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“The waste that lies before me”: The Public and the Private Worlds of Robert Baldwin

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Article abstract

Les auteurs nous proposent ici de jeter un nouveau regard sur le personnage de Robert Baldwin, l'un des grands promoteurs de l'instauration du principe de la responsabilité ministérielle au pays. L'image que l'on a connue de lui jusqu'à présent en est surtout une d'un politicien intègre, d'un gentilhomme accompli, d'un homme public d'une grande réserve qui donnait même souvent l'impression d'être un peu terne, voire sans grande passion.

Or, l'étude de nouvelles sources le concernant nous le révèle plutôt comme ayant été un personnage tourmenté, inquiet et d'une grande sensibilité. Il conçut d'ailleurs très tôt une immense passion pour une jeune cousine qu'il épousa, en 1827, à l'âge de 23 ans. Les années qu'il vécut avec cette femme dont il était profondément épris - et qui, semble-t-il, le lui rendait bien - furent sans doute les seules années heureuses de sa vie. Ils eurent ensemble quatre enfants mais elle se releva difficilement de sa dernière grossesse dont elle avait été délivrée par césarienne et mourut, en 1836, après seulement neuf années de mariage.

En dépit du chagrin et de la douleur qu'il en ressentit, Baldwin ne quitta pas la vie publique mais il vécut le reste de sa vie en se remémorant les années passées avec elle et en érigeant sa peine en une espèce de culte centré sur la célébration de leur amour. Gestes, objets et événements lui rappelaient les diverses étapes de leur vie commune et il poussa la dévotion jusqu'à prescrire par testament qu'on lui fasse, après sa mort, la même incision que sa femme avait dû subir lors de la naissance de leur dernier enfant. Sa mélancolie s'accrut d'ailleurs avec les années. Déjà, en 1850, il était réduit à l'incapacité pendant plusieurs mois et il mourut quelques années plus tard, au cours des derniers mois de 1858.

“The waste that lies before me”: The Public and the Private Worlds of Robert Baldwin

MICHAEL S. CROSS AND ROBERT L. FRASER

Robert Baldwin is a good example of an old politician who needs a new interpretation. With the exception of Professor J.M.S. Careless's recent article,¹ historians have been content with the one dimensional man suggested by Donald Creighton's marvellous tag — Robert Responsible Government.² Surely few would take exception if one suggested that whoever coined the phrase that Canadian history was as “dull as ditch water” had Baldwin in mind. His portrait, done in later life, betrays no hints to the contrary. The slight stoop, the bulging waistline, the funereal detachment and reserve, and the expressionless, almost lifeless eyes suggest a rather dull, passionless, torpid man.³ Yet this cast was only the public persona of one of the most complex and, indeed, passionate men in Canadian history. This man of ancient griefs and loves would have been unrecognizable to the political world, where he was so controlled and reserved. It is a measure of his strength and his force of character that he played out his role in politics for so long and so well, carrying the weight of oppression that was his own mind. Few beyond his immediate family and possibly only his daughters had any inkling of the demons which troubled him and which made public life a trial for him. Only in the days immediately after his death on 9 December 1858 did Robert Baldwin's private hell make itself known to the family. The purpose of this paper is to offer a glimpse of the private man and to suggest a possible bridge between the public world and the private man.

Throughout the last years of his life, and possibly even before that, Robert Baldwin carried in his waistcoat pocket a terse, forcefully written memorandum:

that in case it be God's will that I should be taken away suddenly . . . that I may not be interred without my last injunction as to the operation mentioned being scrupulously complied with. And I earnestly entreat of those who may be about me when I die, both Physicians and others, that for the love of God, as an act of Christian charity, and by the solemn recollection that they may one day have themselves a dying request to make to others, they will not on any account whatever permit my being enclosed in my coffin before that performance of this last solemn injunction. And that if from this memorandum not having been found

* The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of J.P.B. Ross and Simon Scott who made available the papers of the private Mr. Baldwin.

1. J.M.S. Careless, “Robert Baldwin”, in Careless, ed., *The Pre-Confederation Premiers: Ontario Government Leaders, 1841-1867* (Toronto, 1980).
2. Donald Creighton, *Towards the discovery of Canada* (Toronto, 1972), p. 199.
3. See the dustjacket portrait in R.M. and J. Baldwin, *The Baldwins and the Great Experiment* (Don Mills, Ont., 1969).

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in time, or other accident I may have been interred without this request having been attended to they will see that I am disinterred for the purpose of complying with it, that so under no circumstance may my body be finally left to its repose in the grave till such operation has been performed upon it. And may the blessing of God rest with those who shall make it their business to see this my request⁴

It was January 1859. Robert Baldwin, statesman, father of responsible government, had been dead for a month. His body lay in the crypt on his family estate, Spadina, in Toronto's Yorkville suburb. Four men gathered in the vault to honour, belatedly, the antemortem instructions of the dead reform leader. Dr. James Richardson took a scalpel and approached the reopened coffin. Following Baldwin's injunction, Richardson made "an incision . . . into the cavity of the Abdomen extending through the two upper thirds of the Linea alba". Robert Baldwin was now complete, gone to eternity bearing the same surgical wound as his beloved wife Eliza — the scar of a Caesarian section.

Baldwin once remarked that he was content to leave judgements about him to what he supposed would be the impartial eye of posterity.⁵ What then should posterity make of him? Clearly it would be easy to hold him up to ridicule by dubbing him Robert Caesarian Section, a surefire laugh when lecturing on responsible government in undergraduate survey courses.

The contemporary judgement of Baldwin was clear enough. He was an exceptional man of exceptional accomplishments. He resurrected the reformers from the ashes of the Rebellion of 1837 and twice brought them to power in the United Province of Canada, in 1842 and again in 1848. He was the most respected and trusted politician of his age. He was the popularizer of the theory of responsible government and clung doggedly to the idea against the opposition of Canadian Tories and British governments until he saw its formal triumph in Nova Scotia and Canada in 1847-48. He was not a natural politician; he would never be a man of parliament. He was a poor speaker, the bane of assembly reporters because of his nearly inaudible addresses.⁶ He even lacked the appearance of leadership. He lived a public life out of duty, not out of ambition, and yet became a dominating figure in parliament. A visitor in 1850 was struck by the silence which fell over the usually unruly house when Baldwin spoke.⁷ He commanded such attention for the same reason that he led the reformers. He lacked parliamentary skills, his intellect was ordinary but his character was beyond reproach

4. We were alerted to the existence of this document by Miss Edith G. Firth. It was discovered after a long search, misplaced in the family's genealogical volumes: Metropolitan Toronto Library (MTL), Robert Baldwin Papers (RBP), section II. The scene is described in a note by Robert's son, William Willcocks Baldwin.

5. RBP, I, A86, Robert Baldwin to William Warren Baldwin, 8 April 1843.

6. *Montreal Gazette*, 12 September 1841; Public Archives of Canada, (PAC), George Brown, I, Hincks to Brown, 13 February 1849, 32; Neil F. Morison, ed., "Portraits of the Canadian Parliament of 1850", *Ontario History (OH)*, XLII, 3 (1950), p. 157.

