The Camembert Cheese.

That machination of the Devil called Income Tax was unknown. Public Revenues were gathered, almost entirely, from heavy duties on all imported goods. Europeans therefore had to cut their luxury eating according to available financial cloth.

A highly decorated officer, who had had an honourable career both before and during World War I, was happily retired beside the sea in a most delectable spot. I fancy that he had had a love affair during his youth, which had alienated him from women as such.

He had two men servants. His cook, houseboy and general factotum was a Fijian, imported from Suva. This man had the tallest and thickest head of fuzzy hair that ever was. Looked like a guardsman wearing his bear skin.

The other servant was a very handsome Tahitian boy, always impeccably dressed in white shirt and blue loin cloth. He acted as assistant to the cook.

The Officer had supplied his chef with several cookery books and insisted that, as often as possible, a new dish be placed before him for his approbation or otherwise. If approved, the concoction was duly added to the list of delectable foodstuffs to be offered to his future guests. He was a gourmet in both food and wine. To dine with him constituted a never to be forgotten dream.

"I have asked a few friends to come and enjoy a Camembert Cheese, which I am importing from Paris under every known care, so as to be guaranteed to be in perfect condition on its arrival by the next boat. There will be the dear old village Chief, the Marist padre and you and me. We dine at eight, but come at six. Dress as informally as possible so as to hide your nakedness. I shall wear only a loin cloth.

The great evening duly arrived and we assembled in his luxurious drawing room. Cut glass goblets of a delectable aperitif were served by our host and replenished as soon as empty. In an atmosphere of gentle merriment, conducted in French, English and Tahitian, as occasion demanded, in order to unravel the meaning of some topic under discussion, the time passed quickly."
Called upon to offer the first toast of the evening before dinner, which was about to be served, I rose unsteadily to my feet. Clothed as directed, I had chosen a black silk dressing gown with brick red lapels. "Mesieurs, je vous porte le toast, le Camembert." Loud cheers in which all joined. "Vive le fromage," "Vive la France," "Here's how," "May we live for ever and die happy," "God bless".

"Master, dinner is served"; so we staggered in to partake of a perfect repast. Tōhāroa soup. A small glass of tomato juice to prepare the palate for artichokes. Filet Mignon with pommes de terre frites and baby onions in white sauce. Pêche Melba. Red and white wine alternating with the dishes. The Chief gave a loud belch to show his unqualified approval.

"Now my dear friends, the great moment has arrived when I have the honour to offer you my Camembert." A tinkle on the bell little bell on the table, and with measured tread in came the cook bearing on a purple cushion the little round wooden box containing the noble cheese.

"Gentlemen, I must ask you to rise while our padre offers a suitable blessing on this our cheese fromage which we so unrichly deserve.

The padre, becoming mixed in his metaphors, offered the following in broken English. "Hail Jesus, mother of God, we thank thee for this the fruit of thy womb Mary." Loud cheers from all. The padre, mopping his brow, regained his seat with a "Oh là là".

Slowly but surely the ceremony of opening the box continued, with emphasis on the wordings on the wrapper. "Enfin, voilà mon voilà mes amis." Oh dear. Oh dreadful day of reckoning. Instead of the perfect aroma of ripe camembert, out came a pungent smell of ammonia, which was followed by a great silence.

"My friends we will not see it wasted. We will give it to the fish in the lagoon." A procession was soon formed behind the cook carrying the box as before, and to the chanting of the "Dead March in Saul," the cheese was duly splashed to its watery grave.

Returning to the house, we repaired to the patio over hung with frangipane and settling in soft armchairs sipped a four-finger Napoleon Brandy.
Our host placed twelve classical records on his gramaphone and was soon fast asleep. First the Chief excused himself, soon followed by the padre and I was left alone. The last record dropped and then started to repeat itself over and over again. Presently the sleeper awoke and I rose to leave. "Before you go, tell me in how many you can love a woman. I know of thirty two not counting the ordinary case."

He was asleep again, so I, considering that in this retreat was the better part of valour, crept softly away into the night.