



The War of the Roses

R.B. Mowat

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The Mediaeval and Modern History of England are divided from one another by the Wars of the Roses. Out of the troubles of that time a new England arose. The period has been described by the historian Stubbs in a memorable passage: "Weak as is the fourteenth century, the fifteenth is weaker still, more futile, more bloody, more immoral." But out of the weakness came strength. The Wars of the Roses were a rough schooling to England, but they ushered in the glories of the Tudor reigns.

It was a period when in Europe national states were slowly being evolved, with autocratic monarchs and consolidated governments. Spain grew to unity and strength through her great conflict with the Moors. France, in the first half of the fifteenth century, suffered dreadfully both from civil and from foreign wars. Out of these grew the centralised government of Lewis XI.

England too had her period of internecine war, during which she got rid of many troublesome elements, and emerged a strong, consolidated state. In this England was more fortunate than other countries. The caste nobility was almost completely exterminated, and the country gentlemen and the middle classes stepped into their place in the local government of the country. A new nobility had to be formed, recruited from the best servants of the State. In the century following the Wars of the Roses, England prospered under a strong monarchy, a nobility of service, and a wealthy middle class. Thus she was able to go through the tremendous crisis of the Reformation, without the internal conflicts which devastated other countries.

It is, therefore, as being the death of the old England and the beginning of the new, that the Wars of the Roses have their great interest...

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