7. The visitor was school superintendent George Duck from Chatham, Upper Canada; see Morison, "Portraits", p. 157.

and that made him outstanding. Robert Baldwin lived the rhetoric of his time; most men paid homage to the code of gentlemen — he *was* a gentleman. He was able to lead, eventually to build a parliamentary majority, because he epitomized the code of the pre-industrial age, an age which was passing in the 1840s but which still represented a set of beliefs revered by the élites that dominated politics. Baldwin was morally courageous, utterly genuine in his willingness to sacrifice his own interests to the core institutions of society — the constitution, the law, his church, property, and the family. Other politicians who talked of honour and virtue knew that other considerations might, and probably would, at times, be pre-eminent. But friends and foes alike paid deference to a man for whom there rarely were other considerations, to whom they invariably applied the vocabulary of honour: “honesty”, “integrity”, and “disinterested views”.⁸

The benchmarks of Baldwin's political life were honour, duty, and principle — all of them measured against his own Christian and providential code of conduct.⁹ Only such a set of beliefs can explain the sacrifice involved in his first acceptance of a post in the Executive Council in 1836, only weeks after the shattering of his life by the death of his wife Eliza. It was his character which gave him moral leadership and allowed him to rebuild the Reform party and ally it with Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine's French party. During the early negotiations between French and English reformers, the *Canadiens* needed reassurance over Baldwin's decision to join Governor General C.P. Thomson's administration. Francis Hincks explained to LaFontaine, “Come what will I am anxious that you should believe what I know to be the case that Mr. Robt. Baldwin is *incorruptible*. He had taken office *solely from a sense of public duty* and against his private inclinations.”¹⁰ Hincks and most reformers had “the most unbounded confidence in Mr. Baldwin's sincerity and political integrity. Many feel that he took [office] in accordance with the wish and the hope of being useful to the Country . . . I know and feel that he did not do so from *Mercenary* motives . . .”¹¹ As an expert on “Mercenary motives”, Hincks' testimony may carry especial weight.

8. For a disparate sample: a Lower Canadian liberal, PAC, Papiers LaFontaine, 602, Wolfred Nelson to L.H. LaFontaine, 26 February 1850; W.L. Mackenzie's son, Public Archives of Ontario (PAO), Mackenzie-Lindsey Collection, James Mackenzie to W.L. Mackenzie, 11 October 1842; a comment on Malcolm Cameron's views after he had broken politically with Baldwin, RBP, I, A38, Alex Cameron to Baldwin, 11 April 1850.

9. The seminal work on providential beliefs in Upper Canada is S.F. Wise, “God's Peculiar People”, in W.L. Morton, ed., *The Shield of Achilles* (Toronto, 1968). See also Robert L. Fraser, “Like Eden in her summer dress: Gentry, economy, and society: Upper Canada, 1812-1840”, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1979), chapter II. Baldwin's religious beliefs require interpretation. Late in life he referred to himself as a High Church Anglican but he had won the abuse of High Anglicans for his creation of a secular University of Toronto, his opposition to the use of the Bible in schools, and his consistent opposition to Anglican establishment. That he was deeply religious is not in doubt, however, as his carefully crafted personal prayers make clear.

10. PAC, Papiers LaFontaine, 95, Hincks to LaFontaine, 22 February 1840.

11. PAO, Mackenzie-Lindsey Collection, Hincks to T. Elliot, 16 April 1841.

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Robert Baldwin was much admired as a public man, but little loved. The best description of the public Baldwin was that of his friend and follower, James Hervey Price, writing to a fellow reformer who had been offended by Baldwin's manner: “You may not know Mr. Baldwin's peculiar temperament; he appears cold distant and reserved and in some respects is really but then he is sincere honest and devoted to the welfare of his county and friends.”¹² These perceptions were accurate enough and fit the stereotypical Victorian statesman that Baldwin has seemed in most historical portrayals. Yet they obviously fail to give the full measure of a man driven by the strange passions which achieved their consummation in the tomb at Spadina in January 1859. Even his politics, which we felt were so well understood in the numbing repetitions of the story of responsible government, need to be reassessed in the light cast by that strange episode. To begin the reinterpretation we need to look within the Baldwin family.

Robert Baldwin was born in York, Upper Canada, in 1804, the scion of a wealthy and influential family of professionals and landowners. His father, the Irish-born Anglican, William Warren Baldwin, lent a cast of respectability to the Reform party and to the concept of responsible government which he was among the first to espouse.

Little is known of Robert Baldwin's childhood, and family papers are scarce for those decades. It is therefore difficult to offer much about how he grew up. He was the eldest of four children in a family that placed special emphasis upon primogeniture and there was undoubtedly much expected of the heir apparent. After making his will in 1842 William Warren Baldwin felt compelled to offer some explanation to his wife as to how he had disposed of his property:

one child only can be born first — and this in all times and societies barbarian as well as polished has been received as the appointment of Provident — . . . this is a motive of the human heart so general that we must hold it as natural and therefore just and also useful — it tends to preserve a reverence for the institutions of our ancestors, which though always tending to change, for by nature all human affairs must change, yet resist innovations but those only which are gradual and temperate . . .¹³

William Warren had been one of the foremost defenders of primogeniture throughout his political career.¹⁴ In large measure, Robert's views were scarcely different. When he drafted his own will in 1840 he left most of his land to his eldest son William Willcocks as “head of the Senior male branch of the family”. He enjoined his son to “never forget the duties which devolve upon him as the head of a family which (as well as their Ancestors) have always been distinguished for their unblemished integrity & for the warmth of their family affections”.¹⁵ It was the particular duty of the head

12. RBP, I, A84, Price to M.S. Bidwell, 29 December 1848.

13. RBP, III, W.W. Baldwin to Phoebe Baldwin, 26 August 1842.

14. R.L. Fraser, “Like Eden in her summer dress”, p. 237.

15. RBP, III, (R. Baldwin) Draft of my will, 17 March 1840.

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not merely to use without impairing the property which he inherits from his Ancestors but by diligence industry & economy to increase the same so as to be able besides providing property for the rest of his children to transmit the family Estates to his heir enlarged as well as improved according as God has prospered him.¹⁶

After his father's death in 1844, Robert saw himself as now "become the head of the senior small branch of my family in this Province".¹⁷ The loss was great and for Robert, "all that is left us is to honour his memory by endeavouring to imitate his example".¹⁸

Baldwin characterized his family relations as warm and affectionate. He once commented of an aunt that "she like her son Henry is not Irish in her feelings — she wants that warmth of feeling which all the rest of the family seem to have".¹⁹ Baldwin probably received his earliest education from his formidable mother, whom he once described as "the master mind of our family". In the draft of this letter he had referred to her first as "the superior mind of the Family" and then crossed it out.²⁰ Robert's formal education was under the tutelage of John Strachan. By age fourteen, William Warren reported that his son was "as forward in point of education as our school here advances boys of his age. I shall keep him yet two years more at school with Doctor Strachan — I intend please God to bring him up to the bar."²¹ Two years later, Robert's younger brother Henry died (as did another brother Quetton Saint George in 1829) and, if anything, the expectations and pressures on young Robert increased. That same year, his father referred to him as "quite a young man", the "most advanced boy in the school", and the "best Classic" scholar.²² Robert's parents were proud of their son. His relationship with them was close and warm. He looked on his father as "one of the most beloved as well as best and kindest heads that ever any family were blessed with",²³ and revered his mother. But with all his advantages young Robert was not happy. He was not the self-confident, urbane man that his father was. William Warren Baldwin was by turns a lawyer, doctor, architect, politician and office holder. Outwardly haughty,²⁴ he held deep affection only for his family.

