

food with his hands. The chiefs are in such a case fed by their attendant; but the absurd prohibition is a serious punishment to the common people, who have nobody to assist them.

Nicholas relates an amusing incident illustrative of this. "On going into the town," says he, "in the course of the day, I beheld several of the natives sitting round some baskets of dressed potatoes; and being invited to join them in their meal, I mingled with the group, when I observed one man stoop down with his mouth for each morsel, and scrupulously careful in avoiding all contact between his hands and the food he was eating. From this I knew at once that he was 'tabooed;' and upon asking the reason of his being so, as he appeared in good health, and not afflicted with any complaint that could set him without the pale of ordinary intercourse, I found that it was because he was then building a house, and that he could not be released from the 'taboo' till he had it finished. Being only a "cookee,"* he had no person to wait upon him, but was obliged to submit to the distressing operation of feeding himself in the manner prescribed by the superstitious ordinance; and he was told by the tohunga, or priest, that if he presumed to put one finger to his mouth before he had completed

*Mr. S. Percy Smith, of New Plymouth, states that this word was very common in New Zealand fifty or sixty years ago. It was applied to servants, and was derived from the English word "cook." In Maori it is "kuki."