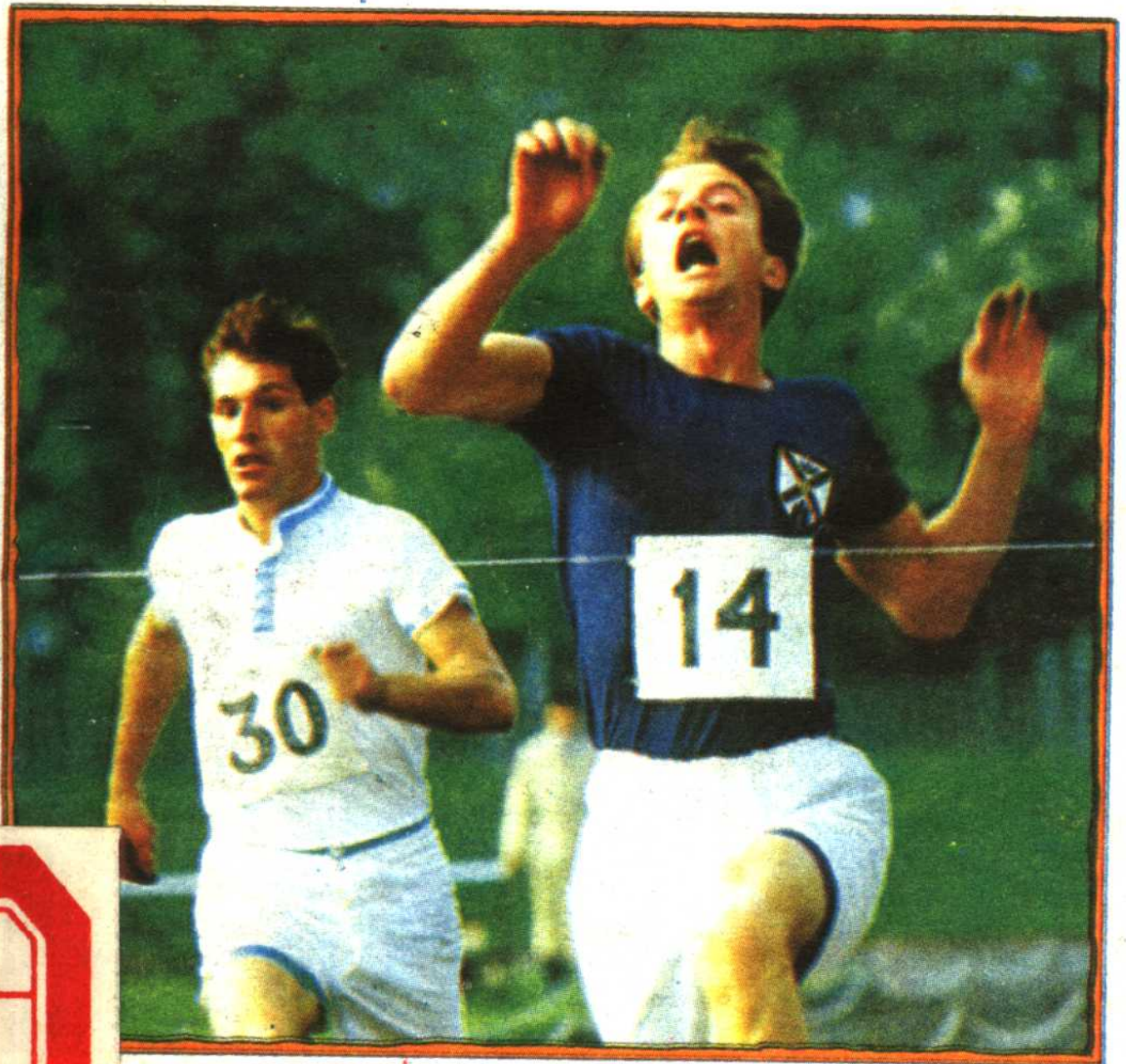




# CHARIOTS OF FIRE



**WRITTEN BY W.J. WEATHERBY**

**BASED ON A SCREENPLAY BY COLIN WELLAND**

**Collins English Library**

# **Collins English Library**

Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

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**WRITTEN BY W.J.WEATHERBY**  
**BASED ON A SCREENPLAY BY COLIN WELLAND**

Abridged and simplified by Margery Morris

Collins ELT

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 .