16. *Ibid.*

17. RBP, II, Baldwin to Sir William Bethom, 22 May 1845.

18. MTL, Quetton St. George Papers, Baldwin to Mrs. St. George, 20 January 1844.

19. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, R. Baldwin to Eliza Sullivan, 11 June 1826.

20. Private (Simon Scott), Ross-Baldwin family papers, R. Baldwin to Eliza Ross, 17 April 1854, draft.

21. MTL, William Warren Baldwin Papers (WWBP), II, W.W. Baldwin to John Baldwin, 21 April 1818.

22. WWBP, II, W.W. Baldwin to John Baldwin, 21 November 1820; W.W. Baldwin to Quetton St. George, 2 September 1818.

23. WWBP, B105, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 24 September 1836.

24. Charles Durand remembered him as a reformer "yet [he] was a haughty, prejudiced, Protestant Irish gentleman, and wonderfully set in all his ways and notions of propriety towards young men and law students". Durand also commented, "I always heard that he was very rough and aristocratic in his ways, quite different from his two sons, who were affable and courteous." *Reminiscences of Charles Durand of Toronto, Barrister* (Toronto, 1897), p. 129.

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Moreover, there was a hard, disquieting side to him that marked him apart from his son. Robert's deep emotionalism was most evident in his attitude towards death. In 1834 after the death of his sister, William Warren noted that

Robt grieves heavily — indeed I seem amongst them [the family] not to feel much — as much as I ought . . . and yet I seem to myself quite hard — when I witness the distress of those around me — what a strange comportment is Mine — I really know nothing of myself — I wish a friend could tell me — and yet I would shrink from his candour.²⁵

Robert was much different. Perhaps it was the aura of his father and the pressure of family expectations which made him, as a young man, so uncertain of life and even of religion. If he never became altogether certain of himself, his religious doubts dissipated when he discovered Eliza and love. Thereafter he derived comfort, consolation, and happiness “from that blessed religion which the Son of God came into the world to reveal and offered up himself to establish”. He wished his children “the *thorough conviction* which after having been when a young man a sceptic — may God forgive me though I hope not wholly an unbeliever, I arrived at of [sic] the *absolute truth* of the Religion of the blessed Redeemer”.²⁶ He carried with him a small collection of short personal prayers, copies of his various oaths, and selected Biblical homilies.²⁷ The thrust of their collective message was to keep a “clean heart” and a “right spirit”. His prayers make it clear that duty to family or society were but aspects of devotion to God. One prayer contained the hope “that I may enter upon this duty with the deepest reverence, & sincerest purpose of devoting my whole heart to thee”.²⁸

The self-doubt which mirrored his early religious scepticism was only part of a repressed emotionalism that showed itself in the romanticism of his youth and in the depressive illness of his maturity. The young Baldwin was unhappy, sickly and melancholy. He yearned for a relationship in which to vent the emotions that he kept so well hidden from most of the world. For him, full emotional openness and solace were possible only with women. His youthful correspondence with James Hunter Samson and James Givins reveal his almost obsessive interest in women and love. The young friends exchanged poetry, and Samson and Baldwin carried on a lengthy discussion on the respective merits of love (between man and woman) and friendship (between two men). It was only too apparent which side Baldwin would take. Early in 1819 he indicated to Samson his interest in a girl and wished that he were happy. When, after several months, he had not written (Baldwin was a notoriously poor correspondent his entire life), Samson wondered if Baldwin was in love and added, “but believe me she cannot love or esteem you more than I do”.²⁹ Several weeks later Baldwin had answered and was despondent over unrequited love; indeed, so much so that he was

25. WWBP, B108, W.W. Baldwin to John Large, 8 August 1834.

26. WWBP, B105, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 27 November 1836.

27. RBP, section II.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

29. RBP, I, A69, J.H. Samson to R. Baldwin, 14 March 1819.

neglecting his studies.³⁰ Of this particular fixation, Baldwin later commented that "I was once foolish enough to give myself up to a foolish excess of passion".³¹ By his own standards, such excesses were put behind him. Over and over again, he returned to the superiority of love over friendship. Samson reported, "you say two friends cannot meet each other with transports (or feelings) equal to those of two lovers".³² In a slim volume of Baldwin's poetry collected by Samson, no fewer than twenty-four poems were to individual women while another five addressed the female sex in general.³³

Baldwin's notion of love was exalted, a virtuous life of the highest and purest order. In this respect his attitude distinguished him from many young men of his rank and station. John Beverley Robinson, as a young man, shared Baldwin's interest in female companionship and his poetic sensibility, but not the exaggerated emphasis on love, deep emotion and pure relationship.³⁴ Perhaps Baldwin was closer to the young John Macaulay who was as grave and reserved but priggish in a way not evident in Baldwin. Certainly he was far removed from Jonas Jones, the randy young squire whose ceaseless discussion of his "pieces" abruptly caused Robinson and Macaulay to break off correspondence.³⁵ Samson, in 1820, expressed his concern about Baldwin's companions at York (Toronto): "There are *many* very immoral young men there They talk of virtue as a mere bye word, long since obsolete, the arts of seduction as necessary accomplishments, and the feelings of parents as matters of ridicule."³⁶

Baldwin was by no means a hermit; he enjoyed family entertainments, especially plays, and attended the usual round of parties. He liked dancing although he was once forced to flee a partner who he explained "dances too much from her hips instead of with her legs & feet — do you understand what I mean?"³⁷ A young man of real abilities, well-educated, and trained for the law in his father's office, Robert was a man of boundless future. But he was shy, altogether lacking in self-confidence and emotionally unsatisfied. He had a deep yearning for love, perfect love. To the dismay

30. RBP, I, A69, Samson to Baldwin, 25 March 1819.

31. RBP, I, A69, Samson to Baldwin, 31 May 1819. Samson was quoting Baldwin.

32. RBP, I, A69, Samson to Baldwin, 20 July 1819, again quoting or paraphrasing Baldwin.

33. RBP, III, Poems by Robert Baldwin and others.

34. PAO, Macaulay Papers, for instance J.B. Robinson to John Macaulay, 13 September 1810.

35. *Ibid.*, Robinson to Macaulay, 6 May 1809 and 25 November 1810. Robinson noted that Jones' subjects "appear disgusting on paper".

