Paracetamol 'overdose' killed teenage patient

A PATHOLOGIST told yesterday how a teenager's death could have been avoided if hospital staff had not given her an overdose of paracetamol.

Dr Julie McAdam was giving evidence at a fatal accident inquiry into the death of 19-year-old Danielle Welsh.

Miss Welsh, who had a rare syndrome which meant she weighed just five-and-a-half stones and was only four feet tall, was given almost double the recommended dose of the painkiller at Glasgow's Southern General Hospital in June 2008.

She suffered liver failure and later died while being treated in the liver unit at Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Dr McAdam told the inquiry at Glasgow Sheriff Court she was '100 per cent certain' that a toxic level of paracetamol caused Miss Welsh's death.

By **Victoria Weldon**

Lawyer David Hunter, representing the teenager's parents John and Margaret, asked her if she believed Miss Welsh's death could have been avoided.

Dr McAdam replied: 'Yes, it could have been avoided if she had been given an appropriate dose of paracetamol for her size.'

Mr Hunter asked if there was anything else in the post mortem examination that could have brought about Miss Welsh's death. Dr McAdam said: 'No.'

It was also put to Dr McAdam that Miss Welsh might have been suffering from a rare condition called Reyes Syndrome but the pathologist said: 'I truly believe that Danielle was not suffering from classic Reyes Syndrome.

'I don't think there's any clear evidence of a Reyes-like condition, whereas there's very clear evidence that she died as a result of paracetamol overdose.'

The inquiry heard earlier that junior doctor Shamita Das prescribed the paracetamol for Miss Welsh without seeing her.

Dr Das said that this was the first time she had ever been asked to prescribe the drug and she gave an adult dose not realising how light her patient was.

Under the guidelines for prescribing intravenous paracetamol, Miss Welsh, of Glasgow, should have been given 525 milligrams instead of one gram.

The inquiry, before Sheriff Andrew Cubie, continues.

by Jeremy Hodges

ARE ye gaun tae stan' a budge the nicht? The age-old call to sin from the world's oldest profession had a distinctive vernacular in Victorian Edinburgh, where the streetwalkers patrolled the eastern end of Princes Street after dark, waylaying strangers and inviting them to buy a girl a drink. The lamplit spectacle would long haunt one of their more literary customers as 'face after face went by; swinging dress after dress brushed on the even stones; out of face after face the eyes stood forth with a sordid animal invitation'.

Yet few of the girls, befuddled by whisky, had any idea that the outlandishly attired youth they knew as 'Velvet Coat' was a reluctant engineering student called Lewis Stevenson whose wealthy parents fondly imagined he was attending the university.

Nobody could imagine him as a best-selling author with the most famous initials in the world. By the time he became Robert Louis Stevenson, the RLS who penned Treasure Island, Kidnapped and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, he was a bed-bound invalid in Bournemouth, tended by a fiercely protective American wife.

Yet before meeting Fanny Osbourne at the age of 25, the young man known to his friends as Louis had led an active life in the city he once described as a 'lamplit, vicious fairy land' – changed by a prudish editor to 'a sort of lamplit fairyland' to escape any suggestion of vice.

From the age of 17, when he cut loose from the apron-strings of his nurse Alison Cunningham to enrol at Edinburgh University, Louis went his own way. He found academic life unedifying and was disappointed in his fellow students, who seemed interested only in securing well-paid jobs and shunned an oddity who dressed like a bounder and cut lectures.

Instead, the lonely teenager spent his days roaming the city, occasionally smoking hashish in graveyards before venturing among the 'rainy, beggarly slums' with only his personal charm to protect him. Yet he would always be home for dinner at the smart townhouse in Heriot Row where, as an only child, he lived with doting parents.

Tom Stevenson was a wealthy lighthouse engineer with firm Calvinist convictions, while his wife Maggie was the bright and charming daughter of a Church of Scotland minister who dealt with any unpleasantness by smiling sweetly and pretending it wasn't happening. She

An oddity who went his own way: Author Robert Louis Stevenson

'Eyes stood forth with a sordid animal invitation'

certainly would not want to know what was happening to her 'darling Lou' when he slipped out into the Edinburgh night.

Gliding swiftly along Queen Street, the scarecrow figure in the velvet jacket would reach the point where respectability ran out as the road dipped into York Place. A few footsteps away lay Elder Street, Clyde Street and St James Square, where assorted respectable Edinburgh citizens might be seen attempting to enter the 'night houses' without being recognised.

The city was full of repressed Dr Jekylls seeking release in the haunts of Mr Hyde. In rigidly religious and respectable middle-class Edinburgh, where divorce was seen as scandalous, the most common escape from an unhappy marriage or a cherished wife who could not face another childbirth was the brothel.

There were more than 200 such establishments known to the police in Edinburgh, plus countless girls walking the streets. Their inescapable presence led upstanding Christian citizens to band together to protect the city's morals.

The Scottish National Association for the Suppression of Licentiousness issued pamphlets warning that the Old Town brothels, with their drink-sodden sixpenny whores, were 'nightly filled to overflowing with working men and boys'; while their New Town counterparts were 'thronged by parties moving in the most respectable society, from the youth still attending school to the grey-haired parent'.

Supporters of the campaign included Louis's uncle David Stevenson, who along with Louis's father was involved closely in the running of the Edinburgh Magdalene Asylum, where 'fallen women' were given the chance to reform through the power of needlework and labouring in a laundry.

The elder Stevensons' reforming zeal may have been fuelled by the fate of their poor brother Alan, a brilliant lighthouse builder struck down by a disease that drove him into doom-laden religious mania before an untimely death from 'general paralysis', which in Victorian times suggested syphilis.

They may also have feared for the fate of their sons in a city full of wicked women. Louis in particular had a passionate nature and a strong sense of adventure, leading him into places better left alone.

Suspecting this, his father kept him on a short leash financially. This debarred him from visiting the beautiful girls at Clara Johnson's in Clyde Street, whose clients would pay £5 – about £1,000 today – for an evening of discreet satisfaction.

Instead, he became a familiar face in Leith Street, where a girl would oblige for a few shillings. The area had all a young man seeking a Bohemian lifestyle could require, including a tobacconist's where the proprietor, Henry Wilson, let Louis receive letters and meet friends he might not wish to take home.

On the terrace opposite were several small night houses, along with the home of Arthur Collett. Originally Thomas Arthur Corlett, a respectable advocate on the Isle of Man, he had since led a colourful life with a series of wives and now ran a shebeen in cellars beneath the Leith Street pavement.

Entry to this smoky, sweaty hellhole was via a doorway off the Low Calton, where customers were scrutinised through a spyhole before being admitted to the illegal drinking den where soldiers and sailors, lawyers and students could carouse with loose women.

It was a favourite haunt of Louis and his cousin, Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson. Bob, as he was known, had no stern father to keep an eye on him since the death of poor Alan and could spend his inheritance as he pleased.

So far he had spent it studying to be an artist in Paris where, when his