

SUMMARY: Benedict Spinola, from whom Oxford purchased the great garden property at Aldgate on 15 June 1580, died on 12 July of that year. Could Oxford have penned and published this epitaph? The iambic tetrameter verses are polished, and Spinola's virtues, as extolled in the epitaph, are ones Oxford admired – liberality, and loyalty to the sovereign among them. It is also worth noting that the first verse is reminiscent of the opening lines of Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet*, the principal source of Shakespeare's play *Romeo and Juliet*:

*There is beyond the Alps a town of ancient fame,  
Whose bright renown yet shineth clear; Verona men it name.*

An Epitaph upon the death of the worshipful  
Master Benedict Spinola,  
merchant of Genoa and free denizen of England,  
who died on Tuesday the 12 of July 1580.

Amongst the states of Italy  
That stand and strive for fame  
There is a city passing brave  
That Genoa hath to name,

Inhabited with noble race  
Whereas amongst the rest  
There is a house of Spinolij  
As noble as the best

Of ancients come from foreign parts  
As fate did give them leave,  
And by their arms it doth appear  
They come from th' house of Cleve.

From out which stock a bud of birth  
Inferior not to any  
Sprang in this country's soil of ours,  
A comfort great to many.

In that most gracious Prince's reign  
Sixth Edward was he sworn  
A denizen, and ever since  
Hath faith and duty borne

Unto the princes of this realm

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Still pressed to do them good,  
And with them ever since his oath  
In grace and favour stood

At ready hand at all assays;  
When Queen or Council would  
Command him aught he nought refused  
To do what thing he could.

What passeth above my reach to know  
I leave; he lived here  
A noble merchant every way,  
No stranger was his peer.

His friendly mind to all men like,  
His word and deed was one,  
And to the honest-minded men  
His purse was shut from none.

Amongst the poor imparted he  
The talent God him lent;  
On poor, and setting poor on work,  
The greatest part he spent.

With money, meat, and physic, too,  
The sick he comforts oft,  
The men decayed that secret wept  
Again he set aloft.

The prisoners oft he visited  
With money meat to buy,  
And many did he set at large  
That did for little lie.

What was his liberal alms abroad  
I need not for to show it,  
Nor what his bounty every way;  
The poor and rich do know it.

His name inferred a godly life,  
For Benedict he hight,  
Oh Spinola, thy blessed works  
Are blessed in God's sight.

And as his life was liked of,  
Unblamed of foe or friend,

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So God did show his mercies great  
To him in latter end.

Good memory to latter gasp,  
And knowledge of the Lord,  
A mind to prayer wholly bent,  
As one that life abhorred.

With hands erected up aloft  
And eyes unto the skies  
In contrite wise, when speech was gone,  
In godly sort he lies.

Lo, here his birth from whence whose life  
It is that I do write  
Whom (out alas) untimely death  
Hath smitten with despite.

Wail may the sick, weep may the poor,  
And heavy many a heart  
That from so sure a friend as he  
Their chance is to depart.

Clay hath his right, death hath his due,  
Deserts remain to Fame,  
God hath his soul, the world his pelf,  
And bruit his lasting name.

God grant thy good example may  
Raise up some godly hearts  
To help the poor as though hast done  
In grievous pain and smarts.

God is with thee, God be with us,  
God send us there to dwell  
With Christ and thee in heaven above;  
My Spinola, thus farewell.

R.B.

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