36. RBP, I, A69, Samson to Baldwin, 10 March 1820.

37. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, R. Baldwin to Eliza Sullivan, 1 February 1826. It had long been assumed that the correspondence between Robert and Eliza was buried with him and the copies that he made in the months prior to his death lost. A substantial number of the originals recently have reappeared, thanks to the detective work of Robert Fraser, found in the possession of a Baldwin descendant in the Loire valley, France. They have since been donated to the Public Archives of Canada by their owner, Mr. John Paul B. Ross. The collection, known as the Baldwin-Ross Papers, is closed until 1 January 1984.

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of his family he satisfied this yearning by falling in love, early in 1825, with his first cousin, Augusta Elizabeth Sullivan. Theirs was a storybook romance. It was a living cliché of the love that must not be, for Eliza was not only a close relative, she was also a sheltered sixteen year old when their relationship became known to the family. Shortly after she was bundled off to New York to stay with mutual relatives, the John J. Morgans, but the enforced separation did nothing to nip young love.

Robert and Eliza carried on an affectionate correspondence while, at home, Robert enjoyed the anguish of pent emotions. But to even a casual reader of his letters to her he appears as nothing less than a sort of Upper Canadian Heathcliff. It was characteristic of Robert throughout his life than even the rare moments of happiness were tinged by sadness. One week after her departure he began his first letter to “My very Dear friend” with the observation that he felt “a pleasure bordering on melancholy in recalling you to my mind”.³⁸ Again, characteristically, he delighted in recalling the anniversary of the day of their walk to the “Happy Valley”. His passions on the occasion were so great he found himself unable to render them into prose:

You cannot tell how much I feel your absence or rather you *alone* can tell it — I am obliged sometimes to reason on the necessity of it, to remain calm — I would not lose the painful pleasure of such moments — no not for worlds — It is out of the question my dear Eliza I cannot write what I could say — what I *do* feel — it is impossible I long to hear from you write soon as often as possible and as long letters as possible.³⁹

Historians have used the salutations and closings of letters to delineate changes in the relationships between males and females and to chart the rise of the affectionate marriage. As a family, the Baldwins were much given to repetition of terms of endearment to give emphasis to the strength and bond of family relationships. Caught up in his first true love, Baldwin carried this tendency to excess. For him, it was a means of affirming, reaffirming and emphasizing what he could not otherwise express. He closed his first letter with, “And remain *ever* assured of the affection of your Robt. Baldwin”.⁴⁰ In his choice of salutations he quickly dropped the use of friend, for Eliza was most assuredly more than a friend. His favourites were “My ever dear Eliza” and “My dear, beloved Girl”.⁴¹ After several months there was a change in emphasis to “My very dear Eliza” or “My Dear and beloved Eliza”.⁴² By 1826 he adopted “My Dearest Eliza” and “My ever dear and beloved Eliza”.⁴³ If anything his closings, because they represented a parting and therefore possibly more lasting thought, were even more strongly weighted to indicate the depth, purity and constancy of his love: “good night My beloved Eliza your affectionate Robert”, or “And believe me my ever dearest Eliza ever *unalterably* your own Robert”.⁴⁴ By May 1826, after over a

38. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 16 April 1825.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1825 and 3 August 1825.

42. *Ibid.*, 3 September 1825 and 1 October 1825.

43. *Ibid.*, 12 January 1826 and 1 January 1826.

44. *Ibid.*, 14 November 1825 and 25 November 1825.

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year's separation, he was concerned to reinforce that nothing had, in fact, changed: "adieu my ever dear and beloved Eliza & be assured of the unalterable attachment of Your Robert".⁴⁵

William Warren Baldwin, Robert's father, and Barbara Sullivan, Eliza's mother, were brother and sister. Eliza, from the historical record, seems a woman who was in no way out of the ordinary. She was plain in appearance with the ample family nose and the rather disturbing, expressionless Baldwin eyes. Her correspondence also was plain, marked only by a girlish, kittenish self-consciousness. Robert, however, had great admiration for her writing and seems to have been markedly affected by her thoughts and opinions.⁴⁶ She was for him that particular person who released the caring, the reserves of emotion which he had so assiduously kept hidden from his family and the world. The extravagance of Robert's need for Eliza's love, and his need to love her, were at a polar extreme to the tight control of the Victorian statesman. That need grew with the years.

During the family-enforced separation, Robert's letters evinced strong currents of melancholy (even love could not dissipate that), a sense of his personal unworthiness (both of Eliza's love and of his own happiness), his fear of failure (as he embarked upon his professional career), and an unnerving presentiment of the fragility of his most cherished hopes. He enjoyed the solitary moments, usually late in the evening, when he could give himself up to romantic thoughts. On 15 May 1825, he

left the house & came down to the Abbey [Russell Abbey] where I entered the little Study I threw myself into the chair that stands opposite the window and gave myself up to the most exquisitely painful train of reflections — the window was open & the perfume of the blossoms of the fruit trees & the buds of the Lylacks just opposite the window was blown in by the breeze — those were the very lylacks from which I used formerly to pluck bouquets for you — they brought to my recollection a thousand little instances of your preference — and can the thought I have deceived me — can she have pretended an injury I had done to your delicacy (will you forgive me). Was it possible that the gaities & fashionable frivolity of the City had so soon blotted me from your recollection — I could not believe it I would have given the world for a flood of tears to relieve me but they would not come though my head was in dreadful pain —⁴⁷

45. *Ibid.*, 12 May 1826.

46. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 2 June 1825: "I admire your letter because it is written in that easy style of sprightliness which forms the greatest beauty of epistolary writing which few can attain." 1 October 1825: "Oh Eliza your's is indeed a *valuable* heart — there was more prudence & delicacy in that silence than (I fear) I should have shewn — I will profit by your example — the time will come when I shall not only be able to profit by your example, but to have the benefit of your immediate advice." WWBP, B105, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 27 November 1836, (of Robert and Eliza's habit of holding Bible reading and study), "when I again meet some passage which she had pointed out either as confirmatory of our faith or consolatory to our hopes. . . ."

47. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 15 May 1825.

