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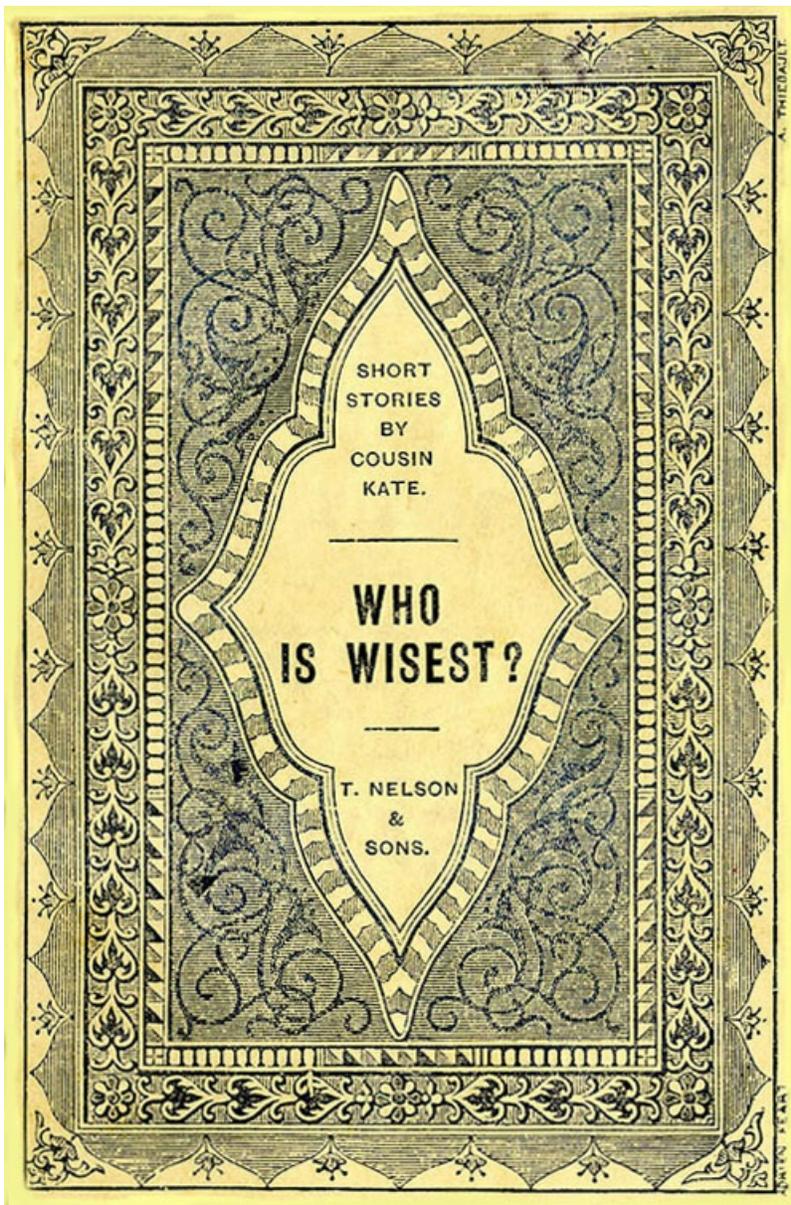
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**SHORT
STORIES
BY
COUSIN
KATE.**

WHO IS WISEST?

T. NELSON
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WHO IS WISEST?

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but as wise, redeeming the
time."*

Eph. v. 15, 16.

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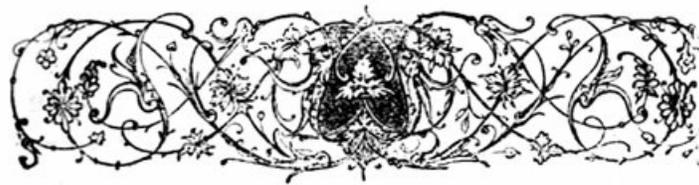
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WHO IS WISEST?

"Ah, Thomas," he said, "I don't want to boast. But will you answer me this—whose life is the happiest, yours or mine?"—Page [8](#).



WHO IS WISEST?



Thomas and John were next door neighbours, and as neighbours, in some measure friends. At least they felt kindly towards each other, took an interest in each others' affairs, and had a good deal of converse together. Only they thought, and felt so differently on the most important matters, that friends in the full sense of the word they could never be. John was a true Christian, Thomas was thoroughly careless and godless. Like Gallio, he really cared for none of these things, and thought not at all about them. But sometimes to free himself from the arguments and persuasions of his neighbour John, he would talk as if he had carefully studied the subject, and had determined to have nothing to do with religion, only because, after fully weighing the matter, he had come to the decision that there was no truth in it, no profit to be gained in seeking it.

"Well," said John one day after they had held a long argument on the subject, "let us argue that matter no further. You say that you will never believe that there is any life hereafter, until some one has come back from the grave to tell you that there is."

"I say that till some one comes back from the grave to tell us all about it, you can't know that there is another world," said Thomas.

