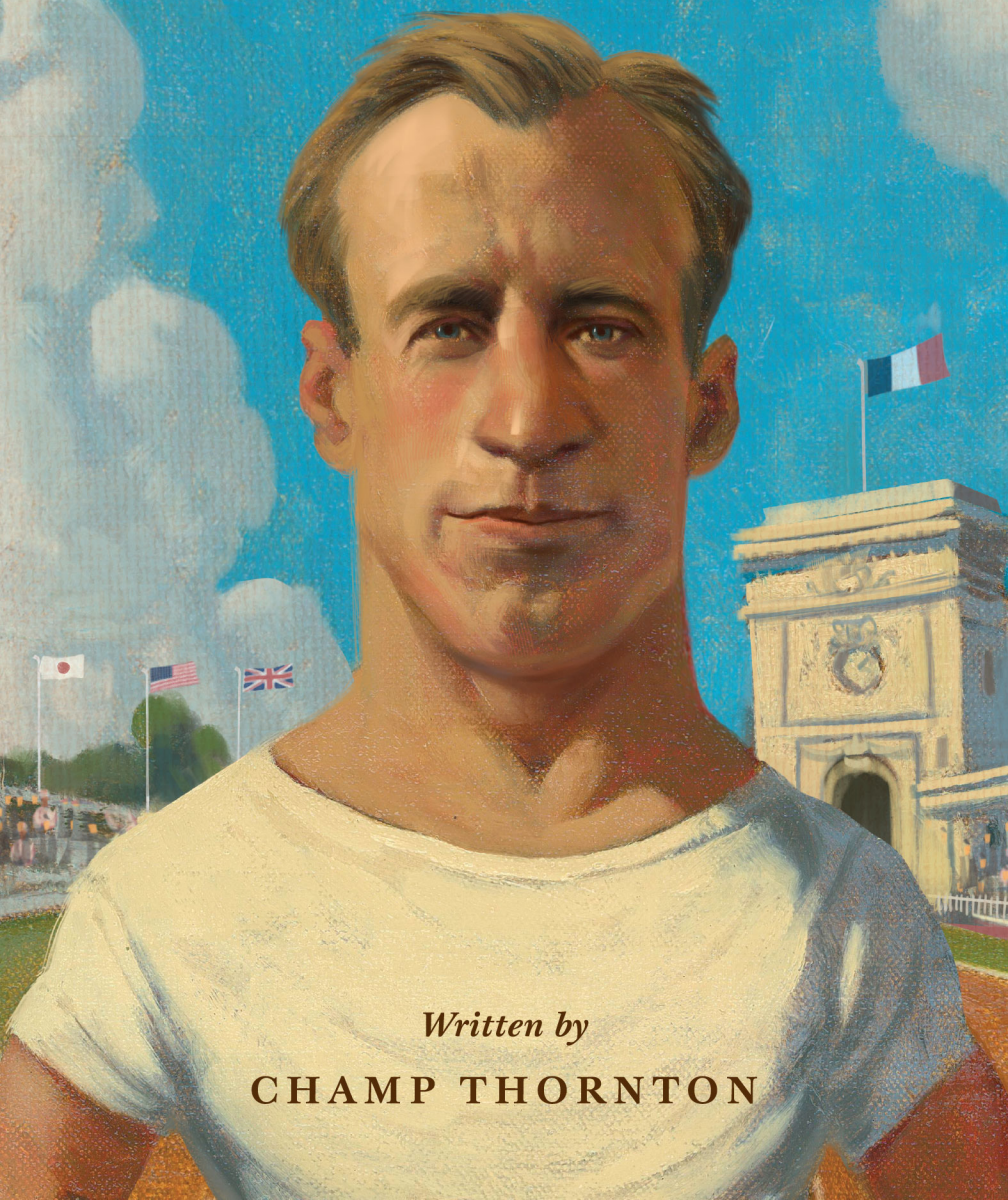


THE STORY OF
Eric Liddell

– The Runner Who Lived for God's Glory –



Written by

CHAMP THORNTON

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Lives of Faith and Grace

The Story of Eric Liddell

The Runner Who Lived for God's Glory

Champ Thornton

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*For my colleagues at Crossway
—friends and collaborators in the transmission
of the treasure of the gospel—*

*“Let us run with endurance the race that
is set before us, looking to Jesus.”
(Hebrews 12:1–2)*

*“Many of us are missing something in life
because we are after the second best.”*

ERIC LIDDELL

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1

The Greatest Race

1923

IT'S SATURDAY AFTERNOON, July 14, 1923. The summer sun blazes down on the oval race track, its surface of finely crushed rock baked flat and hard. Athletes from across the British Isles—from England, Ireland, and Scotland—are gathered for a track meet in an English city called Stoke-on-Trent

(a six-hour drive north of London, England).

Occasional gusts of wind ripple the thin uniforms of the six runners coming onto the track. They're getting ready for the next race: the quarter-mile. Some of the men are fresh. It's their first race of the day.

Eric Liddell has already run twice. Today, he first ran the 100-yard sprint and won. But this is no surprise. The week before he ran the 100-yard race in 9.7 seconds, setting a new British record. Eric's a natural sprinter. But this twenty-one-year-old from Scotland, whom they nicknamed the "Flying Scotsman" for his speed, wasn't done. Today he also ran the 220-yard race—that's half a lap around the track. He won again—22.3 seconds.