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Later, when Eliza's mother asked Robert if he had received a letter from her daughter, he was overcome. “I could only press her hand and hurry again into the passage for I felt the tears rushing to my eye — I am a strange being Eliza — I frequently bear pain without a tear — but joy always overcomes me.”⁴⁸

Eliza quickly became the object of all Baldwin's earthly hopes, his only chance for earthly joy. In one of his “Happy Valley” poems he referred to her as

The loved companion of my way
My hope — my joy — my more than pride
My beacon to a happier day —⁴⁹

Eliza was the embodiment of the three parts of which woman was made, sense, beauty and sensibility, “And [these] in E_____ jointly reign”.⁵⁰ If this was an idealized view of woman, his respect led him to treat women as intellectual as well as sensuous beings. On the education of his daughter Maria, for example, Robert for once parted with his father's advice:

you refer to the subject of female education as if you thought I was inclined to pitch the standard too high and to forget the sphere of social life which Providence has destined woman to have — I am not conscious of having fallen into the latter mistake and if I have erred in the former and have overrated the mental capabilities of the sex I can only attribute it to having received my early impressions of its powers from what I feel belong to My dear Mother — And if I have overestimated my Maria I attribute it to a resemblance in some respects at least which I trace or believe I trace between them — There are other traits in which my Maria reminds me of my departed one who if she had not a mind of fully the same force and power as my dear Mother was far from being deficient in either of those qualities — And had assuredly all others others [sic] which make a husband happy.⁵¹

Emotion, not intellect, ruled in his love affair with Eliza, however. Robert and Eliza had arranged during their separation to have “ideal” meetings on the first day of each month. On the evening in question he would gaze at the heavens, “indulging in a thousand delightful recollections and anticipations (God grant that the latter may be realized)”.⁵² These occasions gave him “comfort”. There was “something so soothing in the certainty that we were mutually occupied with the image of each other at the same moment”.⁵³ There was an almost desperate quality to the manner in which he attached all possibility of happiness to Eliza:

I feel that upon the performance of that promise depends the happiness of my future life — not that I mean to say that the loss of it would deprive me of my sense

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, to E_____ Happy Valley, 14 May 1825.

50. *Ibid.*

51. RBP, I, A87, R. Baldwin to W. W. Baldwin, 16 May 1843.

52. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 2 June 1825.

53. *Ibid.*, 1 March 1826.

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or make me absolutely wretched — I might enjoy comfort nay *some* happiness, but I should never be *happy* — every day convinces more certainly of that — I put in this proviso my dear Eliza to take off any appearance of that extravagance with which novels and Romances are cramed [sic] and which I abominate — an extravagance which I have always avoided in speaking both of you and to you. And which I always shall — I respect, I esteem, I love and adore you. I look forward to you as the sweetest source of my future happiness and the kindest soother of my future disappointments. . . . I hope by a constant attention to *your happiness* to be more worthy of your kindness — but I do not expect to find you absolutely perfect — I *know* you will find me very far indeed from being so.⁵⁴

Robert wondered about the seven degrees of matrimonial happiness drawn up by “Some Modern Novelist” that ranged from bliss to wretchedness: “How far do you think we shall descend in the scale for the author says that the first degree [bliss] is the one that never was & never can be continued at long in this World”.⁵⁵ Yet this degree, and this degree only, was acceptable to Baldwin.

The thought of their prospective marriage led Baldwin to reflect “how much of your happiness depends upon my success in my profession. . . . I own I almost tremble with anxiety.”⁵⁶ In the summer of 1825 Robert was about to be called to the bar and, as his friend Samson put it, he was “not sufficiently sanguine of success in the profession” in spite of what Samson considered Baldwin’s advantages of education and talent.⁵⁷ As Robert gained experience in the profession of law, paradoxically his fears of failure increased. More important, these fears were tied directly to Eliza:

I have a horror of not rising above mediocrity — I am not however by any means so certain of my future success as others seem to be — I have been hitherto listened to as a novice & consequently with favour mingled with some degree of tenderness — but this will soon be over & every thing I say will be closely scrutinized & severely criticized, that is the period which is so trying to the reputation of every public man [:] many a one has done well at first & then sunk into insignificance — I have formerly heard myself praised & I have felt the exultation of it but there is a certain indescribable transport for the prospect of success since I have looked forward to you as the partner of it which I never felt before — it seems a feeling more intense & of a different species from any which I had hitherto experienced.⁵⁸

Almost as if to prove the uniqueness of this love, in which his career, his whole life, were subsumed, Baldwin felt compelled to assert it was his first and only real love. In July 1825 Samson had noted to him, “you remark truly that you never were in love before. I was always of that opinion tho’ I dare not express it. Your Irish blood

54. *Ibid.*, 2 June 1825.

55. *Ibid.*, 3 August 1825.

56. *Ibid.*, 24 June 1825.

57. RBP, I, A69, Samson to Baldwin, 29 July 1825.

58. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 22 October 1825.

would have been up to the point of pugilism at so mortifying an assertion.’’⁵⁹ Baldwin was evidently struck by the expression and the following month wrote Eliza that ‘‘you remark truly that you never were in Love before — I was always of that opinion tho’ I dare not express it — Your Irish blood would have been up to the point of pugilism at so mortifying an assertion.’’⁶⁰ To his mind, no object attracted the affections ‘‘so soon as the dearer sex. . . . I am firmly convinced that I really never did actually *love* before — There is something delightful in the assurance.’’⁶¹

Baldwin opened himself to Eliza as he had to no other: ‘‘though I am surrounded by the best and kindest of friends there is not one to whom I could open my bosom as I could to My Eliza.’’⁶² The obvious truth of this claim pained Samson, whose affection for Robert may have gone beyond friendship. When Baldwin informed him of the engagement, Samson replied: ‘‘I cannot say I was pleased. Some selfish feeling came over me; and it seemed to me as if I were losing some portion of that, to which I had a prior claim. . . . I love and esteem you with my whole soul; but can you tell me why your letter has made me low spirited?’’⁶³

So great was Baldwin’s need for Eliza that when incautious remarks by members of the family hinted that the marriage would not take place, he panicked. In a hastily written letter he assured Eliza that ‘‘the heart cannot be *divided* mine is wholly my Eliza’s. . . . the want of such a *more than* friend . . . makes a blank in my breast that I long to have filled.’’⁶⁴ Upon learning the following day that he had been mistaken, he, nonetheless, assured her that ‘‘one word will breake [sic] the strings of feeling and leave my heart a leafless desert — You do not know My beloved Eliza how interwoven you are I might almost say with my being.’’⁶⁵

In April 1826 Robert reviewed the highlights of their year of separation. He had entered the profession of law ‘‘and succeeded in making a favourable impression which by the permission of providence will enable me at length to establish a clear act in the Profession’’.⁶⁶ Equally important, the Baldwin and Sullivan families had had the opportunity to gauge the affection of the lovers that it was ‘‘not the consequence of any sudden and unfounded predilection but the result [of] mutual esteem gradually ripened into that indescribable but at the same time delicate sentiment — Love’’.⁶⁷ He had ‘‘always looked with something bordering on contempt at what is called Love at first sight — It may be passion but it certainly is not Love — Love as I understand it — Love as I feel it — it must proceed from a mind either extremely weak or extremely fanciful. . . .’’⁶⁸ Small wonder then that Baldwin’s favourite novel was Fanny

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1825.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*, 14 October 1825.

63. RBP, I, A69, Samson to Baldwin, 14 March 1825.

64. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 25 November 1825.

65. *Ibid.*, 26 November 1825.

66. *Ibid.*, 1 April 1826, notation of 9 April.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*, 12 May 1826.

