

# The Broken Promise - song lyrics

American Old-time song lyrics from [www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

THE BROKEN PROMISE.

By Isaac Marks. Scene is in The Philadelphia Dramatic Club.

'Twas in 1890, about ten o'clock, on a cold and dreary night,  
We were sitting 'round the fireside of our club, so cozy and so bright;  
Some of us were sipping wine and reading, having nothing else to do;  
Some of us were actors, giving the amateurs their cue.

As time was hanging heavily, I asked some one to recite.  
Or tell a funny story, or sing, perhaps, he might,  
And as one was collecting his thoughts, and was about to begin,  
We heard a noise at the door and a tramp marched boldly in.

If a ghost had appeared among us. we couldn't have been more surprised;  
We looked at him and stared at him, and could scarcely believe our eyes -  
"How did he ever come in here?" some one cried out.  
"Was the doorman at his post?" another one did shout.

His clothes were torn and ragged, his nose was strawberry red.  
And a tile that had seen better days was perched upon his head:  
His shoes, too big and old and torn, must have been number nine.  
Which never felt a shoe-brush and never had a shine.

After getting over our surprise, we thought we saw a chance for fun.  
And asked him to take a drink with us, and tell us how he came to be a bum:  
He said if we'd give him another drink, he would tell  
How he came to be a tramp, and to feel the pangs of hell.

After he had drank again, he cleared his throat and said:  
"Boys, it's pretty hard to say it, but I wish that I was dead;  
You've treated me pretty nicely and I'd like to do the same to you,  
So you'll see why I'm a trump to-day by the time that I get through.

"'Twas 'bout forty years ago I determined to become one of the forty-niners.  
And go out West and look for gold, along with the other miners,  
But, before I went, I promised my wife and child that I'd not forget them in my  
But when I had enough for all, I would return to home.

"So, with a light heart I started out, and reached at last a mine,  
Where gold was found in plenty, and the sun seemed forever to shine;  
I had luck and found the gold, and gained a fortune fast.  
And every hundred that I added I promised would be the last.

"But somehow when I got the hundred, I didn't want to leave.  
For I thought of my wife and child, and how it would them please.  
For I had grown to be like a miser, and didn't want to drop my claim.  
Especially as I had struck it rich again, on a better-paying vein.

"So I broke my promise to them and begged them to come out to me,  
And when they came, I was as happy, God knows, as happy us I could be;  
For there was 'Nell' to cheer me when I came home at night.  
And little 'Lill' always at my side, making the working hours bright.

"They had been with me 'bout a year, and during all this time  
I had been working, day after day, at the same old mine,  
Hoarding und making the pile grow larger day by day.  
And as we grew richer with gold, so did our spirits grow gay.

"About this time we were growing uneasy, because the Indian pillages  
Had at last become a source of terror in the surrounding villages,  
And as they were growing more hostile, I determined at last to leave  
And return to the East And spend my money and live in perfect ease.

"We packed up our things and were about ready to go,  
So I thought I'd bid farewell to an old partner of mine named Joe;  
And kissing my wife and child good-bye, I set off whistling a tune.  
For I was thinking, yes thinking, that I'd be going east by next day noon.

From the music archive at [www.traditionalmusic.co.uk](http://www.traditionalmusic.co.uk)

"After bidding my friend farewell, I started back for the cabin,  
And when I got up to the door, all seemed quiet within.  
I opened the door-all was turned upside down, and there on the bed.  
With their arms entwined, lay my wife and child-dead.

"Oh, God, it was I who had killed my wife and child;  
I had broken my promise-oh, the thought of it almost drives me wild,  
For had I gone East and kept my word when enough gold I had found.  
I wouldn't then have to lay them, no, in the cold, cold ground.

"The Indians had heard I was going, and had all day watched the house,  
And when I had gone, crept up on all fours, more quiet than a mouse.  
Murdered my wife and child, stole all my gold and goods,  
And, after trying to fire the cabin, had started back to the woods.

"I didn't have the courage to kill myself, so I 'listed in the war.  
Praying that I might be killed in a good cause-then, perhaps, I might go to  
But, no, when I die I know to heaven I won't go- [yonder shore-  
They don't allow promise-breakers up there; I'm sure to go below.

" Now, gents, you've treated me as well as though I was one of you to-night.  
And I hope to God you may never see my side of life, but always see the bright,  
And now I leave you, to tramp the cold streets once more  
'Till something happens in this world to call me to another shore."

With this he bowed his head and silently left the room,  
And the fireside that had seemed so bright before he came, now seemed filled  
And I, taking my hat and coat, was soon in the fog outside lost, [with gloom,  
Wending my way to my home, thinking of what that broken promise had cost.