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CERVANTES
RINCONETE Y
CORTADILLO

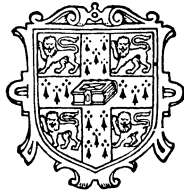
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Frontmatter

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NOTE

Rinconete y Cortadillo is generally thought to have been written rather earlier than 1604, eight years or more before it was published in Cervantes' *Novelas Ejemplares*. Many would write it down as the best of these tales, and it is certainly inferior to none in bold realism and richness of detail: Cervantes knew the company he painted as thoroughly as the environment in which he placed them.

This story of two boys—thief and card-sharper, Rinconete and Cortadillo—who find their way to Sevilla and join the brotherhood of the infamous Monipodio, may or may not have the moral effect on the reader of to-day which its author, in accordance with the sentiments of his prologue (to the *Novelas*), devoutly wishes for it in the concluding lines. It is more likely to attract him as a vivid picture of a society which he may be forgiven if he has never encountered in the flesh—of a company of merry profligates and adventurers who lived when “thieving was a free profession,” its only security being given “in the lump,” namely that of the head; and when the terrors of screw and rack made thieves of sterner stuff than to-day, for “what the tongue uttered the throat paid for.” With rare skill Cervantes introduces us into this world of light-hearted crime which was not too proud to keep on the right side of religion, and leaves us amazed at the insight into human nature which he combined with a knowledge of the customs of his day.

E. ALLISON PEERS.

April, 1922