Burney's rather indifferent *Camilla*. The plots of Burney's books had "matrimony as a terminus";⁶⁹ Baldwin found *Camilla* compelling:

there is something in that novel that enchants me . . . but I really *think* I never read a novel from which I derived more advantage & I most certainly never met with one from which I derived have [sic] the pleasure — this is the third year that I have been irresistibly led to read it at this Season.⁷⁰

In the intensity of Baldwin's emotions, extremes met — pleasure and pain, sorrow and happiness. His temperament was melancholic and happiness was so fleeting, so rare, that he always suspected he was undeserving of it. On the evening of 14 May 1826 he reviewed his life, particularly the experiences he had shared with Eliza. He was grateful for his blessings, both past and present. Turning to the future and its delightful prospects, Baldwin had a dramatic sense of how, in almost ten years, his hopes would be shattered:

I began to lay aside one expected blessing after another till all were gone & I was left there alone — the spot on which I stood a waste — the parents who had watched over my infancy — The friends who had been the companions of my youth were sunk into the grave & but for one I had been alone in the world — I imagined that one no more — The cup of misery was full —⁷¹

Baldwin had a delicate, an almost poetic sensibility, a constant awareness of the interplay in human life of chance and mutability, the most extreme form of which was death. This notion that his own best chance at temporal bliss was foredoomed was brought home to him again in a dream less than a week later, "which has diffused over my mind a tender yet not altogether agreeable melancholy". He dreamt he encountered Eliza at his uncle's home before the date of her expected return from New York:

there was a sadness in her countenance that struck me to the heart it was accompanied with a paleness that startled me . . . I turned round and saw my Eliza leaning against the pillar that supports the portico on the side nearest the shop — with a countenance so deeply impressed with suffering — a frame so weak from its ravages & eyes full of tears — that I was rushing to support to console but the agony of my feelings awoke me —

He longed for her return "to bless us all with her cheerful happiness" and attributed the dream to having finished *Camilla* and its melancholy scenes.⁷²

The misery and suffering that Baldwin anticipated was his due in life was spared him for but a short time. The only happiness he knew was in marriage to Eliza. They

69. Albert C. Baugh, ed., *A Literary History of England* (New York, 1967), pp. 1032-4; Sir Paul Harvey, ed., *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford, 1967) notes that Fanny Burney was "the originator of the simple novel of home life".

70. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 12 May 1826.

71. *Ibid.*, notation of 15 May.

72. *Ibid.*, 20 May 1826.

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were married at St. James in York on 31 May 1827. Robert had turned twenty-three two weeks earlier, Eliza would be eighteen eleven days later. For him it was the day “that has made me the happiest or at least one of the happiest of men”.⁷³ Their mutual affection seems not to have lessened through nearly nine years of marriage and the birth of four children, the first, Phoebe Maria, born only ten months after the wedding, and the last, Robert, born 17 April 1834. Several months after the wedding, Eliza wrote Robert that “I wish every one was as happy as I am and I wish all the married women had good husbands for then they could not help being good wives.”⁷⁴ For his part, Robert found himself unable “to convey on paper half the tender emotions” her letters occasioned:

I feel as if I loved you (after the words of our own prayer) “next to my God” & yet whatever is the reason when I attempt to put on paper a description of my emotions — it looks so cold & meagre that I get quite out of conceit of it & imagine that I cannot really feel it because I cannot really express it.⁷⁵

This happiness was shortlived, less than nine years. After the birth of her youngest child, Eliza’s health never recovered; Robert Jr. was a surgical delivery. In May 1835 she journeyed to New York in the hopes of restoring her health. On the day of their wedding anniversary Robert wrote “My own dear dear Eliza”:

This day Eight years ago you gave me the right to claim you by the dearest of all titles — that of wife — This day sees us the parents of four dear & promising children — Oh May the Almighty Father of us all look down upon them & me with the eyes of Mercy and restore to us the most beloved of wives and Mothers.⁷⁶

Eliza returned to Toronto but did not recover. She died on 11 January 1836, as Baldwin described it,

of an attack of water on the brain, in which the general derangement of her system consequent on the extensive hemorrhage [sic] Attendant on her last confinement (to me at least most unexpectedly) terminated — During our short married life we were blessed with the most perfect and unbounded mutual confidence and affection — She was all a husband’s love could wish her. The loss to her family and friends in general all Who knew her can estimate — the loss — the sad — sad loss to me and her poor children none can Know but myself — I am left to pursue the remainder of my pilgrimage alone — and in the waste that lies before me I can expect to find joy only in the reflected happiness of our darling children, and in looking forward, in humble hope, to that blessed hour which by God’s permission shall forever reunite me to my Eliza in the world of Spirits.⁷⁷

73. *Ibid.*, 16 August 1827.

74. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1827.

75. *Ibid.*, 16 August 1827.

76. *Ibid.*, 31 May 1835.

77. This quotation is from a memorandum begun by Robert and Eliza, and completed by him, which gives details of their wedding, the birth of the children and Eliza’s death, and concludes with Robert’s reaction to the tragedy. It is privately owned and the owner wishes it to remain confidential. We are grateful for his cooperation in making a photocopy available to us.

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Baldwin's greatest desire was to rejoin his beloved in eternity. The necessity of right conduct and fulfillment of duty, the avoidance of sin, were the path to that blessed day. Death was a release and a beginning. He had been particularly sensitive towards death all his life but after meeting Eliza had come to accept it. Moreover, as he told her in 1827, if one lived properly there was no reason to fear it: "and why should we fear death — guilt alone ought to make us fear it — for guilt alone need make us fear our hereafter."⁷⁸ With God's assistance (and Baldwin like most of his contemporaries understood the world in terms of providential dispensation) he would live virtuously and fulfill his duty honourably. He prayed for guidance "in the discharge of those important political duties" to do "what shall be best for the good of my King & my native country & for the establishment upon a sure foundation of its wealth happiness & tranquility".⁷⁹ He wished to be used "as an humble means of good & suffer me not, either through incapacity or temptation to become an instrument of evil — And finally, O Lord God, so soon as thou seest that I can be no longer useful in a public capacity restore me, I most humbly beseech thee, to the walks of private life."⁸⁰ It was this conception of duty that drew Robert Baldwin into the public arena against all his private inclinations.

