AN ECCENTRIC COUNTESS.

The Peculiar Vagaries of Sarolta Vay, a Titled Hungarian.

She Dons Men's Clothes and Goes Out Into the World in Search of Adventure—Her Marriage With Nine Women.

THE young Hungarian Countess Sarolta Jay closed her mad career last January. Without money and without credit, shattered by dissipation and disheartened by disappointment, restrained at every turn by the inflexible hand of the law, and notorious beyond any other European woman of her generation, she then took refuge from the sporting world in the seclusion of a friend's house in Pesth. She abjured drinking, betting and gambling, fighting, dueling and debt-making. She continued to wear trousers and cutaways, but ceased to woo and win young women under such false pretenses. Her retirement from the sporting world, which she had helped to lead, caused the revival of many reminiscences of her bizarre record in the high life of Vienna, Pesth and Prague. But the Countess and her family and friends kept their mouths shut so tight concerning her carousals that only desultory bits of her history could be picked up here and there by the Continental dailies.

Recently, however, Professor von Krafft-Ebing got at the records of the Vay family, from the tenth century founder down to Countess Sarolta, and collected from them the facts for "psychological and physiological study," which he has just published. His book is far from being as heavy and abstract as its title might indicate. It contains a wealth of raw material for simon-pure gossip in the finer drawing-rooms of Emperor Franz Joseph's subjects, and from it the New York Sun made the following condensation:

Countess Sarolta Vay was born in 1866, just nine years after her mother's marriage. Her father was Count Ladislas Vay, a General and an Imperial Chamberlain. He had waited so long and with so great an anxiety for the birth of an heir that when Sarolta came her mother feared to tell him that his first born was only a girl. With the aid of the nurse she concealed from him the sex of the child, and, as time passed, took all the necessary precautions that occasion demanded to keep up the deception. Sarolta went into knickerbockers and roundabouts at the age of 5, played boys' games, got the elements of a boy's education, and when 12 years of age could hunt, fish and fence as could few boys of her age. In her fourteenth year her father decided to send her to a military school. To prevent this her mother was obliged to confess all. The Count swallowed his anger and chagrin, and tried at once to repair the topsy turvy condition of his family affairs by putting Sarolta into girl's clothes, calling her Sandor, and sending her off to a girls' school. In vain. Sarolta

REFUSED TO BE TRANSFORMED.

She stole into her trousers and jackets whenever she got a chance, and led her parents a sad life in her constant endeavors to get rid of the petticoats they tried to keep on her. She besought her father to allow her to enter the Honved Hussar Regiment. His refusal was the last straw, and she proclaimed her intention to tear up all Austria with her pranks as soon as she became of age.

She kept her word faithfully. On the first day of her majority she swung out into the world in a cutaway, tight trousers and a high hat and began a career of unprecedented dissipation. She did everything and did it with a zest that made her the most notorious person in the fastest circles of Vienna. She got head over heels in debt, and to extricate herself forged, embezzled and stole on a grand scale. Still her creditors were only half satisfied and hounded her constantly. They finally drove her to a step that caused her arrest on a dozen different charges, and eventually her retirement. To extricate herself she married Marie Engelhardt, a beautiful eighteen-year-old girl, whom she met at a summer hotel at Worthersee last fall. Papa Engelhardt, an army contractor, thought, of course, that his daughter was marrying a real Count Sandor Vay, and was so delighted to have her capture a title that he gave her dowry of $500,000. The marriage was celebrated with tremendous pomp, such as only a simple Continental citizen who has corralled a nobleman for his daughter knows how to exhibit with proper impressiveness. The Countess and Marie went on a wedding journey. The Countess threw away the dowry so rapidly that every one she owed heard of her showy extravagance; her creditors surrounded her, the victims of her dishonesty began to call for indemnification for their losses, and a general exposure followed. Despite all this, Marie clung fast to the Countess, and left her only when compelled to do so by her parents.

Sarolta, or Sandor, was imprisoned in Klangenfurth; was deprived of the right to contract legal debts, and was threatened with the insane asylum. She was released after two weeks of incarceration, and sought directly the quiet of the house of her friend, Fraulein Czeky, in Paris.

