

Hymn of the Week – St Matthew and Harvest

We Plough the Fields and Scatter the Good Seed

Words: Matias Claudius (1740 – 1815)

Tune: Wir pflugen by J A P Schultz (1747 – 1800),

This hymn, which many of us will feel is an essential component of a traditional English Harvest Festival, is based on Ps 144 and reminds us to give thanks to God not only once a year for the harvest but for all the good gifts, especially his love, which are given to us all the year around. What is not so commonly known is that the hymn was written in its original form for a play which the author wrote about harvest in a north German village and was based on a peasant song he heard in a farmer's home.

Matias Cladius was the son of a Lutheran pastor from Lubeck and was destined for the same vocation but poor health and the influence of his education at the University of Jena lead to his become a journalist and, at the time he wrote this hymn, he was editor of a local paper in Hesse Darmstadt and appropriately, a Commissioner of Agriculture. The hymn was translated into English in 1861 by Jane Montgomery Campbell, daughter of the vicar of St. James', Paddington and since then has become a permanent feature in every major English hymn book.

The tune was first set to the hymn in 1800, its composer Schultz produced a wide variety of music and most noticeably served as Kapellmeister first to Prince Henry of Prussia and latterly to the Danish court in Copenhagen.

The hymn is sung here by “The Symphonials” a Choir from Ghana that seeks to inspire music lovers with religious and patriotic choral songs as a way of sensitizing the power of gospel music on nature.

<https://youtu.be/QTejKRYz1FE?list=RDQTejKRYz1FE>

And last but not least..... John Betjemin wrote splendid parody of the hymn which may ring all too true, the first verse runs as follows:

“We spray the fields and scatter
The poison on the ground
So that no wicked wild flowers
Upon our farm be found
We like whatever helps us
To line our purse with pence
The twenty-four-hour broiler-house
And neat electric fence.
All concrete sheds around us
And Jaguars in the yard
The telly lounge and deep-freeze
Are ours for working hard.”