

JEANNE-THE-FLAME

Music and original lyrics: *Jeanne-la-Flamme (Janedig Flamm)* in the *Barzaz Breiz*. Same tune as *Combat of the Thirty*. Collected by Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué, *Barzaz Breiz*, before 1846, https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Barzaz_Breiz/1846

Translation and arrangement by Dorothea de Beckham (Dee Becker) (© 2020)



I

“What climbs the mountain? It’s a flock of black sheep, I think.”
“It is not a flock of black sheep; an army, I’m not saying.”^[1]

A French army which comes to lay siege to the city Hennebont.
While the duchess’ process toured all the bells were ringing.

II

As she rode on her white palfrey, with her child upon her lap;^[2]
Everywhere along its path the people of Hennebont cried with joy:

“God helps the son and the mother; and confuse the French!”
As the procession ended, French soldiers were heard to shout:

“Now we are going to take them all alive, in their lodging,
The doe and its fawn!
We have gold chains to tie them up.”

Jeanne-the-Flame then answered them, from the top of the towers:
“It’s not the doe that will be taken; the bad wolf^[3], I’m not saying.

“If he’s cold tonight, we’ll heat his hole.” So, to end these months, she went down, furious,
And she put on an iron corset.

She put on her black helmet, and she armed herself with a sharp steel sword, and she chose three hundred men.

III

With a red brand in hand, she left the city by one arch,
While the French sang cheerfully, sitting at table drinking.

Gathered in their shut tents.
The French sang into the night,
When they heard in the distance, a singular embittered voice:

“More than one who laughs tonight will cry before it is the day;
“More than one who eats white bread will eat cold black earth.

“More than one who pours red wine will soon shed oily blood;
“More than one will make ashes,” said the bold swagger.

More than one bowed his head on the table, drunk,
when this cry of distress sounds:
“Fire! Friends, fire! Fire! Fire! Fire!

“Friends, run away! It’s Jeanne-the-Flame who puts us to the torch!
“Jeanne-the-Flame is the most fearless on the earth. Run away!”

Jeanne-the-Flame had set fire to
the four corners of the camp;
Soon the wind had spread the fire,
and lit up the dark night;

The tents were burned, the French were grilled,
three thousand men in ashes,
only a hundred men escaped.
Jeanne-the-Flame had won the night.

IV

At her window, looking out
across the countryside,
seeing the smoky camp destroyed.
The tents reduced to heaps of ash.

Jeanne-the-Flame cried out: "Oh my!
What a beautiful rich field!
What beautiful fertilizer!
For one grain we'll have ten!"

The ancients said true: "There is nothing like the
bones of the Gauls;
Only crushed Gallic bones
to grow the Breton wheat."

1. *Joan of Monfort was likened to Clorinda, Queen of the Shepherdesses, in the hearts of the Breton people according to Théodore Hersart de la Villemarqué's commentary in the 1839 edition of the "Barzaz Breizh."*
2. *Montfort procession of 1341-1342 to gain control of major cities across Brittany. Joanna (Joan, Jeanne, Janedig) of Montfort was the mother of John IV the Duke of Brittany who succeeded Charles de Blois.*
3. *Charles de Blois. In Breton there is a pun which rolls on the resemblance of the common name bleiz (wolf), and of the proper name Blois.*