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C. Mervyn Maxwell
Andrews University

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The Loving Letter

by C. Mervyn Maxwell
illustration by June Nowlin

The story of how the loving letter to Laodicea came to the Adventists in Waukon, Iowa, is deeply moving. Some of it happened in the Lake Union. It will be told in four installments.

In a little house in Rochester, New York, Mary Loughborough greeted her husband as he came home one Friday evening in the fall of 1852.

"I'm so glad to see you!" she squealed. "I missed you terribly all week."

John said the same and hugged her tight. She disentangled herself after a bit and asked, "Did you have another good week?"

"Mary, the Lord surely blessed. Everywhere people were building houses, and almost everyone seemed eager to buy my Arnold's Patent Sash Locks for their windows. But supper's on and Sabbath's coming in. Let's eat."

During the meal Mary asked, "John, have we been able to save anything?"

"Save anything? You wouldn't believe how much."

"I'll try, John."

"We've got \$35—think of it! Most people earn only \$1 a day. We could live in comfort for almost six weeks even if I sold nothing more."

"Don't you think we ought to celebrate? Let's do something special."

"Yes," answered John soberly. "I think the Lord has been blessing so I could do

something special. I think He wants me to become a minister."

"Oh, no, John! Ministers are much too poor. Please don't talk about being a minister."

John agreed—and found he couldn't sell sash locks any more. About six weeks later he was reduced to a single coin. He stayed in the bedroom one morning and committed himself at last to the ministry, trusting God.

As he stepped into the living room, Mary asked for money to go shopping with. He handed her a silver three-cent piece and asked her to spend only two cents so they wouldn't be entirely broke.

"But John," wailed the poor girl, "what are we going to do?"

"I've promised God I'll be a minister."

"But John, then we'll be poor!"

"We can't be any poorer than we are already," John replied. More tenderly he added, "God will help us. You know He will."

Mary cried in the bedroom for an hour. After she went shopping, however, a stranger knocked. He was moving south and wanted an \$80 collection of Arnold's Patent Sash Locks to set himself up in business. At a one-third commission, John was suddenly worth \$26. The man left. John started to sing. Mary walked in with her one-cent change.

"How can you sing when we're so poor?" she demanded.

"How can I keep from singing when we're so rich?" he countered.

John told Mary what had happened. She returned to the bedroom for a different cry. They entered the ministry, happily. They were not Laodiceans—not yet.

C. Mervyn Maxwell is professor of church history and chairman of the department of church history at Andrews University's Theological Seminary. His father was best known as Uncle Arthur of the Bedtime Stories.