And now it's time for the 440-yard race, which is not his usual distance. It's one full lap, a quarter of a mile. So for the third time today, Eric walks to the starting line. He shakes hands with the other runners, and then takes his place on the inside lane next to the grassy infield. He looks down the sun-dried track, still solid but now dotted with thousands of tiny cuts. The

sharp spikes of leather running shoes have started to break up the solid surface, giving it a little more traction. The runners take their marks. They get set. *Go!*

The pack surges forward. There's confusion, as runners crash into each other. Within three steps, Eric is tripped up. Pushed off the track, he's on his hands and knees in the grass.

That seems to be it.

Half a second ticks by. Eric thinks he's been disqualified. The other runners pound down the dusty track. Another second. Someone's shouting—*Eric! Get up! Run!* This race isn't over!

Eric springs to his feet and launches himself down the track. The runners are almost 20 yards ahead of him. He digs deep. With his face to the heavens, he runs like he's never run before. He gains ground with every step, leaving tiny clouds of grit behind him. Closer. Closer. Now he's at the back of the pack. He passes one runner. And then another.

Coming out of the final turn, Eric's in fourth place. He's 10 yards behind the leader, Englishman

J. J. Gillis, who had tripped him up at the beginning of the race.

Eric rips past the next runner, then the next. He's five yards behind. There's 40 yards to go in the race. Now he's two steps behind Gillis. They thunder toward the tape. Eric catches him, passes him, stretches out the lead, and flashes across the finish line, two yards ahead.

Eric Henry Liddell wins the quarter-mile in 51.1 seconds! He collapses to the ground, exhausted. The crowd goes wild.

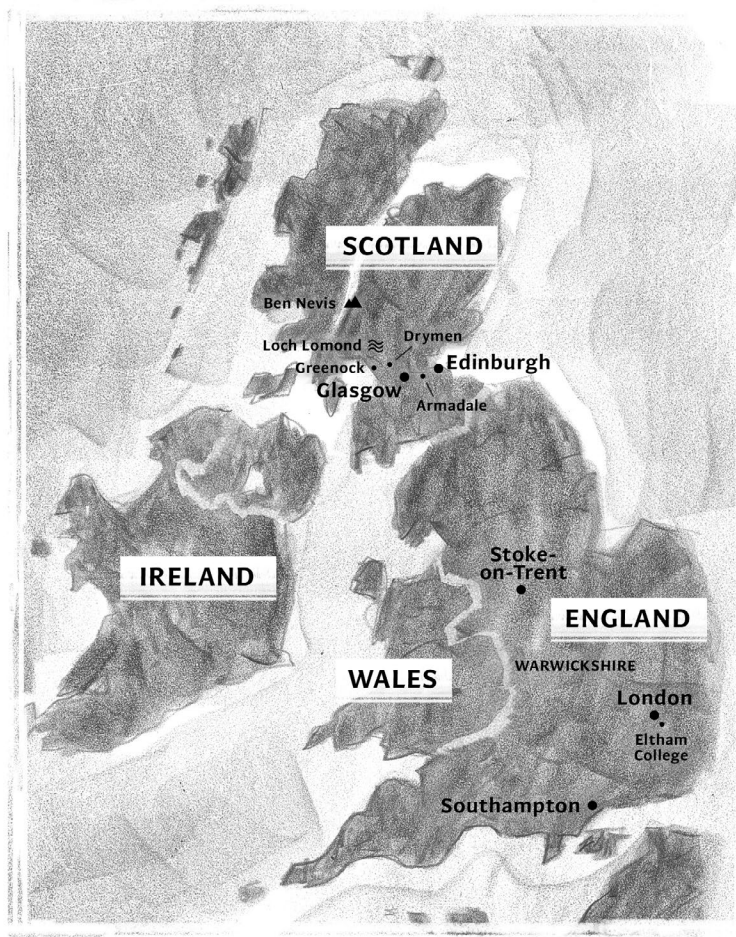
What a comeback! What a race! No one had seen anything like it before. Some wondered if Eric surely got a little help from the wind. Others called it a miracle.

But this race showed the world what Eric Liddell could do. It also demonstrated what kind of man he was. As an athlete, Eric was dedicated to practicing hard, learning how to improve, and doing his best. Over the years, he ran in many races, some small and some big, including the Olympics. He won so often

that he became one of the most famous names in Great Britain.

Yet as a Christian, Eric was also running another kind of race. “The greatest race,” he would say. Throughout his life of service to God, Eric wanted to work hard, grow in godliness, and give his best. Like his running, he knew how it felt to get knocked down and to face terrible challenges. He also knew how to get up and, only in God’s strength, to struggle forward and finally finish. He wasn’t living for himself; he was striving to glorify someone else—the Lord.

As his friends joyously carried Eric from the track on that hot July day, few realized what obstacles he had overcome to get there. And no one could’ve imagined the course of life that lay before him, or how this runner’s race through life would one day end.



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Edinburgh: EH-din-Bur-row

Glasgow: GLAZ-go

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