"But, at the same time, you grant that until some one comes back from the grave to tell us, you can't be sure that there is *not*. Now, you know how far I am from agreeing with you. You know that I hold, that we have every reason to believe most surely, that there is a life after this, in which each man shall be judged according to what he has done here. Still let us leave all this for the present. Let us suppose your view of it to be right. Supposing it should turn out that when a man dies here, he is done of life for good and all, and is to lie down in a dead sleep from which he shall never awake. Still even in that case, what the worse shall I be then for having lived a sober God-fearing life, while I had it to live? While on the other hand, what will your case be, if it turn out that I am right, and that there is a God who will judge the world?"

Thomas moved uneasily on his seat.

"But you don't state the case fairly, man," he said. "You speak as if all the advantage were on your side. You forget that the folly we charge upon you is this, that you throw away the present life, and lose all its happiness, for the sake of a life that may never be yours."

John shook his head, and smiled a grave, rather sad smile.

"Ah, Thomas, my man," he said, "I don't want to boast. But will you answer me this upon your conscience, whose life is the happiest, yours or mine? Who has the happiest heart, the happiest home, you or me?"

Thomas glanced up in his friend's face, upon that brow, so open, so smooth, into that eye so clear and bright, and then looked down again.

"You are a lucky fellow, I know," he muttered. "Things go better with you than they do with me."

"But why should they?" John persisted. "You have more of the world's gear than I have. Your wages are better than mine. Your house is your own. You have no rent to pay, while my rent cuts out a pretty slice of my yearly income. You have three children, and I have six. Why should the world go more easily with me than with you? Why should my life be brighter than yours?"

"Well, I'm sure I don't know," poor Thomas said rather sulkily, making a movement as if to rise and go away.

"Nay, man," said John, laying his hand kindly on his shoulder, "sit still, and let us talk it out. Look the truth fairly in the face, and have done with it. Is there not good reason why even this life should be sweeter to me than to you? What harm, what but the greatest good can it do a man to believe that there is a great and holy God for him to love with all his heart and soul, to serve with all his might? A God such as my God is, more holy, more pure, more loving than the heart of man can conceive. And then, are not the things that he commands the very things most likely to do us good? Does it not do a fellow a whole world of good to be able to forget himself, and to give his whole heart to love such a gloriously holy Being? What is a man the worse, is he not a thousand times the better, for loving his neighbour as himself, for being sober, and honest, and industrious, diligent in business, keeping himself carefully from all that is false, or mean, or

selfish, or cowardly?"

Again Thomas glanced up into the good, honest face of his companion, and in his heart he felt that there were few of his careless, worldly friends like him. But he only said in that half sulky tone,—

"As if there were not others besides yourself that wanted to keep away from all that is false and mean."

"I know there are," said John readily, "plenty. I hope we all desire to be true, and generous, and brave. And because I believe that you desire it as much as I do, therefore I advise you to seek the strength for all good that I have found. Nothing cheers or heartens a man so much as to believe that there is a God to be pleased, or displeased by every act he does, by every word he says,—and that a God so full of love, so altogether lovely as is my God."

"But when you don't know if what you believe is true or not," Thomas objected.

"But I do know," John cried triumphantly, with a joyous glance up to the sky. "However that is beyond the mark just now. What I am now driving at is to show you, that even if things are quite as uncertain as you believe them to be, I am the wisest of the two; that my belief works me nothing but good here, and may bring me everlasting joy hereafter; while your unbelief keeps you dark, and uncertain, and wavering in this life, and may be eternal ruin to you in the life to come."

Thomas did not answer, but sat with his head bent down, working nervously with the toe of his shoe in the earth.

"And as to the troubles and sorrows of this life," John continued, "ah, Thomas, if you but knew the comfort of being able to take every one as coming from the hand of a loving Father. If you but knew the joy of being able to cast every care upon Him that careth for you, of being able to rest your heart upon him, through the storm and tempest, as well as in the sunshine and calm. But these are joys I cannot speak of." And he broke off abruptly, rose, and walked towards the house.

Thomas rose too and went to his home. But he could not get away from the recollection of his friend's words. At his work all day, with his noisy companions in the evening, and in the silence and darkness of the night they haunted him, and lay on his spirit like a load. Continually, and quite against his will, did he seem forced to repeat John's question, "Who is wisest?"

"If he be mistaken," he thought, "yet what does he lose, living the life he does, so peaceful and happy, so upright and true, loved and respected by all who come near him? And if he be right, what is to become of me?"

That was a question which he could not answer, and which yet he could not shake off. He went to his old haunt of the public house. He tried to be as noisy and uproarious as any there. But still in the midst of his merriment, his talking, and singing, again and again flashed through his mind the thought—"What a fearful risk am I running? And for what am I risking it? Not that I may be happier, for John is far happier than I am. Not that I may be more manly, more neighbourly, a better husband, or father, a better servant, or friend, for in all things John has the advantage over me."

John had not spoken so strongly to his neighbour, without earnest prayer for a blessing beforehand, and equally earnest prayer afterwards. And the blessing was not withheld. The thoughts that he had been the means of putting into Thomas' mind, remained there fast until they brought forth fruit. And before many weeks, Thomas came to John saying,—

"I don't know whether I'll ever make a Christian or not, but at least I am determined to try, for of this I am sure that the risk in the other course is greater than I am willing to stand."



Transcriber's Note

- Obvious punctuation and spelling errors repaired.

[The end of *Short Stories By Cousin Kate: Who Is Wisest?* by Maria Jane McIntosh]