assignment has never arrested me, as it tends, all too easily, to promote self-aggrandizement. It has taken ten years of hints, suggestions and even requests by friends and acquaintances from all walks of life to persuade me that it might possibly be a good idea to recall something of my life and, in particular, the ministries in which I have been involved, and to put it into book form.

When I took note of the people who were doing the prompting and their backgrounds, I began to take them more seriously. They included London City Mission colleagues, friends and supporters of the Mission, who heard me speak in public and with whom I held private conversations. There were also those who once lived on London's streets and with whom I still have contact. One Sunday, after I had given an address at the Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich, a gentleman, while ensuring I had a cup of





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coffee, introduced himself as 'Just a soldier'. In the course of our conversation he asked me to talk a little about my life in the L.C.M. Then he said, 'I think you should really turn these experiences into a book'. I told him he was the third person that week to make such a suggestion and I promised to give it some consideration. After we had shaken hands and parted, I asked a friend who the gentleman was. 'Oh,' he replied, 'he is General Sir Ian Gourlay, formerly Commandant General of the Royal Marines.' On looking him up in *Who's Who?*, I learned that his many achievements are well documented. 'I'm just a soldier.' Such humility too.

My family have been my most enthusiastic supporters, by keeping me on track and contributing in practical ways to the production of the book. More than this, Julia has typed it and Marion, where needed, has done what she does best and corrected words, phrases and sentences; and how many times have I heard from Joan, 'How's the book coming on?'

It would be difficult to recall situations and conversations in detail without the help of documentation, and this has been available through years of diary-keeping and annual reports required by the L.C.M. In addition I have rechecked facts with some of the people referred to and for this I am grateful that they have filled in some of the gaps. There is danger in having 'the pen of a ready writer' and I have asked the Lord to hold on to the hand that holds the pen.

Finally, in writing this book I want to glorify God and encourage Christians in their faith and ministry as well as help them to win others for Jesus Christ. Please pray to this end even as you read, and may the Holy Spirit bring you into a closer relationship with God.

