



George Barr McCutcheon,  
Author of "Nedra."

## Nedra

George Barr McCutcheon has a genius like that of the late Frank R. Stockton's when it comes to making the impossible seem plausible. But this very gift which has made him so popular with a wide circle of readers seems likely to mislead him in the end. In his last novel\* he has exercised his faculty for the incredible even more than usual, but he has been flagrantly careless in presenting those details where art counts for more than imagination.

\* NEDRA. By George Barr McCutcheon. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co. \$1.25.

His readers are delighted when the pair of rich Chicago lovers elope to Manila, where they expect to be married and escape the nuptial functions attendant upon wedding occasions in their social set. The adventures they have in New York prior to their flight and during the voyage are all set down in McCutcheon's best manner. We know that the plot thickens when another man on board falls in love with Grace Vernon and when Lady Tennys is drawn toward Hugh Ridgeway in spite of her old husband. We accept the beginning of the *dénouement* with confidence when a storm wrecks the ship, and Ridgeway saves Lady Tennys by mistake from the cruel waves instead of his betrothed bride—with confidence because we remember the happy adventures Mr. McCutcheon always provided for his readers in the famous principality of Graustark. But when Ridgeway and Lady Tennys are washed ashore upon an unknown island, where they pose before the savages there as god and goddess, when they do the same things that people have always done in such situations since Robinson Crusoe set the fashion, except that they live in primitive luxury, then we are kin to the street gamin who is not to be taken in by an old fake, and we exclaim: "Aw! what yer givin' us, Mr. McCutcheon?" And it is bad enough that the whole thing has been given so often before, but the author's carelessness in developing the situation almost amounts to an affront when we consider how able he is to do better. Thus, after spending the greater part of a stormy night in a boiling sea, Lady Tennys sits like a Gibson girl among the rocks and tucks up her hair with "tortoise shell combs." Now, can any woman remain twenty minutes bareheaded in the mildest surf without losing every hairpin she possesses, much less her tortoise shell combs? And the man's grief for his lost love does not last two hours. He rages and curses Lady Tennys; then sobs with delight because he has saved her. The next morning, altho she has lost her husband and he his bride, they are very gay. He ties a palm leaf under her chin and she performs a like service for him. Really, it is scandalous. Savages do not forget their dead so soon.

But that is not all. Later on when Ridgeway overhears Lady Tennys offer a perfunctory prayer that Grace Vernon may have escaped a watery grave, Ridgeway sulks for two weeks. He is obviously offended because the woman he has is decent enough to hope that the other one still lives.

In other ways the author crosses the line of good taste even when there is no humor on the other side. They need, for instance, a white signal to attract the attention of any ships which may be passing. Lady Tennys furnishes it and with a remark that would cause Bernard Shaw to blush with envy because he has never thought of anything to say so suggestive and *risqué*.

In short it is not that the thing is preposterous, but it lacks the chief charm of the incredible, originality, and it has been so badly done by an author who can do so well.