

The reflected glory and the shame of failure

The reflected glory and the shame of failure are all matters of belonging to the glorified or to the failed. The reason for going to see one's football team tackle an opposition is to cheer, shout, hurray for your own side and odious hooting, swearing against the other team. The team's win makes their supporters feel good about themselves as emotionally they are part of them, and when lose miserable. A whole week's mood between matches can be spoilt by the abject performance of one's own team and an extra spring in the step if they win¹. Spectators leaving the stadium before the match ends feeling their team has no chance of winning so being let down, are not the true loyal supporters. For real loyalty does not falter even when the home team is at the bottom of the table with no chance of coming on top of the opposition, for they are theirs. Any number of sporting contests between national teams are the same, the team representing a country will have the same effect on the whole population, that is if they have any interest in the kind of contest it is. The football supporting population running into many millions probably does not care much about the Ashes, their thrill is in beating Scotland at Hamden Park, or even better the Germans.

First, though, what is meant by glory for it is more than just competitive success, something that the glorifiers impose on their subject, an emotional bond. The dictionary definition is:

high renown or honour won by notable achievements.

In the 17th Century Baruch Spinoza put it another way writing in *The Power of Intellect* saying, '*mental satisfaction in truth can not be distinguished from glory*'. Perhaps the two can be combined as: '*glory is mental satisfaction born from achievement*'.

Just now I picked up the disconcerting news that **Manchester United** have been beaten at home by **Wolverhampton Wanderers**². Both clubs have great history, but MU is a club of world renown, they have the highest paid football stars so how was it that at home they could not conjure up a single goal! It is terrible, my evening has been spoilt by this shameful failure. I have been a supporter of theirs for decades even though I have only seen them play at Old Trafford once and against Arsenal when George Best scored a goal. Even so, any news concerning MU is always of interest. Why do I have this irrational belonging to Manchester United, their fortunes affecting my mood? The other Manchester club, City, arouses my scorn, never mind that they have the best manager, win everything, play excellent football. Arsenal and Chelsea are clubs in London that has been home all my adult life, I have been to their impressive stadiums, but their results are only of interest as football news. It is Manchester United, whoever their manager is, that touches my mood. This kind of loyalty has no rationality, MU's fortunes are something that connects with me in an unexplainable way, I even resent it but envelopes me all the same. It is shared by the tribe of MU supporters, the spectators at the match who thrust their arms in the air when MU score, they share the glory.

There are several levels of loyalty that carry glory starting with the family, friends, club, neighbourhood, country, even continent. Loyalty, as tribal belonging, is one of our strongest emotions, I say emotions for as with MU it often does not have logical

¹ It would be interesting to know if anyone has made scientific measurements of supporters' production output related to their team's performance the previous weekend.

² Played on 3.1.2022.

explanations³. The country where one is born automatically envelopes the person, demanding his/her loyalty for the entire self has sprung from it. The language by which we communicate, food, history, friends and of course the family stretching back. If there is a war go out to fight for it even sacrificing lives. Traitors have revulsion against all of this. The past of one's country is viewed by some, in contemporary morality, as evil. British colonial history, whose benefits are all round, are enjoyed by the 'woke' but now hate them. That a medium sized country managed to rule over a quarter of the globe is not a matter of pride to them. They despise their reflected glory or rather dispute the glory itself, but there is nothing that can be done about the past, it happened beyond the present generation's reach. It can merely be viewed from the present perspective, but like it or not it is their past, who owns the past? What was glory for older generations who erected statues, named buildings after them were all wrong, self-serving exploiters. Equally some of the neglected have been resurrected as heroes, people to be proud of, adding to the reflected glory. Many, in fact most of us, have had ordinary, decent lives but nevertheless without great achievements; what raises us is our country's past glories. Those with distinguished family ancestry glow in their heritage even though they themselves have achieved nothing much worthy of note. This predicament covers monarchies, aristocracies and those who had great family members in the past now must carry the burden of past glories that far exceed their own. Not that there is any sign they resent it. If anything, they glow in the reflected glory, saying it is their duty to carry on the tradition.

Today it came to my attention that the statue of Christopher Columbus in one of the most distinguished squares in London has been sprayed with red paint as he was a slave owner.⁴ Slavery was abominable but widespread when he ventured to find a route to India but instead discovered the American continent, not that he knew it, something that changed history and has had effect down to our time. He was an enterprising mariner who took on often fatal risks that went with maritime exploration. There are any number of places, states, towns in America named in his honour but here in London his statue had to be defaced with red paint by people who may have education but also hate in their souls. Those who sprayed tell all who admire Columbus's achievement: shame on you! This brings a question mark about democracy based on the universal franchise. The franchise that gives a vote to all who are above a certain age and not clinically insane. The state confers wisdom on the whole of the electorate, wisdom to absorb information, analyse it and make a rational choice. And these 'rational' voters sprayed red paint on the statue, which is revered by others and most strongly by those who erected this bronze memorial in the first place. For all we know he may have been a benign slave owner. By this extreme logic the Lancashire cotton mills, what is left of them, should be sprayed in red paint as the cotton that came from America was grown using slave labour.

Since I started writing on this subject, I have also gone back to a previous subject that interested me over several years, *how Britain's maritime dimension spurred the Industrial Revolution*. In the Preface I listed two major contributions that this country has given to the world: English, the de facto Esperanto; and the Industrial Revolution that has raised living standards through mass production. But now I need to add another that has also affected people's lives around the globe: competitive team sports. Through organised matches, whether in football, cricket, rugby, or others it has been possible to prove

³ Spinoza had much to say about the control of intellect over emotions.

⁴ Since cleaned up.

superiority against an opponent without bloodshed. The reflected glory or shame of failure without killing anyone or destroying anything (no need to list exceptions). Rugby and cricket were started in public schools and the most universally popular, football, among the working class in England. The support for these team sports by and large still relies on these social divisions. No Coliseum of the Romans watching the savage killing of opponents, just play according to rules with complete passion to arouse the spectators. What a great gift to mankind team sports have been!

Yesterday, MU came out on top scoring the winning goal in the last minute, never mind that their effort in open play was so so, they won, and their sixty odd thousand supporters went home with the cheer of victory in their hearts. Equally their opponents travelled back to London fuming in frustration conceding almost at the final whistle. An absurd idea: is Vladimir Putin threatening Ukraine with hundreds of tanks is to prove that the miserable performance of the Russian team at the last European championship must not be taken as his country's inferiority. 'We sent a rubbish football team, but our tanks can overwhelm you' etc.

We are constantly in the grip of reflected glory and shame of failure from every direction, there is no escape, for we want to feel good about ourselves beyond ourselves, but dependent on those who supply the glory we all crave for.

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