The Ballad of King Arthur and the King of Cornwall, updated by Lou Bodenhemier.

Says, "Come here cousin Gawaine so gay;
    My sister’s son are you;
For you shall see one of the fairest Round Tables
    That ever you have seen with your eye."

Then spoke Lady Queen Guenevere,
    And these were the words she said:
"I know where a Round Table is, you noble King,
    That is worth your Round Table and three like it.

"The trestle that stands under this Round Table," she said,
    "Low down to the mould,
It is worth your Round Table, you worthy King,
    Your halls, and all your gold.

"The place where this Round Table stands in,
    It is worth your castle, your gold, your land;
And all good Brittany."

"Where may that Table be, Lady?" said he,
    "Or where may that good building be?"
"You shall seek it," she said, "till you find it,
    For you shall never get more out of me."

Then spoke noble King Arthur,
    These were the words he said:
"I’ll make my vow to God,
    And also to the Trinity,

"I’ll never sleep one night, there as I do another,
    Until that Round Table I see!
Sir Marramiles and Sir Tristram,
    Fellows you shall be;
"We’ll be clad in palmers’ clothes,
    Five palmers we will be;

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1 Originally “Litle Britaine”; Little Britain refers to Brittany
2 He will never spend more than one night in the same place, because he is searching
There is no foreign man we will abide,
    Nor will we come near."
Then they went east and they went west,
    In many a strange country;

Then they travelled a little further,
    They saw a battle new set;
"Now, by my faith," says noble King Arthur,
    . . . well met

(here half a page is missing)

But when he came to this . . . C . . ,
    And to the palace gate,
Standing ready there was a proud porter,
    And met him soon there.

Shoes of gold the porter had on,
    And all his other clothes were the same.
"Now, by my faith," says noble King Arthur,
    "Over there is a servant boy."

Then said noble King Arthur,
    These were the words he said:
"Come here, you proud porter,
    I pray that you come over here to me.

"I have two poor rings on my finger,
    The better of them I'll give to you:
If you tell me who the Lord of this castle may be," he says,
    "Or who is Lord in this country?"

"Cornwall King," the porter says;
    "There is none so rich as he;
Neither in Christendom, nor yet in heathen lands,
    None have so much gold as he."
And then said noble King Arthur,
    These were the words he said:
"I have two poor rings of my finger,
The better of them I'll give you,
If you will greet him well, Cornwall King,
And greet him well from me.

"Pray him for one nights lodging, and two meals of meat,
For His love that died upon a tree;³
For one guesting, and two meals of meat,
For His love that died upon a tree,

"For one guesting of two meals of meat,
For His love that was of Virgin born,⁴
And in the morning that we may get away,
Either without fighting or insults."

Then forth has gone this proud porter,
As fast as he could go;
And when he came before Cornwall King,
He kneeled down on his knee.

Says, "I have been a porterman at your gate
This thirty winter and three . . .

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. . . our Lady was born.
Then thought Cornwall King,
These palmers had been in Britain.

Then spoke Cornwall King,
These were the words he said there:
"Did you ever know a well-bred King,
His name was King Arthur?"

And then said noble King Arthur,
These were the words he said:

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³ Reference to Jesus Christ and his death upon the cross, which is often depicted or alluded to as a tree as medieval and early modern theology linked it to the Tree of Paradise.
⁴ Another reference to Jesus Christ
"I do not know that good King,
   But once myself I did see him."
Then spoke Cornwall King again;
   These were the words he said:

Says, "Seven years I was clad and fed,
   In Brittany, in a bower.\(^5\)
I had a daughter by King Arthur's wife,
   That now is called my flower.
For King Arthur, that kindly cuckold,
   Has none such in his bower.

"For I do swear, and save my oath,
   That same lady so bright,
That a man that were laid on his deathbed
   Would open his eyes to see her."
"Now, by my faith," says noble King Arthur,
   "And that's a fair thing to say!"

And then spoke Cornwall again,
   And these were the words he said:
"Come here, five or three of my knights,
   And fetch me down my steed;
King Arthur, that foul cuckold,
   Has none such, if he had need.

"For I can ride him as far on a day,
   As King Arthur can do any of his horses on three.
And is it not a pleasure for a King
   When he shall ride forth on his journey?

"For the eyes that were in his head,
   They glow as do burning coals."
"Now, by my faith," says noble King Arthur,
   "That is a very good steed."

(Half a page is missing here)

\(^5\) A private room for the Lady of the castle or household
"Nobody say . . .
   But one that's learned to speak."

Then King Arthur to his bed was brought,
   A grieving man was he,
And so were all his fellows with him.
   From him they thought never to flee.

Then take they did that little sprite
   And under an upside down tub he was closed.
And he was set by King Arthur's bedside,
   To hear their talk and their communication,
   That he might come out, and make proclamation,
   Long before it was day.
It was more for King Cornwall's pleasure,
   Then it was for King Arthur's benefit.

And when King Arthur in his bed was laid,
   These were the word he said:
"I'll make a vow to God,
   And also to the Trinity,
That I'll be the bane of Cornwall King,
   Before I see Brittany again!"

"It is an unadvised vow," says Gawaine the gay,
   "As ever a King heard make I:
We are but five Christian men,
   Of the Christen faith are we -
And we shall fight against anointed king
   And all his armies."

And then spoke him noble Arthur,
   And these were the words he said:
"Why, if you are afraid, Sir Gawaine the gay,
   Go home, and drink wine in your own country."

