

**The Fence or The Ambulance**  
**Joseph Malines**

*'Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,  
Though to walk near its crest was so pleasant:  
But over its terrible edge there had slipped  
A duke and many a peasant;  
So the people said something would have to be done.  
But their projects did not at all tally:  
Some said, "Put a fence around the edge of the cliff"  
Some, "An ambulance down in the valley."*

*But the cry for the ambulance carried the day.  
For it spread to the neighboring city:  
A fence may be useful or not, it is true,  
But each heart became brimful of pity  
For those who had slipped o'er that dangerous cliff,  
And the dwellers in highway and alley  
Gave pounds or gave pence, not to put up a fence,  
But an ambulance down in the valley.*

*"For the cliff is alright if your careful," they said,  
"and if folks even slip or are dropping,  
it isn't the slipping that hurts them so much  
as the shock down below-when they're stopping,"  
So day after day when these mishaps occurred,  
Quick forth would the rescuers sally  
To pick up the victims who fell off the cliff,  
With their ambulance down in the valley.*

*Then an old man remarked, "it's a marvel to me  
that people give far more attention  
to repairing results than to stopping the cause,  
when they'd much better aim at prevention.  
Let us stop at its source all this mischief, cried he.  
"Come neighbors and freinds, let us rally :  
If the cliff we will fence, we might almost dispense  
with the ambulance down in the valley."*

*"Oh, he's a fanatic." the others rejoined:  
"dispense with the ambulance Never!  
He'd dispense with all charities, too, if he could:  
no, no! We'll support them forever.  
Aren't we picking up folks just as fast as they fall?  
And shall this man dictate to us? Shall he?"*

*Why would people of sense stop to put up a fence?  
While their ambulance works in the valley?"*

*But a sensible few who are practical too,  
Will not bear with such nonsense much longer  
They believe that prevention is better than cure  
And their party will soon be the stronger  
Encourage them, then with your purse, voice and pen  
And (while other philanthropists dally)  
They will scorn all pretense, and put up a stout fence  
On the cliff that hangs over the valley.*

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