In spite of the strongest of personal reservations, incalculable grief, and the real belief that his temporal life was all but over, Robert Baldwin did not retreat from the world after Eliza's death. Emotionally shattered, he now imbibed from the cup of misery which he had foreseen ten years previously. The strength of his religious convictions buttressed him and kept him from despair; he wrote his father on 27 November 1836 that he had not completed the scripture readings which he and Eliza had started a year ago:

We had previously always read them through consecutively from Genesis forwards — Many & many a time since have I in my solitary chamber recalled the pleasure and profit of those our daily exercises — And yet much as I enjoyed them formerly it is now that they seem to come still more home to my heart — my desolate heart — & when I again meet some passage which she had pointed out either as confirmatory of our faith or consolatory to our hopes I can scarcely believe but that I hold communion with her blessed spirit — I am indeed rich in these treasures and blessed — oh how blessed in every recollection connected with her memory — Should the Almighty in his wisdom see fit to call me hence instead of restoring me to my poor children above all things let them know the *comfort* — the *consolation* — the *happiness* which both their parents derived from that blessed religion which the Son of God came into the world to reveal and offered up himself to establish.⁸¹

From 11 January 1836 Robert Baldwin lived the rest of his life in anticipation of rejoining Eliza. Yet at the height of desolation he accepted a seat on Bond Head's reconstituted Executive Council. The resignation of that council plunged the colony

78. PAC, Baldwin-Ross Papers, Robert to Eliza, 16 August 1827.

79. RBP, II, Prayers, p. 19.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

81. WWBP, B105, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 27 November 1836.

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into a constitutional crisis greater than any hitherto experienced.⁸² As soon as duty permitted he fled to Great Britain in the spring of 1836. Duty still called him to undertake an unsuccessful mission to the Colonial Office to plead for British justice against Head's abuses. Once free he plunged into a celebration of memory, going to Ireland to uncover the family roots. He felt at home in the past, in “this dear land of my parents and of my own Eliza and if it makes me a worse philosopher I shall be satisfied if it makes me a better Irishman”.⁸³ This comfort with the past eased into the obsession that would characterize the years after Eliza. He collected sods from the family cemeteries and carefully carried them back to Upper Canada. In London, he visited the cemetery where a boyhood friend, Horace Ridout, was buried and had the, perhaps startled, sexton open the crypt so that he might view his friend's coffin. He laboured over the family genealogy, continuing the work that his father had started, and would culminate in four bound volumes.⁸⁴

The attempt to hallow Eliza's memory and their mutual love led Robert Baldwin to erect his love and grief into a cult centred on the celebration of their love. The tendencies were evident early in their relationship, the special meanings he attributed to their moments together, their ideal communion of spirits over distance, his fussiness about detail, and his cherished regard for her letters or anything that personified her — a locket, her hair, a sprig of lilac. He enjoyed the bittersweet quality of solitary moments poring over her words to him and recalling the past. These impulses were exacerbated by her death and strengthened by what he evidently regarded as a marriage that had attained bliss.

Returning to Toronto in February 1837, Baldwin sanctified a temple to his dead wife. Her room was kept precisely as she had left it and was locked against the world. The first person admitted to the sanctuary was their eldest daughter Maria when she turned 21 in 1849.⁸⁵ The cult was practised every day. Whenever possible, Robert retired to Eliza's room to read and reread her precious letters; always he carried some of the letters with him so that in the event he should die away from home he would have part of her with him as he departed life.⁸⁶ The festival days of the cult were 11 January, the date of Eliza's death, and 31 May, their wedding anniversary. We can sense how intimately he lived with death in a letter written on 31 May 1845 in which he told his mother and his aunt of the observances. Each woman received a lilac sprig “from the first tree on the right hand side of the Entrance” to Spadina. In 1827 Robert and Eliza had taken two sprigs from the same tree “and like the hearts, though alas not the hands, that united them they remain together still”, carefully preserved by this

82. See the letters from John Rolph in WWBP.

83. WWBP, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 29 July 1836.

84. George E. Wilson, *The Life of Robert Baldwin* (Toronto, 1933), pp. 56-7.

85. Private (Simon Scott), Ross-Baldwin Family Papers, Mary J. Jones, “Memories of My Youth and a Sketch of the Family History of the Ross-Baldwin Families”, 17 October 1825, p. 16. Mary Jones was Robert Baldwin's granddaughter, the child of Augusta Elizabeth Baldwin and John Ross. Ironically, Mary Ross married the youngest son of Jonas Jones, one of the few men that, it is clear, Robert Baldwin hated.

86. Private, Ross-Baldwin Family Papers, antemortem instructions.

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secret romantic. That morning he had walked the route from the church to the old family home, the route of the wedding procession eighteen years before, and then he prowled "the old haunts" about Spadina, kindling his recollections. The desire to retrace his steps could be glimpsed as early as 1825 when he commemorated their first walk to "Happy Valley". As was often the case in May, as in January, his celebration of the dead cut him off from the living. In this particular letter he apologized that he could not leave his home, even to visit his mother and aunt.⁸⁷

While in Ireland Robert realized more clearly than ever before the supreme importance of family. He cherished his father's letters because

they tell of home — that home which though robbed of its dearest brightest treasure would be still dear to me were it but for the shadows of the past — how much then when it still contains so much to value so much to love — And I know I am loved as father — brother — nephew — cousin — friend — Yes more also than I deserve — Many and many a night have I gone over not merely your household but the whole family and recalled unnumbered instances of affection from all — Oh my father this family love is a holy a blessed affection let us cherish it as heavens best gift — let us cling to it as the most valued inheritance with which the Almighty has blessed us — And oh above all things let us not let the political differences interfere with the cultivation of it — but on the contrary where such unhappily exist always forget the politician in the relation.⁸⁸

Those "political differences" were a measure of both Baldwin's commitment to family and of his naively forgiving nature. Entering the Executive Council of Upper Canada only weeks after Eliza's death was painful. The refusal of Lieutenant Governor Head to concede responsible government, and the subsequent resignation of Baldwin and the other councillors, was painful. For most men, most painful of all would have been that when Head reconstructed his council on unregenerate, irresponsible lines, among those to accept his call was Eliza's brother, Robert Baldwin Sullivan. Far from denouncing his cousin's betrayal in those moments of his grief, Baldwin congratulated Sullivan on his post and urged his father not to allow politics to strain family bonds. Again, in 1841, Baldwin left the Executive Council of United Canada on the principle of responsibility but Sullivan snugly remained in the government.⁸⁹ Through these political differences, the cousins remained law partners — despite Sullivan's alcoholism and neglect of business.⁹⁰ Yet Robert once again accepted Sullivan into the Reform cabinet of 1848 and in September of that year raised his bibulous cousin to the dignity of the bench. It was at no little cost that Baldwin preserved family ties and his

87. RBP, III, R. Baldwin to Mrs. Sullivan, 31 May 1845.

88. WWBP, B105, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 24 September 1836.

89. On the resignation, see RBP, I, unbound correspondence with the Hon. R.B. Sullivan, Baldwin to Thomson, 11 and 12 June 1841; Wilson, *Baldwin*, pp. 103-8.

90. Sullivan took the temperance pledge in 1844 but complaints from clients, recorded in the Baldwin Papers, indicate that his business practices did not improve. By 1848 he was drinking again: Peter Neary, ed., "'Neither Radical Nor Tory Nor Whig,' Letters by Oliver Mowat to John Mowat, 1843-1846", *OH*, LXXI (1979), p. 101, citing a letter of 6 February 1844; RBP, I, A50, Lawrence Heyden to R. Baldwin, 11 March 1848.

