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A POEM ON THE RIVER FOSS

Early 19th Century

Oh! Poets have sung of "Bonny Doon"
Of Thames, Of Tyne, Of Tweed,
But thou, a stream beyond compare!
Hast never had thy need
Of song of praise, or that renown,
Which justly is thy due.
Are not thy waters stagnant slime
And is not such their hue,
That if they could but give a gloss,
A blacking warehouse we'd call Foss.

How gracefully the dead dogs float
Upon thy snail-paced tide,
What odours steal from these dung hills,
That rise on either side;
How deep, how rich the mud that fills
Thy channel to its brink,
And leaves a track of deeper black
As the old keel boats slink,
Through filthy weeds, so green and gross
That mantle o'er the face of Foss.

Limb shaking ague, and fever force,
That licks the life blood up,
Consumption! That fell hypocrite,
All drain thy noxious cup;
A deadly leaven thy stream has prov'd,
Mix'd with the city's pride -
The boat of the 'grim ferryman'
Oft floats upon thy tide.
Thirsty King Death is ne'er at a loss,
His 'coal black wine' is sure the Foss.

All that healing art profess,
Quack, surgeon, or M.D.,
Your glasses fill with blood red wine,
And quaff a toast with me.
The pestle flourish round each head,
Gleam high the lancet's blade,
And drink to Foss, pellucid Foss,
The best friend of our trade.
To know 'twould be a real dead loss,
Were they to purify the Foss.