

## **Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick and Wars of the Roses**

*Rebecca*

The Wars of the Roses, a clash between the houses of York and Lancaster for the throne of England, stretched over thirty years, from 1455 to 1485. A key figure on the side of York during the first fifteen years of this conflict was Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick. After those fifteen years however, Warwick deserted the Yorkist faction and made an alliance with Margaret of Anjou, the leader of the Lancastrian party. There were several reasons for this switch of support. It seems that disagreements occurred between King Edward IV and Warwick, not only over marriages, but also over foreign policy. Warwick and his family's decline in power, his disobedience to and rebellion against the King and his thwarting of personal ambition also influenced his defection from the Yorkist camp.

The relations between King Edward and Warwick began to deteriorate from 1464. The first rift appeared when Edward secretly married Elizabeth Woodville in May of that year. Apparently Warwick was outraged at the marriage, due to his loss of face abroad, as he had been carrying on negotiations for a French marriage for Edward (Lander, 1990, p105). Following this, the rise of the new Queen's family through marriages and promotions, was natural enough, but was too rapid for discretion, and alienated Warwick. Some of the marriages arranged caused him annoyance, but others caused anger and left him with a genuine grievance. With the baronial marriage market of the time being scooped up, Warwick was left without suitable husbands for his two daughters, Isabella and Anne Neville, unless the King was prepared to sanction their marriage to one or other of his royal brothers, George of Clarence or Richard of Gloucester, but this Edward steadily refused to do. This created considerable friction between the Nevilles and the court (Churchill, 1969, p893).

A major cause of tension between Warwick and Edward arose over questions of foreign policy (Hallam(ed.), 1996, p245). Edward wished to revive England's old alliance with the Duke of Burgundy. By contrast, Warwick had come out strongly in favour of an alliance with the ancient enemy, France, despite the fact that this ran in the opposite direction to English popular sentiment. Warwick's plan had much to commend it, but it seems that he may have been largely influenced by the flattery and lavish gifts he had heaped upon him by the King of France and perhaps also by the personal hatred he is said to have felt for the new Duke of Burgundy, Charles the Bold (Churchill, 1969, p893). However, Edward held firm for the Burgundian policy. Neither Warwick's anger nor persuasion could prevent Edward from concluding treaties with Burgundy and marrying his sister, Margaret of York, to Duke Charles in 1468.

King Edward clearly signalled his intention to reject Neville domination in 1467, when he dismissed George Neville, one of Warwick's brothers, from the chancellorship of England while Warwick was away in France (Churchill, 1969, p893). Warwick was now seething with resentment and sulked in his north-country castles (Churchill, 1969, p893). He took on as many squires, knights and gentlemen as he could to swell his forces, and the King did all he could to reduce the Earl's power. It seems they were brought together several times, but "never again found pleasure in each other's company" (Hallam(ed.), 1996, p236).

Another cause for dissension between King and Earl was the secret marriage of Warwick's daughter Isabella to George, Duke of Clarence, Edward's brother. This was done flatly against the King's command in July 1469, in Calais. This was followed by Warwick and his son-in-law associating themselves with rebel complaints against the King's 'evil advisers' : " It was no coincidence that the accused were also Warwick's particular enemies at court, whose influence was now greater than his own" (Churchill, 1969, p893). In the same year, Edward fell into the hands of Warwick, and was imprisoned in the Earl's great Yorkshire fortress of Middleham. Warwick then tried to rule in the name of the captive King, but he lacked any support from his fellow peers, who saw only too easily that his schemes were inspired by personal ambition. So it was that Warwick was forced to release the King. Edward, however, seemed even now prepared to forgive and forget, but Warwick would have nothing of the sort. It was at this point that he took the final step and allied himself with the Lancastrians.

"The breach with Edward was his own making. This reaction to the decline of his influence was essentially self-interested" (Churchill 1969, p894) Warwick's various schemes from 1469 to 1471, such as the attempt to rule through a captive King, to replace him with the Duke of Clarence, and, finally, to substitute Lancaster for York, were all designed to perpetuate his own control of power. In the end, the extreme cynicism of his deal with Margaret of Anjou highlighted his over-weening ambition. It proved to be his downfall, as the politically conscious classes in England would not rally to a man so obviously ready to sacrifice principle to his own advantage. Warwick had no cause to offer except his own advancement (Churchill 1969, p894).

Richard Neville made his alliance with Margaret of Anjou for a variety of reasons. Disagreements with King Edward in areas of foreign policy and marriages, began to cause serious conflicts between the two. The decline of his own personal power and that of his family was also a contributing factor. His disobedience to the King and his open rebellion led to his switching support from York to Lancaster. However Warwick's decision to ally with Lancaster was due entirely to his desire for personal power and gain. His decision to change sides was not wise, and his ambition for power never satisfied. He was killed in battle in 1471, fighting for the cause of the house of Lancaster.

## **Bibliography**

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