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emotional link to Eliza's blood. But it was a cost he willingly paid, for he retained as idealized a conception of family as he had held of women. After all his experience with R.B. Sullivan, he could still write in 1843, “we cannot too sedulously cultivate family union & affection — it affords a circle within which we may hope to be at least free from treachery.”⁹¹

The relationship of family and politics was close. Most obviously, Robert devoted his public career to achieving his father's great idea, responsible government. The family also reinforced both Robert's conception of duty and his sense of destiny. There can be little doubt that this shy, introspective man disliked politics. His discomfort in a profession for which, he believed, he was “not . . . at all calculated”⁹² was a constant theme in his letters. Not only did he feel out of place in parliament and at sea in the rough and ready of power politics, but public life separated him from his family and home. There was a constant pull to leave politics, to return, as he wrote his son in 1842, to “home — my own dear dear home . . . which brings tears into my eyes whenever I think of it”.⁹³ At the same time, it was a family-instilled devotion to duty and family support which allowed him to function in the alien world of politics.

William Warren and Phoebe Baldwin filled their son with the sense of divine inspiration. During the political crisis of the early Union in 1841, when Robert agonized over whether to resign from Thomson's cabinet, his father advised him to act “by the dictates of your own heart & conscience & God will direct you — therefore you cannot err.”⁹⁴ A month later the old man wrote, “God almighty directs us all in the way he would have us go in this important struggle between good Govt. and evil Govt.”⁹⁵ Robert shared this almost Manichean sense of the course of political events. Small wonder that he wore the mantle of public responsibility so heavily. When he did resign on 15 June 1841, his father was sure that God approved; Robert, he felt, had taken “the virtuous religious course”.⁹⁶ Not surprisingly when, in January 1843, William Warren believed that responsible government had at last been achieved, he gave the credit wholly to his son: “my dear Robert, you are the man — the only man under Gods providence that was fitted for these struggles — and God so ordered you.”⁹⁷ Nor was it only the parents who saw Robert's divine mission. Early in March 1843 his brother, William Augustus, wrote Robert that “your magic influence is the only thing that can save society.”⁹⁸

Baldwin's family gave him the strength to persevere in politics. From birth to death he lived in an extended family of Russells, Baldwins and Rosses. Often living within the same household and almost always within a short walking distance of each

91. RBP, I, A87, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 28 November 1843.

92. RBP, I, A86, R. Baldwin to W.W. Baldwin, 26 July 1841.

93. RBP, II, R. Baldwin to William Willcocks Baldwin, 17 September 1842.

94. RBP, I, A84, W.W. Baldwin to R. Baldwin, 13 May 1841.

95. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1841.

96. *Ibid.*, 25 June and 26 July 1841.

97. RBP, I, A85, W.W. Baldwin to R. Baldwin, 3 January 1843.

98. RBP, I, A82, W.A. Baldwin to R. Baldwin, 7 March 1843.

other, his family supplied the emotional support, the political counsel that Baldwin needed. If it was a circle free from treachery, it also was a closed circle; with very few exceptions, he was not close to anyone outside the network of his family. But the family also compelled him to live a political life that was an agony to him; it loaded him with an overwhelming burden of duty, of responsibility for the family's good name and for the very survival of society. It made Robert Baldwin a great man; it also made Robert Baldwin a man whose personality warred with itself.

This was true throughout his adult life. His deep emotionalism, his preoccupation with love — these were repressed in his preparation of himself to do his father's work and to meet society's standards of "manliness". He became unable even to express his love to his children. His granddaughter, remembering what she had heard from her mother and aunt — Baldwin's daughters Eliza and Maria — described him as more a schoolmaster than a father to his children.⁹⁹ It was a failure he himself recognized in later years. He apologized to the younger Eliza in 1854 that, although he took great pleasure in the children and their marriages, "I only fear that I do not express to them with the warmth I feel my satisfaction with them and the pride I feel in them — Would that it had pleased God to have spared their poor mother to have participated in these feelings."¹⁰⁰

It showed in his instinct to resign. Seeking perfection in himself and perfect principles in politics, his first reaction when politics and government did not respond precisely as they should was to resign in protest against their imperfection — and his own. Each time he was in government, in 1836, 1840-41, 1842-43 and 1848-51, he left by resignation. He also resigned a nomination in 1858, threatened resignation often and did submit his resignation to the governor during cabinet disputes in 1850 and 1851.¹⁰¹ A more startling evidence of his perfectionism was the sharp awareness he claimed, in his declining years, of the workings of his internal organs. They were, he told LaFontaine in 1853, "too powerful . . . I manufacture blood and fat too rapidly."¹⁰²

Baldwin's melancholy and repression deepened, after Eliza's death in 1836, into hysteria and finally into a severe depressive illness.¹⁰³ By 1850 he was incapacitated for months at a time by his private blackness. The decline of the Reform "Great

99. Private, Ross-Baldwin Family Papers, Mary J. Jones, "Memories", pp. 16-7.

100. *Ibid.*, Baldwin to Eliza Ross, 3 November 1854.

101. His resignations are on the public record. For his threatened resignations see RBP, I, A87, Baldwin to Lord Elgin, 10 April 1850; PAC, Elgin Papers, 4A, Baldwin to LaFontaine, 2 May 1851.

102. PAC, Papiers LaFontaine, 748, Baldwin to LaFontaine, 21 September 1853. Halifax psychiatrist John W. MacDonald was helpful in assessing the documents on Baldwin's psychology.

103. On "hysteria" and Victorian women, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th-Century America", *Social Research*, 39 (Winter 1972). Baldwin showed many of the symptoms ascribed to "hysterical" women, including depression, hypochondria, disabling pain and even self-mutilation.

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Ministry” has been explained by many factors. One which deserves more attention is the mental illness of Robert Baldwin, his loss of control over cabinet and party, and the decline in his steadfast purpose that had given Reform its moral and political direction. While the nature of his illness was not public knowledge, his weakening capacities were all too obvious. A worried liberal in eastern Upper Canada, William O. Buell, wrote to Baldwin in June 1850 to report a widespread public belief that the leader's career was near an end; people were calling him the “Finality man”.¹⁰⁴ In June 1851 he would be gone. Just turned forty-seven, he was nevertheless an old man, worn down by responsibility, illness, and his everlasting grief. The torment of the pain and strange sounds in his head and the deepening preoccupation with the dead Eliza made him a shadowy figure in retirement, one rarely seen in public, spending his time organizing his papers and reading, over and over, the thirty year old letters from his wife.¹⁰⁵

The interplay of family influence and his own personality had made Robert Baldwin the central figure in Canadian politics, and had made him the one man who could rescue liberalism, bind French and English together, and accomplish the necessary reform of responsible government. That interplay had also made him suppress much of his own nature. For a time, the love of Eliza gave him some balance between the compulsion of duty and his private needs. When she was gone, that balance was lost. Driven by duty through the waste that the world had become, he lived a life that could find satisfaction only in death and reunion with Eliza. The essential Robert Baldwin was to be found that January day in 1859 in the crypt at Spadina.

104. RBP, I, A36, W.O. Buell to Baldwin, 1 June 1850.

105. R.M. and J. Baldwin, *The Baldwins and the Great Experiment*, p. 236.