

# *Holiday for Snakes*

**Y**OU'RE A reporter and you've flown 5,000 miles to cover a story—a story of serpents.

Lou land in Cocullo, Italy—the district of snakes, and the peasants are in a holiday mood.

You don't like snakes yourself, but you watch with fascination. White snakes entwine the instruments of the local orchestra as they play. The kids are tossing snakes instead of baseballs and you see reptiles slither and crawl up and down the statues of San Domenico Abate the patron Saint of this town.

You're on a story so you forget your squeamishness for a minute and tell Ezio Graffeo, your photographer and interpreter to shoot the groups of kids with the hundreds of serpents.

You remember that the snake got Adam and Eve kicked out of heaven and has re-

mained a symbol of the devil even to the present times. But you also remember the snake is the symbol of healing and is part of the Doctors' insignia.

In Cocullo, where the inhabitants wear wooden shoes and where no radios exist, the whole town earns its livelihood from snakes. Today is a holiday—the "Feast of the Serpents" in honor of the patron Saint and protector against snakebites. On this day no snakes are caught. They are feted.

Before this big day, many snakes are fed bran and kept in darkness for two months so they will turn white—almost albino. Many of the men have their bodies tattooed with snake images year after year—for centuries past, this snake reverence has continued, and the patron Saint revered. As long as there are snakes in the woods of Cocullo, life and livelihood will go on.