

Laughter.



WHAT is laughter? It is something which we all see, which we all know, which we all do. Yet how many have given thought to the matter and conscientiously asked themselves: "Why do I laugh, and what is laughter?" Doubtless if one were to attempt to answer the question, he would say: "I laugh because of joy, or because something is funny; and laughter is, — er, well I know it, but I cannot exactly say what it is." It would be perhaps difficult to give a real, scientific definition of that strange, intangible something called laughter. Doctor Overton, a celebrated physician of New York defines it as "a succession of short inspirations." But just why this succession of short inspirations and this puckering of the face should invariably and spontaneously follow upon the hearing or seeing of something funny, or upon the discharge of some pent-up emotion, is a difficult question to decide. It is one of the many wonders we find in the make-up of that ingenious piece of mechanism, man.

Laughter is peculiar to man. It is a God-given gift, a distinction, specific characteristic, a channel through which is discharged the burden of emotions peculiar to man. He alone among all animals has a reasoning intellect, and to this we can trace the cause of laughter. He alone by his superior endowments is able to perceive the sense of humor. Humor is that quality of the imagination which gives to ideas an incongruous or fantastic turn, which excites mirth. But in order to have these ideas in the first place, an intellect is necessary, for an idea as St. Thomas defines it is "a representation of something impressed in the mind." Thus we can reason out the relation of humor and laughter with the intellect, and we find that both are dependent upon it, and that if there were no intellect there would be no humor, and if there were no humor there would be no laughter. Laughter then is a sign of intelligence. But it is even more than this; it is a sign of the limit and imperfection of the human intellect, for we find out from Scriptural history that Christ, the most perfect man who ever lived, never once laughed during His entire life.

But you say now a dog laughs. A dog never laughs. He may be so trained as to twist his face through a number of various con-