

March 1962

## HOW THAT SLOGAN STARTED

Q. What is the source of the quotation "There but for the grace of God, go I"?

A. This quotation is attributed to several people and it is not clear who said it first. It is related of John Bradford (1510-1555) that whenever he saw criminals being taken to the place of execution, he would exclaim: "But for the grace of God there goes John Bradford." Very much the same is related of St. Phillip Neri (1515-1595). When he saw a criminal going to execution he is supposed to have said: "There thou goest, Phillip, but for the grace of God."

In "The Boscombe Valley Mystery," Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has his famous hero say: "I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say, There but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes." The reference is to the author Richard Baxter (1615-1691). The saying is also attributed to the Reverend John Newton (1725-1807) who was rector of the Church of St. Mary, London. John Galsworthy (1867-1933) used almost the same expression in his play "A Family Man"—"I say, Mayor—but for the grace of God, there go we."

*From "Why Not Ask," By Rev. James F. Rigney, S.T.D., The Catholic News*