

Sir Hengist

By M. G. Lewis

Herman, or Arminius, is the favourite hero of Germany, whose liberty he defended against the oppression of Rome: Flavus, his brother, sided with the Romans, and in consequence his memory as much detested by his countrymen, as that of Arminius is beloved.—I forget where I met with the original of this Ballad.

Where rolls the Weser's golden sand,
Did erst Sir Hengist's castle stand,
 A warrior brave and good;
His lands extended far and wide,
Where stream'd full many a plenteous tide,
 Where frown'd full many a wood.

It chanced, that homewards from the chase
Sir Hengist urged his courser's pace,
 The shadowy dales among,
While all was still, and late the hour,
And far off, in the castle tower,
 The bell of midnight rung.

Sudden a piercing shriek resounds
Throughout the forest's ample bounds;
 A wildly dreadful yell;
The dogs, by trembling, own their fear,
As if they scent some bad thing near,
 Some soul enlarged from hell!

—“See, father!” cried young Egbert; “see
“Beneath the shade of yonder tree
 “What fearful form is spread!
“How fire around his temples glows!
“How from his lance and fingers flows
 “The stream of bloody red!”—

—“Stay here!” said Hengist, then with speed
Towards the stranger spurr'd his steed;
 What brings thee here, Sir Knight,
“Who darest in my domains to bear
“A lance, and by thy haughty air
 “Seem'st to demand the fight?”—

—“Long has my arm forgot to wield
“The sword, and raise the massy shield,”
Replied the stranger drear:
“Peace to this brown oak’s hallow’d shade!
“Peace to the bones which here are laid,
“And which we both revere!

“Know’st thou not Siegmar, Herman’s sire,
“That arm of steel, that soul of fire?
“Here is his grave.—My name
“Is Flavus—at that sound the woods
“With curses ring, and Weser’s floods
“My infamy proclaim!

“For such is vengeful Odin’s will
And doom, that traitor-curses still
“Thick on my head shall be,
Till from the blood of brethren slain,
“My gory hands and lance again
“I pure and spotless see.

“Still then, when midnight hours permit
“Pale spectres Hela’s realm to quit,
“I seek this hallow’d place:
“With tears bedew these crimson blots,
“And strive to wash away the spots
“No pains can now efface!”—

He ceased; when Odin’s eagle came,
By Odin arm’d with blasting flame,
And seized the phantom knight:
Loud shrieks the spectre’s pangs reveal’d,
And soon a cloud his form conceal’d
From awe-struck Hengist’s sight.

“Son” said the chief, with horror chill’d,
While down his brows cold dews distill’d,
“Now take your sword in hand,
“And swear with me, each drop of gore,
“That swells your veins, well pleased to pour
“To guard your native land!”—