



INDIAN WOMEN GATHERING WILD RICE (AFTER SCHOOLCRAFT)

## INDIAN USE OF WILD RICE

GARDNER P. STICKNEY

"Our songs being finished we began our teeth to worke. We had there a kinde of rice, much like oats. It growes in the watter in 3 or 4 foote deepe. There is a God that shews himselfe in every countrey, almighty, full of goodnesse and y preservation of those poore people who knoweth him not. They have a particular way to gather up that graine. Two takes a boat and two sticks, by w<sup>ch</sup> they gett y<sup>e</sup> care downe and gett the corne out of it. Their boat being full, they bring it to a fitt place to dry it; and that is their food for the most part of the winter, and doe dresse it thus: ffor each man a handfull of that they putt in the pott, that swells so much that it can suffice a man."<sup>1</sup> Thus wrote Pierre d'Esprit, Sieur Radisson, in 1668, for the information of Charles II, of England.

Wild rice, *Zizania aquatica*, is common throughout eastern North America, but is most abundant in the shallows of the Great Lakes region. It is also termed Indian, water, and wild oats and marsh rye. Although known to Linnaeus,<sup>2</sup> it has never been extensively used, except by some tribes of North American Indians. It grows best from the rich, muddy, slimy bottoms of gently flowing streams or their expansions into marshy lakes. The stagnant water of swamps and the still water of small spring lakes do not seem to furnish its necessities. In scarcely moving water the stalks sometimes come up from a depth of ten feet or more, but this grass is commonly found in water from two to

<sup>1</sup> Radisson's *Fourth Voyage*, in Wis. Hist. Coll., vol. xi, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Lapham. *Grasses of Wisconsin*, in Trans. Wis. Agr. Society, 1853.