

THE HOSPITAL

How *Little Blue Books* Are Given
New Zest by New Titles

Emmanuel Haldeman-Julius

How to Find a Title That Will Sell More Books

*Emmanuel Haldeman-Julius is the famed originator of the Little Blue Books series, sold by mail order in the 1920s and 30s. He had hundreds of them and sold them for five cents each. Like all successful mail order merchants, Haldeman-Julius kept careful records of sales. When a particular book was not pulling the buyers as expected, he relegated it to his "book hospital," where he chiefly fiddled with the title. His report on this experiment was included in his autobiographical account, *The First Hundred Million*, a book I highly recommend to anyone in the writing and publishing business. The entire chapter is reproduced below. My own decision to launch a new series of Little Blue SourceBooks was based on Haldeman-Julius' business plan.*

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How Little Blue Books Are Given New Zest by New Titles

WHEN the *Little Blue Books* were approaching the thousand mark in number of different titles in print and on sale at the price of five cents per book there was a great deal of investigating and tabulating going on in Girard. Any number of influences were constantly being brought to bear on the selling totals of various books. A book that was a good seller in a list of 300 titles became a very poor one in a list of 800 titles. There must be reasons for such discrepancies. Fig-

ures were obtained. Inventories were scrutinized. And there grew up what I rather like to call The Hospital, an editorial *sanctum sanctorum* into which were sent those books which were not selling their quota.

In any scheme of mass production and a low-priced product a certain average distribution must be maintained. In the *Little Blue Books* it developed that any single book must be sold in a minimum quantity of at least 10,000 copies every year. This was not exactly a fixed figure, but was flexible to the extent that a book might sell 8,000 or 7,000 copies annually and still be kept in the list. But it meant chiefly that any book running consistently below 0,000 copies annually was sent to The Hospital for consideration of the selling points shown in its title-and author listing in the catalogue and advertisements.

When The Hospital began it was overcrowded with book-patients. The list of *Little Blue Books* had grown with such leaps and bounds in the five years it had then been in existence that a number of titles had been passed along the way and left dying in a ditch behind us. That is, it was not noticed until very suddenly that some of the earlier books were losing their place they were not selling, or, when they came to be investigated, it was found that they had never sold quite so many copies as they ought. The first thorough tabulation of figures sent a hundred or so books to The Hospital for a complete examination and going over.

A good title is a work of genius. I have no hesitancy in saying that, for it is genius whether it is the inspiration of a lucky moment or the painful elaboration of a faint idea

through an hour of deep thought. I have always made the final decision as to the title of any *Little Blue Book*, but I have never confined the search for a new title entirely to my own efforts. An editor must have recourse to more than one method for achieving any desired result. Often a *Little Blue Book* sent to The Hospital would be read by two or three editorial assistants, and they would all comment on it, making suggestions. Out of that a new title would be born and given a trial.

Alice, my ten-year-old daughter, has even played her small though significant part in the birth of new titles. Children are voracious readers, and they usually read with such directness of viewpoint that they have something definite to say about what they read. They approach books with freshness, and a book must be vital and alive to hold their interest. As any writer for children knows, children make the most critical audience in the world. For example, I gave Alice a copy of *Captain Marryat's Privateersman*, which had not been going well. Perhaps people did not know what a privateersman might be. Alice did not know. Yet it was a good story, and it is still in the list because Alice said, after reading it: "It's about a seaman and battles." It was rechristened *The Battles of a Seaman*, with a marked improvement. In 1925 it sold 7,500; in 1926, 8,000; and in 1927, with the change of title, it sold 10,000 copies.

One of the first books to go into The Hospital was Theophile Gautier's *Fleece of Gold*. This amazed me; in fact, it nearly floored me. There were two good reasons why this book should be a top-notch seller. First, the author was a Frenchman—American readers have a weakness for tales

by French authors. Second, it is an excellent story, full of love interest and everything that should place it high among the stories of love and sex. But a moment's consideration of the book shows at once what is wrong. What could "fleece of gold" mean to anyone who had never heard of Gautier or his story before? Little, if anything. It suggests Greek mythology instead of modern France. Gautier's title is picturesque, even poetic, but it lacks informative value. It tells nothing whatever. A happy thought brought this title to mind: *The Quest for a Blonde Mistress*, exactly the sort of story it is. The record is, in 1925, under the old title, only 6,00; in 1926, under its new banner, this jumped almost unbelievably to 50,000!