The idiosyncracies of the Countess Sarolta, which are back of all these curious features in her career, are ascribed by Professor Krafft-Ebing to heredity. A sister of her grandmother, he has discovered, was hysterical, somnambulistic, and lay seventeen years in bed, merely because she imagined she had hip disease. Another grandaunt passed seven years in bed because she imagined herself to be suffering from

AN INCURABLE DISEASE.

Her grandmother suffered from a delusion that a certain table in her drawing-room was cursed. Whenever a person laid an article on this table she cried: "It is cursed, it is cursed," and hurried with the article into an adjoining room, which she called the "Black Chamber." The key to this chamber she carried in her girdle in the day-time, and at night kept it under her pillow. After her death a dozen shawls ornaments, bank notes and gold pieces were found in this back room. A fourth grandaunt did not allow the servants to sweep or dust her room for four years, and neither washed herself nor combed her hair. All these women were, however, clever, well-educated and amiable. Sarolta's mother was nervous, and fell ill whenever she was outdoors in the moonlight. One branch of the mother's family was given over entirely to spiritualism. Four cousins on the mother's side shot themselves.

The majority of the members of the Vay family have been persons of unusual talents. Sarolta's father occupied for a long time posts under the Austrian Government, was a military man of considerable genius, and was a favorite at the Viennese court. He lost his high position, however, on account of his growing eccentricity of behavior and his inclination to throw away all money that came to his hands. In three years he squandered a million, and then fell out of public life. Sarolta's aunt on the Vay side, who lives in Dresden, partakes of the common eccentricity of the family. While Sarolta, in her thirteenth year, was at her grandmother's house, she was encouraged to play all sorts of high jinks in her masculine disguise, to make love to an English girl of 16, and finally to elope with her, although the grandmother knew from the first of the deception.

The desire of Sarolta to appear to be a man has always amounted to a partial mental derangement. Professor Krafft-Ebing says she fought six duels during the maddest part of her career with Viennese officers and students who reproached her with her sex. She insulted several more, who discreetly declined to challenge the prowess of her arm. She has been "married" by priests and civil officers to no fewer than nine women besides Marie Engelhardt. All of these women have seemed to catch the contagion of her own hallucination. Six of them still live in Vienna as divorced Countesses Vay. Two have tried to bring suits for alimony, and one is trying hard to get Sarolta back to live with her. Sarolta, however, still tries, she says, to remain faithful to her last wife.

"BEAUTIFUL MARIE!"

She exclaimed, recently, "I dream of you every night." "I hate everything that reminds me of my womanhood," she said to a friend of the professor. "I would formally insult a man who would call me a Countess. A friend who reminded me of my sex I would never speak to again."

Nevertheless the Countess Sarolta has small affection for mankind. "I have never felt the slightest inclination to become well acquainted with any young man," she exclaimed. "As the years pass by I become more and more convinced that none of them are worthy of my friendship. When I do associate with men, especially in the society of women, I prefer those of a plain exterior, because then I run no risk of being cast in the shade. The idea that a woman could prefer any other man to me has always caused me the deepest pangs of jealousy. In selecting my companions among women I have always chosen the intelligent rather than the beautiful. I have an inexpressible detestation of women's clothes and in general against everything feminine, so far as it concerns me alone. On the other hand, where others are concerned, I love only those of the gentler sex."

Professor Krafft-Ebing has also drawn some conclusions from the formation of the Countess Sarolta's handwriting. "The

strokes," he says, "show firmness and certainty. They are thoroughly masculine. A close analysis reveals these characteristics: Wild passion, hatred, and opposition against everything which partakes of the nature of heartfelt love, an entire lack of poetic sentiment of the sentimental sort, nobility of aspirations, enthusiasm for everything beautiful and noble, a keen mind for science and the fine arts. The contents of her manuscript betray wide reading in the classics of all languages. She quotes freely from the poets, historians and ethical writers of all countries. Her poetical and other literary works are far above mediocrity. For several years she has contributed numerous articles of high merit to four Viennese magazines of wide circulation and considerable prominence."

The Countess Sarolta Vay is a woman of imposing presence. She is of medium height and has limbs of masculine development. Her shoulders are heavy, her chest is broad. Her hair is short, curly and almost black. Her nose turns up slightly and her mouth has the curves of Cupid bow. Although her years of dissipation have cut deep lines in her face, she is still handsome and looks like a boy of 21.