

Meditation VI (1624)

By John Donne (England)

Line
5 I observe the physician with the same diligence
as he the disease; I see he fears, and I fear with him.
I overtake him, I overrun him in his fear, and I go
the faster because he makes his pace slow. I fear the
more, because he disguises his fear; and I see it with
the more sharpness, because he would not have me
see it. He knows that his fear shall not disorder the
practise and exercise of his art, but he knows that
my fear may disorder the effect and working of his
10 practise.

15 As the ill affections of the spleen¹ complicate,
and mingle themselves with every infirmity of the
body, so doth fear insinuate itself in every action or
passion of the mind; and as the wind in the body
will counterfeit any disease, and seem the stone²,
and seem the gout, so fear will counterfeit any dis-
ease of the mind. It shall seem love, a love of hav-
ing; and it is but a fear, a jealous and suspicious
fear of losing. It shall seem valor in despising, and
20 undervaluing danger; and it is but fear, in an over-
valuing of opinion and estimation, and a fear of
losing that. A man that is not afraid of a lion is
afraid of a cat; not afraid of starving, and yet is
afraid of some joint of meat at the table, presented

25 to feed him; not afraid of the sound of drums, and
trumpets, and shot, and those which they seek to
drown, the last cries of men, and is afraid of some
particular harmonious instrument; so much afraid,
as that with any of these the enemy might drive this
30 man, otherwise valiant enough, out of the field.

I know not what fear is, nor I know not what it
is that I fear now; I fear not the hastening of my
death. and yet I do fear the increase of the disease;
I should belie nature if I should deny that I feared
35 this, and if I should say that I feared death, I
should belie God. My weakness is from nature,
who hath but her measure; my strength is from
God, who possesses, and distributes infinitely. As
then every cold air is not a damp, every shivering is
40 not a stupefaction, so every fear is not a fearfulness,
every declination is not a running away, every
debating is not a resolving, every wish that it were
not thus, is not a murmun'ng, nor a dejection
though it be thus; but as my physician's fear puts
45 not him from his practise, neither doth mine put
me, from receiving from God, and man, and
myself, spiritual, and civil, and moral assistances,
and consolations.

¹ The bodily organ once considered to be the source of irritability, melancholy, and depression

² A disease believed to arise from stones in the gall bladder, kidney, etc.