Some skeptics will raise the objection—I know, for I have already considered it—that such retitling cheapens a book. In refutation I offer an example or two from classical literature where authors showed more precision in titling their own works. Is there any great difference between the tone of *The Quest for a Blonde Mistress* and *The Taming of the Shrew*? The latter is by William Shakespeare, unaltered. And how about *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, an accepted Shakespearean title? Such an objection vanishes into thin air when parallel examples are cited. The reason that a new title such as I gave Gautier's story seems to cheapen the book is that it is, at first, rather startling. Again, consider Balzac's *Study of a Woman*, or his *Splendors and Miseries of a Courtesan*. These titles could not be more apt. Even Gautier himself was particular and to the point in his titling of *One of Cleopatra's Nights*, a title that cannot be improved upon.

Then there was Moliere's play, *Les Precieuses Ridicules*. For a long time this was in the *Little Blue Books* under the French title, with the name of Moliere to recommend the book. The French title was bad for another reason—it intimated to some readers that the whole play was in French. By a happy chance the best possible English title was hit upon for this book: *Ridiculous Women*. This conveys the idea exactly: comedy and irony are both suggested; I do not think this play has ever been given a better English title. Something like *The Highbrow Ladies* is usually used, but I don't like that. It is rather too pompous, it sounds "genteel." But *Ridiculous Women* connotes the whole spirit of the play—and it sells the book. Under the French title, as the list grew in variety, this book dropped to almost zero. The new title raised it to better than 10,000 annually.

Another Moliere play, *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, was also a problem. A lame attempt was made to make use of *The Nobody Who Apes Nobility*, but this was awkward and wholly inadequate. There is no real idea in this title that can be grasped at a glance. You can figure it out, to but sure, but what reader is going to regard titles as riddles? The right title for this book, in modern American slang, is *The Show-Off*; and that is what it is now being called. In yearly sales it has jumped from slightly above zero to almost 10,000.

At one time in the history of the *Little Blue Books*, as I have said, little attention was paid to titles. The enterprise was growing so fast that the most important thing was to get new books into print—the public demanded books, and before its choice was spread over so wide a range of sub-

jects—before it had a real choice to make, in other words—the title did not matter so much so long as the book was a good one. But as soon as choice became paramount in making out an order for *Little Blue Books*, the title leaped into first-place significance. Now the title is considered from every possible angle before a *Little Blue Book* is put on sale.

In those early days two volumes of the collected essays of Llewelyn Powys were put into the series. I was glad to do this—the essays are eminently readable and I was sure *Little Blue Book* readers would enjoy them. And I let Mr. Powys give his own titles to the books. So the books appeared as *Honey and Gall*, and *Cupbearers of Wine and Hellebore*. This was very pretty, and appealed to a few readers—but only a few, in fact, almost none. Something had to be done to save these essays from an untimely death. They are now called, with fair success, *Studies in Mystic Materialism* and *A Book of Intellectual Rowdies*. The first sold 15,000 in 1926; the second 11,000. For those who may like them, the older and less informative titles are still on the covers of the books.

A similar poetic mistake was made when several volumes of Jack London's stories were put into the series. One book, because I fancied the phrase from one of the stories, was called *Tales of the White Silence*. This seemed to me particularly expressive. I really thought the book would go. Of course, the name of Jack London carried the book satisfactorily, but still it seemed to me that it should do better. At last I was forced to give up my fanciful preference for the "white silence," and now I think that the newer title is really the better. It is: *Tales of the Big Snows*. The difference in expres-

siveness is instantly apparent.

