

Hello, my name is Meagan Doyle, and I'm here with the next installment of the Read to Me series from the Bowdoin College Library. I'm going to start with a little bit of background about myself.

I am the College's Digital Archivist, but I came to Bowdoin to work on a grant-funded project to digitize the papers of Oliver Otis Howard and his brothers. Now, Oliver Otis Howard is a famous Civil War general and was also commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. And he went to Bowdoin and graduated in 1850. But his two younger brothers also attended Bowdoin, and we also have in Special Collections and Archives, the collections of his two brothers.

So, Rowland Bailey Howard graduated from Bowdoin in 1856. He was the only of his brothers to not fight in the Civil War. He was a pacifist and a minister. And he wrote the letter I'm about to read when he was a junior at Bowdoin, in 1855. And this letter, I just really...has struck me when I read it back a few years ago, and has stayed with me as an example of just the value in having good support system around you, especially when you're dealing with mental health challenges and really the importance of having relationships in which you can feel vulnerable and open. And I think this is a time in our community and our world where that's something that's especially important. And so, maybe this will speak to others the same way it did to me. So, with that, I'll read this. It's a letter from March 28th, 1855, that Roland Howard wrote from Bowdoin to his mother, Eliza Gilmore.

My dear mother, I hesitated some time before I concluded to write this, knowing myself to be in a rather blue state of mind. I was afraid I shouldn't flip some of my bad spirits on you, but after all, human nature wants something serious, nay almost gloomy now and then, just to keep the balance of power. Besides, if we should always write in an apparently happy mood, we should begin to suspect each other of a want of confidence for the mind must have its downs as well as its ups, if we do not deceive, if we would show that confidence which is the true test of affection, we must make each other acquainted with the sad and sorrowful feelings as well as those that are bright and mirthful.

Here lies the great pleasure of writing my mother. I need not feel that it is necessary for me to be sprightly and amusing when there is nothing mirthful in me, but I need only to feel and to speak the true emotions of the heart.

My mental depression today is almost entirely the result of physical causes. I have a serious cold and my whole body feels dull and stupid, and as usual, my mind refuses to study or to think. After sitting rocking to and fro half the forenoon I have taken to this sheet to trouble you with my listlessness, but I hardly think I ought to do so. Sometimes it almost seems as if the intellect, the soul, being so superior in its essence is too closely connected with the body, too sensible of the latter's ills and aches.

I know once when I was very sick, that the saddest moments which I experienced were those when I was conscious of my inability to think, reflect, and reason. No merely physical weakness is half so sensibly felt. The loss of a hand or foot could never so affect the feelings of a man as a sense of mental inferiority. It is no use for boys like me

to dream, although dreaming is much pleasanter to my youth in temperament than thinking. But I have got to think and act like the rest of the world who honestly look to me as if they were all two-thirds mad, or be called a fool and a dunce for my pains.

But enough of this for the present, I shall feel better tomorrow and go to recitation, no doubt.

Love to all affectionately, Rowland.

If you would like to see the rest of this letter or the collection or any of the other digitized collections we have available, you can visit the archives website, which is library.bowdoin.edu/arch.

Thank you for listening.

Transcript by Rev.com