

ODE TO THE VANQUISHED

Dedicated to one who gives his best

My heart goes out in full embrace
To any man who runs his race
Not almost all, nor just in part,
But wholly from the tensioned start;
And whether of vast or doubtful strength,
Who strides the course its tortured length,
Who will not quit but falters on
Until his entire strength is gone.

Within me there is bursting pride
For one who will not turn aside,
Straining, striving, by others passed,
Outrun, outsped, and often outclassed.
But struggling onward, giving all,
Gaining his prize, refusing to fall,
Such valiance does indeed direct
True inspiration, great respect.

The victor commands the watchful eye
Of the cheering throng as he passes by;
Too often his winning place is stressed
Out of proportion to all the rest,
Though well-deserved his laurel wreath
But as for me, let me bequeath
My praise for an inspiring sight
To him who fights the losing fight.

The stadium's raucous, frenzied shout
Descends to whispers or dies out
As derision's voice and foolish jeers
Grate harshly on the loser's ears.
Rude and thoughtless gestures these;
Giving one's best should always please.
Gold and silver, awards of style;
Effort to win is the thing worthwhile.

Total the sum of life's great test
Find honor is given for only your best.
Regardless of finish, your place in the sun
Is decided by the race you've run.
From birth, as from the starter's blast,
Not whether you win, but whether you last,
Not whether you're beaten by others my friend,
But whether you've run your race to the end.

John B. McLendon Jr. (1915-1999)