It is really amazing what the change of a word may do. The mere insertion of a word often works wonders with a book. Take the account of that European mystery of intrigue and political romance, which Theodore M. R. von Keler did for me under the title of *The Mystery of the Iron Mask*. This title was fair. It certainly tells what the book is about. But there is something aloof about it. It may, says the reader to himself, be another one of those poetic titles. It may fool me, he thinks, and so he bewares. But I changed it to *The Mystery of the Man in the Iron Mask*, and now there can be no question, for the record is 30,000 against 11,000 copies per year. Two other "slight" additions come to mind. Victor Hugo's drama, *The King Enjoys Himself* (*Rigoletto*; translated by Maurice Samuel), and Zorilla's, the Spanish Shakespeare's, *None Beneath the King* (translated by Isaac Goldberg) were both rather sick—8,000 for the first and only 6,000 for the second. In 1927, lo and behold, the miraculous cure of title-changing brought 34,000 sales for *None Beneath the King Shall Enjoy This Woman*, and 38,000 for *The Lustful King Enjoys Himself! Snatched from the grave!* Then there was Whistler's lecture, fairly well known under the title *Ten o'Clock*. But readers of *Little Blue Books* are numbered by at least ten thousand for each title yearly. Due to the concentrated interest shown in self-education and self-improvement this helpful lecture on art should be read widely—following this reasoning, the proper explanatory title evolved into *What Art Should Mean to You*. Readers are more interested in finding out what art should mean to them than in discovering what secret

meaning may lie behind such a phrase as “ten o’clock.” In 1925 the old title sold less than 2,000; in 1927, the sales, stimulated by The Hospital’s service mounted to 9,000.

Francis Bacon’s *Apothegms*, under that name in the *Little Blue Books*, was one of my cripples. Here is a great book by a great philosopher. And yet, so listed, it was practically at a standstill—less than 2,000 copies yearly when I came to investigate it. What is wrong with it? The fault lies on its face—the average person, even many a person above the average, does not understand what the word “apothegm” means. I know I had to look it up in the dictionary the first time I came upon it. Many people do not like to go to the dictionary: they prefer to pick up their new words in conversation, where the relation of one word to another will indicate something of its meaning. This is not commendable, perhaps, but it happens to be true. Not one person in a thousand knows what “apothegm” means.

People are not afraid of meaty reading, of a substantial reading diet. I can prove that. But they fight shy of the utterly strange. A book by the same Francis Bacon entitled *The New Atlantis* was doing a little better than 7,000 yearly—not satisfactory, but on the brink of success, so to speak. There is hope when a book gets some distribution, even if it is less than one has hoped. But when it practically stands still the burden is unnecessarily heavy.

This collection of apothegms is a splendid book, in which a great philosopher gives several hundred brief sentences, many of them sparkling epigrams, about this thing we call life. The sentences are interesting, because they tell

us about what interests us most—life. What is an apothegm, then? Simply a terse truth. Look it up for yourself. So, taking the problem in hand, I remedied the situation by retitling the book: *Terse Truths About the Riddle of Life*. The following year (1926) this book climbed to a sales total of a few copies over 9000, which is worth selling, I am happy to say.

Robert Louis Stevenson belongs, to a large extent, with those accepted literary giants—in the sense of world fame, for I do not propose to be critical here—who should not be altered. Certainly I have proved by the success of the pocket edition of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* that this is a title that cannot be altered with impunity or benefit. Even the movies kept this title, which is a good sign of its widespread effectiveness. But with *Will o' the Mill* and *Markheim* (both in one volume) a question arises. Are these two stories sufficiently familiar to make them desirable books to read? The sales record of this book indicated that they were not. The latter story is a psychological study of a murderer and his crime yet the man's name alone does not convey this at all. It might be any sort of story from the title as Stevenson had it. I called it *Markheim's Murder*, which gives it a definite classification, and from practically a cipher the book leaped to 7,000 copies annually. It is still shaky, as you see! Perhaps something more drastic should be done to it.