Printed and published in Great Britain by  
William Collins Sons and Co Ltd  
Glasgow G4 ONB

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First published in Collins English Library 1985

ISBN 0 00 370163 8

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# Chapter One

## Harold and Eric

This is the story of two men. They were very different, but in each man a fire burned. Each wanted to show the world something.

Harold Abrahams was Jewish. His father and mother came from Germany, but they lived and worked in England. Harold went to English schools, and he was English, but he didn't feel English. In those days, the 1920s, many people thought that Jews couldn't be real Englishmen. They were different. Harold didn't like the cold voices, the cold looks that said, "You're not one of us; you're an outsider."

Harold did well at school. He was tall and he could run very fast. He said, "I'll show these cold people what I can do. I'll run faster than any of them."

Eric Liddell lived in Scotland and went to Edinburgh University. He wanted to go to China to teach Christianity, like his father.

Eric was also a very fast runner, and he was a famous footballer. People said to him, "Stay here in Scotland, Eric. We've seen you on the football

field. Stay and run for Scotland.”

“I’ll do both,” thought Eric. “I’ll run for Scotland, and then I’ll go to China with my family.”

While Eric was at the University, his father and sister lived in Edinburgh. His sister, Jennie, didn’t want him to become a runner.

## At Cambridge

In the autumn of 1919, Harold went to Cambridge University, to Caius College. He was twenty.

He thought, “I won’t have any friends here. I’ll be an outsider.”

But Harold made a friend on the first day, when he got off the train at Cambridge. This was Aubrey Montague. Aubrey was a sportsman, and he had a lot of cases and sports things. He couldn’t carry them all, so Harold said, “Let me help you. I’ll take some of them. Which college are you going to?”

“Caius,” said Aubrey.

“That’s my college too,” said Harold with a smile. “You play a lot of games, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. And you?”

“I’m a runner,” said Harold.

“I’m a runner too,” said Aubrey. “But I only like it when I win. Do you?”

“I don’t know,” said Harold, “I always do win.”

“Then you must try the Trinity Dash,” said Aubrey.

"The Trinity Dash? What's that?"

"It's a kind of race – a race with a clock."

"With a clock?"

"Yes. Trinity College has an open space inside, with buildings all around it, and grass in the middle. And there's a clock. You must dash round the open space and reach the finish line before the clock strikes twelve. It strikes 24 times."

"How far is it?"

"A little less than 400 metres, and you have less than one minute."

"Not easy," said Harold.

"Not possible, I think," said Aubrey. "I can't do it, I know that. If you can do it, you'll be the first winner in 700 years."

Harold didn't answer. But he thought, "I'm going to try."

## **The Trinity Dash**

Harold went to look at the open space inside Trinity College. At midday, he listened to the clock. "No," he thought, "It won't be easy. But I'm going to do it. I always win. I'm going to win this. I'll show them."

The morning of the Trinity Dash came. Hundreds of young men were there to see Harold. He was the only runner. Two old men, the Heads of Caius and Trinity, looked out of a window above.

"This Abrahams," said the Head of Trinity, "Who is he?"



"He's Jewish," said the Head of Caius. "He went to Repton."

"Repton's a very good school. What did they say about him?"

"A hard worker. He likes music. Good at it, too. But he doesn't like being Jewish. He's ready to fight people who look coldly at him."

