

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Martin Peerson**  
**- poems -**

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## Martin Peerson(1571-1651)

Martin Peerson (or Pearson) (born between 1571 and 1573; died December 1650 or January 1651 and buried 16 January 1651) was an English composer, organist and virginalist. Despite Roman Catholic leanings at a time when it was illegal not to subscribe to Church of England beliefs and practices, he was highly esteemed for his musical abilities and held posts at St Paul's Cathedral and, it is believed, Westminster Abbey. His output included both sacred and secular music in forms such as consort music, keyboard pieces, madrigals and motets.

From Peerson's will and the March marriage registers, it appears that he was the son of Thomas and Margaret Peerson of March, Cambridgeshire, in England. It is believed that Martin Peerson was born in the town of March between 1571 and 1573, as records show that his parents married in 1570, but a "Margaret Peersonn" was married in 1573. It therefore seems that Thomas Peerson died a few years after 1570 and that Martin's mother remarried.

A drawing of Old St. Paul's Cathedral from the south, as it appeared between 1630 and 1666  
In the 1580s, Peerson was a choirboy of St. Paul's Cathedral in London under organist Thomas Mulliner. Subsequently, he came under the patronage of the poet Fulke Greville. On May Day in 1604 Peerson's setting of the madrigal See, O See, Who is Heere Come a Maying was performed as part of Ben Jonson's Private Entertainment of the King and Queene at the house of Sir William Cornwallis at Highgate (now in London). A letter dated 7 December 1609 states that at the time Peerson was living at Newington (now Stoke Newington, London) and had composed several lessons for the virginals, which was his principal instrument. It appears that he had Roman Catholic sympathies, for that year, on the same occasion as Jonson, he was convicted of recusancy – the statutory offence of not complying with the established Church of England.

Peerson then took up musical studies at the University of Oxford. In order to do so, he would have had to subscribe to Protestantism. In 1613, he was conferred a Bachelor of Music (.) and was appointed Master of the Boys of Canterbury Cathedral. It is possible that he was the "Martin Pearson" who was sacrist at Westminster Abbey from 1623 to 1630. Between June 1624 and June 1625 he returned to St. Paul's Cathedral as almoner and Master of the Choristers; there is also some evidence suggesting he was later made a petty canon. Although all cathedral services ceased at the end of 1642 following the outbreak of the English Civil War, he retained the title of almoner and, along with the other petty

canons and the vicars choral, had special financial provision made for him. Peerson is known to have been buried on 16 January 1651 in St. Faith's Chapel under St. Paul's. He therefore died in either December 1650 or, more likely, January 1651.

In spite of his Roman Catholic leanings, evidenced by the use of pre-Reformation Latin texts for his motets and his 1606 conviction for recusancy, Peerson's position at the heart of the Anglican establishment confirms the overall esteem in which he was held.

# Can A Maid That Is Well Bred

Can a maid that is well bred,  
Hath a blush so lovely red,  
Modest looks, wise, mild, discreet,  
And a nature passing sweet,  
Break her promise, untrue prove,  
On a sudden change her love,  
Or be won e'er to neglect  
Him to whom she vow'd respect?

Such a maid, alas, I know.  
Oh that weeds 'mongst corn should grow,  
Or a rose should prickles have,  
Wounding where she ought to save!  
I that did her parts extol,  
Will my lavish tongue control.  
Outward parts do blind the eyes,  
Gall in golden pills oft lies.

Reason wake, and sleep no more,  
Land upon some safer shore;  
Think on her and be afraid  
Of a faithless fickle maid.  
Of a faithless fickle maid  
Thus true love is still betray'd.  
Yet it is some ease to sing  
That a maid is light of wing.

Martin Peerson

# Upon My Lap My Sovereign Sits

Upon my lap my sovereign sits  
And sucks upon my breast;  
Meantime his love maintains my life  
And gives my sense her rest.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

When thou hast taken thy repast,  
Repose, my babe, on me;  
So may thy mother and thy nurse  
Thy cradle also be.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

I grieve that duty doth not work  
All that my wishing would,  
Because I would not be to thee  
But in the best I should.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

Yet as I am, and as I may,  
I must and will be thine,  
Though all too little for thyself  
Vouchsafing to be mine.  
Sing lullaby, my little boy,  
Sing lullaby, mine only joy!

Martin Peerson