Rudyard Kipling has several good titles of his own that I should not venture to touch. What could be better, for example, than *Without Benefit of Clergy*? Certain of his poems, too, are so famous that they are clamored for as they are: *The Vampire*, *Mandalay*, and *Gunga Din*. Some of the stories, as

The Man Who Would Be King, go very well also. But there is a lure in these stories that is not expressed in the title, and that I have no way of suggesting except by the title. By this I mean the fascinating adventures of the British soldiery in India—those unforgettable episodes of happy-go-lucky army life. So I am experimenting with some titles like *Tales of British Soldiers in India* and *Stories of Army Life*.

It seemed to me that there could be no reason why Oscar Wilde's *Pen, Pencil and Poison* should not sell. That title appeals to me. But it apparently does not appeal to the public at large, as the records of this book showed. And anyone can see, now that the change has been made, that *The Story of a Notorious Criminal* is much more likely to aid the wide distribution of the book. It is another good example of the change from the poetic to the practical, for from 5,000 annually the book rose in 1926 to 15,800 copies!

A number of definite tendencies in titling have come up in this experimenting with what banner a book shall go forth under. All of this is, of course, a revealing commentary on the reading tastes of the American public. There is, for example, the yearning for the truth about things. Americans want to know the truth, even if it hurts — and if you tell them that you are giving them the truth they will at least believe you long enough to read what you offer them under that name. Take, for example, Dr. Arthur J. Cramp's *Patent Medicine and the Public Health*. This is a purely academic, professional-thesis sort of title. It indicates what the book is about, but it suggests nothing of controversy, nothing that anyone ought to know. Yet *The Truth About Patent Medicine*

tells the reader that there is some sort of exposure here, something which he may owe it to himself to find out about. This book sold scarcely 3,000 copies in 1925; in 1926, being the "Truth," it did a trifle better than 10,000 copies. That is why *The Truth About New York's Chinatown* is a better title than simply *New York's Chinatown*. That is why, too, such a book as *The Truth about Los Angeles* is read throughout the United States.

There is another magical word in titles. It is *Life*. The American reading public of today is intensely interested in real life. Witness the success of the confession type of magazine, which tells in loud language that it is offering the truth about real lives. Witness the dominance of love and sex books over all others in the sales record of *Little Blue Books* as a whole; sex is undoubtedly the most intimately connected with everyday living of any subject you could name. The interest in life is clearly evidenced by the repeated selections of books which have that word in the title. There was Charles J. Finger's book entitled *Addison and His Times*. This title is too scholastic: it sounds too much like a thesis written before graduation from a university. But London *Life in Addison's Time* indicates that the book may be at least interesting. Before the change I moved this book, as a matter of fact, only in complete sets; now it squeezes by with 7,000 per year.

Dan Hennessy's *On the Bum* never was a bad seller. As a matter of fact, it is one of the steadiest selling books in the entire list. But the addition of *Sketches of Tramp Life* to the more figurative title helped it even more. There is even one

of my books, *The Color of Life*. My own books in the *Little Blue Book* series are on the whole poor sellers, as I have more than once candidly admitted. But this book, since it has so good a title and its contents, I venture to hope, live up to it—is a very fair seller as compared with the others. And such combinations, of course, as *Love Tales of Italian Life*, *French Tales of Passion and Cruelty*, and Boccaccio's *Tales of Love and Life* cannot be beaten.

The ever-present tendency of the public toward self-improvement has naturally influenced many a title in the series. I have already mentioned one or two examples. People want to improve their conversation, their vocabulary, or they simply want general principles of self-improvement, as in John Cowper Powys' lecture, *The Secret of Self-Development*. Arthur Schopenhauer is a forbidding name to the uninitiated. His *Art of Controversy* never did go very well. But now it is called *How to Argue Logically* and has earned its permanent place in the list. This is another one of those "naughts" which leaped suddenly, through the magic of words, to 30,000 copies per year. The "how to" beginning for a title is still another magical catchphrase. Piano-playing is all right, but notice how much more dynamic and compelling *How to Play the Piano* is, or even, if there is space to print it, *How to Teach Yourself to Play the Piano*.