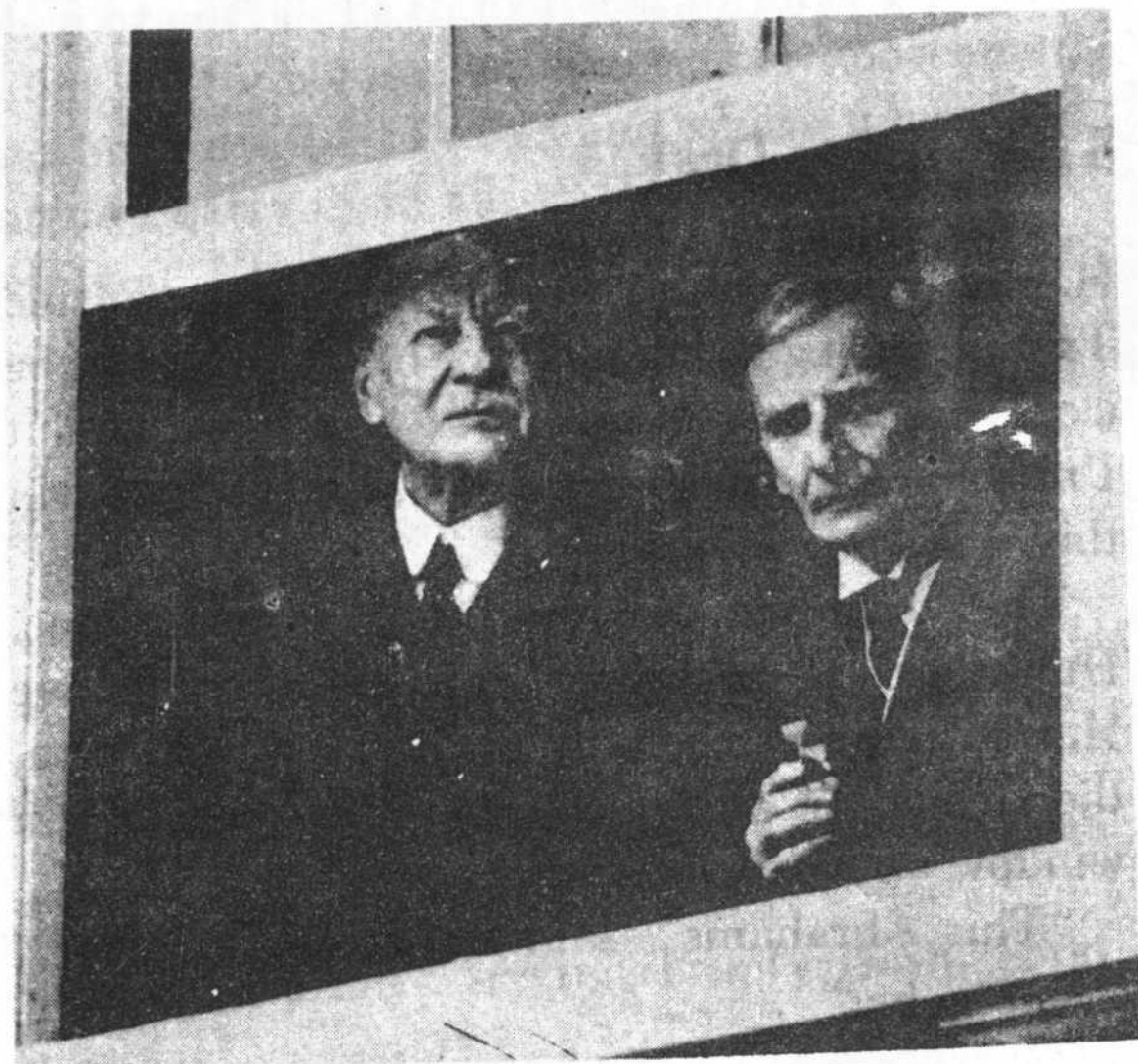
"Can he run?" said the Head of Trinity.