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6 A small imp, originally "lodly boome"
7 Originally "thrub chundler" the meaning of which is debated. Likely a tub or refuse bin upside down, acting as a bedside table.
The Third Part

And then spoke Sir Gawaine the gay,
   And these were the words he said:
"No, seeing you have made such a hearty vow, Heere another vow I will make.

"I'll make mine a vow to God,
   And also to the Trinity,
That I will have yonder fair lady
   To Brittany with me.

"I'll hold her gently to my heart,
   And to her I'll work my will."

(Half a page is missing here)

These were the words he said:
   "Before I would wrestle with that fiend,
I'd rather be drowned in the sea."

And then spoke Sir Bredbeddle,
   And these were the words he said:
"Why, I will wrestle with that evil imp!
   God, my governor you will be."

Then spoke noble Arthur,
   And these were the words he said:
"What weapons will you have, you gentle knight?
   I ask you to tell me."

He says, “A sword from Cologne I’ll hold,
   With a Milanese knife close by my knee,
And a Danish axe close in my hands--
   That a trusty weapon I think will be.”
Then with his sword from Cologne that he had in his hand
The bulge of the trubchandler he burst in three;
With that started out a little fiend,
With seven heads, and one body.

The fire towards the heavens\(^8\) flew
Out of his mouth, where was great plenty.
The knight stood in the middle, and fought,
That it was great joy to see,

Till his sword from Cologne brake in his hand,
And his Milanese knife burst on his knee;
And then the Danish axe burst in his hand first,
That a trusty weapon he thought would be.

But now is the knight left without any weapons.
And alas! It was more the pity.
But a surer weapon then those had he one,
Had never lord in Christianity:
And all was but one little book -
He found it by the side of the sea.

He found it at the seaside,
Wrecked up in a flood;
Our Lord had written it with His hands,
And sealed it with His blood.

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"That you do not s . . .
But lie still in that wall of stone
Until I have met with noble King Arthur,
And told him what I have done."

And when he came to the King's chamber,
He minded his courtesy;
Says, "Sleep you? Wake you, noble King Arthur?"

\(^8\) Originally element, from “firmament”
And ever Jesus waken you!"

"No, I am not sleeping, I am waking" -
These were the words he said:
"For you I have cared. How have you fared?
Oh gentle knight, let me see."

The knight showed the King his book,
Told him to look, read, and see;
And ever he found it on the backside of the page,
As noble Arthur would wish it to be.

And then spoke him King Arthur:
"Alas, you gentle knight, how may this be -
That I might see him in the same likeness
That he stood before you?"

And then spoke him the Green Knight,
These were the words he said:
"If you'll stand bravely in the battle strong,
I will have won all the victory."

Then spoke him the King again,
And these were the words he said:
"If we stand not bravely in this battle strong,
We are worthy to be hanged all on a tree."

Then spoke the Greene Knight,
These were the words he said:
Says, "I conjure you, you foul fiend,
In the same likeness as you stood before me."

With that start out a little friend,
With seven heads, and one body;
The fire towards the heavens flew
Out of his mouth, where was great plenty.

The knight stood in the middle p . . .
... they stood the space of an hour,
  I know not what they did.

And then spoke the Greene Knight,
  And these were the words he said:  

Says, "I conjure you, you fowl fiend,
  That you fetch down the steed that we see."

And then forth is gone Burlow Beanie,  
  As fast as he could go;  
  And fetch he did that fair steed,  
  And came again by and by.

Then spoke Sir Marramiles,
  And these were the words he said:
"Riding of this steed, brother Bredbeddle,  
  The mastery belongs to me."

Marramiles tooke the steed to his hand,  
  To ride him he was very bold;  
  He could not more make him go  
  Then could a child of three years old.

He laid upon him with heel and hand,  
  With stick that was so hard;  
"Help! Brother Bredbeddle!" says Marramile,  
  "For I think he is a devil of hell.

"Help! Brother Bredbeddle!" says Marramile,  
  "Help! for Christ's pity!  
  For without your help, brother Bredbeddle,  
  He will never be ridden by me."

Then spoke Sir Bredbeddle,
  These were the words he said:

9 The name of the fiend
"I conjure you, you Burlow Beane,
    You tell me how this steed was ridden in his country."
He says, "There is a gold wand that
    Stands in King Cornwall's study window.

"Let him take that wand in that window,
    And strike three strokes on that steed;
And then he will spring forth of his hand
    As sparks do from a burning coal."

And then bespake him the Greene Knight . . .

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A loud blast he may blow then.

And then spoke Sir Bredebeddle,
    To the fiend these words he said:
Says, "I conjure you, you Burlow Beanie,
    The powder box you will fetch for me."

Then forth is gone Burlow Beanie
    As fast as he could go;
And fetch he did the powder box,
    And came again by and by.

Then Sir Tristeram took powder from that box,
    And blended it with warm sweet milk;
And there put it into that horn,
    And swilled it about like that.

Then he took the horn in his hand,
    And a loud blast he blew.
He split the horn up to the middle -
    All his fellows this they knew.

Then spoke the Green Knight,
    These were the words he said:
Says, "I conjure you, you Burlow Beanie,
That you fetch me the sword that I see."

Then forth is gone Burlow Beanie,
   As fast as he could go,
And fetch he did that fair sword,
   And came again by and by.

Then spoke Sir Bredbeddle,
   To the King these words he said:
"Take this sword in your hand, noble King Arthur!
   For the sake of the vow that you made I’ll give it to you.
"And go strike off King Cornwall’s head,
   In bed where he lies."

Then forth is gone noble King Arthur,
   As fast as he could go;
And struck he off King Cornwall’s head,
   And came again by and by.

He put the head upon a sword's point . . .

(The poem terminates here abruptly)