

THE OLD CLOCK ON THE STAIRS

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Somewhat back from the village street
Stands the old-fashioned country-seat,¹
Across its antique portico
Tall poplar-trees their shadows throw,
And from its station in the hall 5
An ancient timepiece says to all,—
 "Forever — never!"²
 Never — forever!"

Halfway up the stairs it stands,
And points and beckons with its hands 10
From its case of massive oak,
Like a monk, who, under his cloak,
Crosses himself, and sighs, alas!
With sorrowful voice to all who pass,—
 "Forever — never!" 15
 Never — forever!"

By day its voice is low and light;
But in the silent dead of night,
Distinct as a passing footstep's fall,
It echoes along the vacant hall, 20
Along the ceiling, along the floor,
And seems to say, at each chamber-door,—
 "Forever — never!"
 Never — forever!"

1. The house thus described was that now known as the Plunkett mansion in Pittsfield, once the home of Mrs. Longfellow's maternal grandfather.

2. This refrain was suggested by the words of an old French missionary, who said of Eternity, "C'est une pendule dont le balancier dit et redit sans cesse ces deux mots seulement dans le silence des tombeaux—'Toujours, jamais! Jamais, toujours.'"