"Like the wind, they say."

"Will he win?"

"Perhaps. I don't know. It's possible. A fire burns in men like him."

*"Can he run?" said the Head of Trinity.*



Aubrey came to Trinity with Harold. He said, "You show them, Harold."

"I will."

Aubrey thought, "Harold wants it too much. Suppose he doesn't win? What will he do?"

"Five minutes," said the starter.

The hands of the clock moved slowly. They waited.

"One minute," said the starter. "Mr Harold Abrahams will run alone."

"No he won't," said a new voice. "There's another runner."

It was Lord Andrew Lindsay, a rich young man from a very old English family.

"I'll run with my friend here," said Andrew. "You'll run faster if I run too," he said to Harold.

"Thank you," said Harold.

"Ready?" said the starter. Suddenly all the young men were quiet.

The clock struck, and the race began.

Harold was in front. But at the second corner a stone moved under his foot and he fell. "He can't win now," thought Aubrey. "Poor Harold."

But Harold was up again, and now Andrew ran beside him. They reached the third corner. "Eleven more strikes," thought Aubrey. The clock went on striking. Nineteen. Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three – and Harold was over the line – twenty-four!

"You've done it, you've done it!" said Aubrey.

Andrew was five metres behind. Harold helped him over the line. "Thanks, Andy," he said, "Thanks, you helped a lot."



*"He can't win now," thought Aubrey.  
"Poor Harold."*

Above them, the Head of Trinity closed the window.

"He did it," he said. "The first in 700 years. You were right about the fire in that young man."

"He's the fastest runner in Britain," said the Head of Caius. "There can't be another runner like him."

But the Head of Caius was wrong.

# Chapter Two

## The Sports Meeting

"Please sir, will you write your name in my book?" said one of the children's voices. "And mine," said another. "Mine too, sir," said another.

The young man smiled and wrote his name, Eric Liddell.

"Eric Liddell," the children read. "Thank you, Mr Liddell, thank you very much."

"You're famous," said Eric's friend, Sandy McGrath. Sandy was at Edinburgh University with him. "Do you like having a famous brother, Jennie?"

Jennie, who was a year or two younger than Eric, didn't smile. "Football isn't Eric's life-work," she said. "Football's just a game."

It was a sunny day in May, and the three young people were at a meeting of runners and Scottish dancers. All round them were the beautiful mountains of the north of Scotland.

"Eric," said Sandy, "You're going to run in the last race today, the 200 metres, aren't you? It's going to begin soon."

"Perhaps," said Eric, "If Jennie will let me."

"Of course she will," said Sandy.

"I suppose I can't stop you," said Jennie.

The children heard the word 'race'. "Mr Liddell, you will run, won't you?" they said. "You'll win, you know you will. We want to see you."

"All right," said Eric. He took off his coat. The other runners were already at the starting line. "Ready?" said the starter. The gunshot was loud in the mountain air.

Sandy said to Jennie, "He's there, look, he's in front, look at him, Jennie, look, you'll never see another runner like him!"

Jennie said nothing.

"It's strange," said Sandy, "He's doing it all wrong. His feet are too high, he moves his arms too much, his head's too far back – but he's winning, he's winning easily!"

Jennie still said nothing.

"Eric's won," said Sandy. "Jennie, aren't you happy?"

"No," she said, "I'm not."

"You don't understand, Jennie," said Sandy, "Eric could race some of the best runners in the world."

But Jennie walked quickly away.

## Sunday

The next day was Sunday, and Eric and Jennie went to church. When they came out, they saw two boys playing football. Eric said to them, "Don't you know what day it is?"

"It's Mr Liddell," said one of the boys. "It's Sunday, Mr Liddell," he said to Eric.

"That's right," said Eric, "and Sunday is God's day. We don't play games on Sunday. But," he said with a smile, "tell me, do you get

up early in the morning?"

"Oh yes sir, we're always up at seven."

"All right," said Eric. "Meet me here tomorrow at seven and I'll play football with you."

"Oh thanks, Mr Liddell. Can I bring my Dad?" said one boy. "Can I bring my little brother, Mr Liddell?" said another.

"Of course, bring the family," said Eric.

As they walked home, Jennie said, "Why did you do that? You won't have time. Our train goes at nine and you must get back to Edinburgh."

"It's all right," said Eric. "There'll be enough time."

"You think too much of football," said Jennie.

"Jennie," said Eric, "you don't understand. That boy knows that Sunday is God's day. But there are six other days in the week. Of course God wants him to enjoy football."

They walked on, but Jennie didn't speak to her brother.

After a minute, Eric said, "Jennie, what's wrong?"

"Sandy wants you to be a famous runner. A star. But that's not the right life for you. I'm afraid for you. You'll forget God. Run for Scotland in the Olympic Games? You can't, Eric, you mustn't."

"God made me," said Eric, "I'm a runner. Can't I thank God? Can't I use what he's given me?"

But Jennie didn't answer, and Eric began to think, "Is she right? I'll ask father."

That evening they sat by the fire and Eric's



father tried to help.

"You have a great future, Eric," he said. "Of course you must use what God has given you."

"But Jennie's right about time, Dad," said Eric. "Learning to run well will take time, and I have my work at the University too."

"Tell me, Eric," said his father, "Is Sandy right? Could you run in the Olympics? Are you good enough?"

"When I ran in that race yesterday," said Eric slowly, "I had a feeling, a strong feeling, that I can win any race. It was like a fire, God's fire, inside me."

"Then run for God," said his father, "Run for God, Eric, and thank Him, and show the world what God has given you."

## **The Flying Scot**

So Eric began to run more often and Sandy helped him. With every race Eric felt stronger. Then he ran for Scotland, and other runners began to talk about him. The papers called him 'The Flying Scot'.

In Cambridge, Harold Abrahams heard about the Flying Scot.

"He runs in a very strange way," said Aubrey, "Feet too high, head too far back, and he moves his arms too much. But he still wins."

"Liddell tells people he runs for God," said Andy. "He runs to show people that God is great."

Both Aubrey and Andy often ran with Harold, and they were fast. But it was Harold who was famous. Cambridge called him 'Abrahams the runner', and children in the streets asked him to write his name in their books. "Are you going to run in the Olympics?" they asked. "I don't know yet," said Harold with a smile. He thought, "I want to race with that man Liddell before the Olympics."

One day Andy told him, "There's going to be a race between Scotland and France."

"Where?"

"In Edinburgh. And Liddell's going to run for Scotland."

"Is he?" said Harold, and he thought, "I'll go to Edinburgh and see the race."

## **Mr Sam Mussabini**

So Harold went to Edinburgh. Eric's picture was often in the papers, so Harold knew him when he saw him.

"There he is," he thought, "but he's so easy and smiling. Doesn't he want to win?"

Eric said, "Good luck" to the runner next to him. Harold couldn't believe his ears. "Say 'good luck' to your enemy?" he thought, "I couldn't do that."

The race began. A Frenchman was in front, and Eric was just behind him. Then Eric was in front. And then, suddenly, the French runner put his arm in front of Eric, and Eric fell.

“That’s the end,” thought Harold, “Liddell can’t possibly win now.”

But Eric jumped up and began to run again. The others were twenty metres in front of him. Then nineteen, eighteen, seventeen – and then Eric was only ten metres behind the leader. And now he felt the fire inside him burn higher, and his head went back.

“It’s not possible,” thought Harold. “He can’t win. Can he?”

Eric could. He crossed the finishing line two metres in front of the Frenchman. And then he fell, and stayed on the ground with his eyes shut.

A little dark man came up and stood over him. “Give him air,” he said to the others, “Get back