The book on conversation has an interesting anecdote to be told about it—at first it was simply Thomas De Quincey's *Essay on Conversation*. When this book came into The Hospital past experience showed immediately that it ought to be called *How to Improve Your Conversation*. But De

Quincey's essay is a bit too studied and scholarly to be offered to an unsuspecting public under that title, at least by itself. It is still in the book, but half of the book is now taken up with Lloyd E. Smith's portion, written especially to fit the title *How to Improve Your Conversation*. That is one of the inside stories of how one popular *Little Blue Book* was born! Arthur Schopenhauer's *Art of Controversy*, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, is more practical and did not need such a preamble.

An entirely separate field of title experimentation was opened in the general classification of biography. "Biography" seeming to be less colorful, I have been trying out "Personalities" as a catalogue division. My experience has been that names alone, even if world-famous, are not sufficient to sell *Little Blue Books*. It appears that the bookbuyer is one of the laziest persons on earth when he examines a catalogue of books. He may know perfectly well that Leo Tolstoy is a Russian story-writer, but he refuses to identify that name for himself. I know that this is so because I used to offer Garnett's *Life of Tolstoy*, and I am able to compare it with the records of the book under its present title: *Tolstoy, Russian Novelist*. It is 2,500 against the present average of 6,500 copies per year. The book is not yet secure—but the change in sales is nevertheless significant.

The general rule in titling biographies has been to name the person and identify him. Fanciful titles will not do at all for five-cent accounts of the life and works of various prominent people. The prospective reader must be reminded, in so many words, of precisely whom the book is about; and, if

possible, the title must also tell the book's particular bias or motivating thesis. Thus, Joseph McCabe's biography of Ingersoll is called *Robert G. Ingersoll, Benevolent Agnostic*. You can see at a glance that this is ever so much more effective than simply *Life of Ingersoll*.

There are cases where the simpler and more obvious title will sell a biography. This is usually true of only what may be called "standard" biographies, however. I refer to *Life of Jesus*, by Ernest Renan, *Life of Lincoln*; *Life of Napoleon*, etc.

Often the biographical titles require a great deal of experimenting. When the *Little Blue Books* were young, I put in as No. 10 in the series that delightful essay by Francis Thompson on Percy Bysshe Shelley. That jewel of literature always seemed worthy of perpetuation to me, and I wanted to have it read by thousands of people. I cannot say that my hope for it has been fulfilled, although the book is still in print and available. But I am trying it under the title of *Shelley, Idealistic Dreamer*. If I called him a poet I hardly think that would help: few people are compellingly interested in the life of a poet. But Shelley was more than a poet, and if I can only get people to buy Thompson's essay I'm confident each one will feel that it is five cents well spent. At any rate, the new title does four times as well as the old—8,000 against 2,000 copies annually.

A classic example of failure to comprehend the man a book is about is the *Life of Barnum*. When Charles J. Finger wrote this book for me he offered the forceful title: *Barnum, the Man Who Lured the Herd*. Unfortunately, viewing the mat-

ter in the light of my later experience, I am afraid the public thought that Barnum was either an eccentric cow puncher or a rustler of cattle! Consequently, this book was sent to The Hospital, and it came forth with the brand-new appellation of *P. T. Barnum and His Circus*. This is not only much better, but it tells exactly what the book is about. It jumped the book from 4,000 copies in 1925, to 8,000 in 1926.

Martin Luther is another case in point. A life of Luther without any other recommendation did not appeal to readers anywhere near to the same extent as does *Martin Luther and Protestantism*. On the other hand, it might seem that a life of Benjamin Franklin could succeed very well with such a name alone. But of late years it has become desirable to accentuate the human qualities of our great men, and that is probably the reason that I have found *Benjamin Franklin, Printer and Statesman* slightly less popular than *Franklin, Lover of Life*.

I would have gambled a great deal on Clement Wood's biography of Casanova, especially since it was deliberately entitled *Casanova and His Loves*. The universal popularity of the "sex books," so called, would seem to indicate that this book on Casanova should be automatically a best seller. It did not work out that way. The diagnosis of the failure was that people did not know the name Casanova, and so they did not care a nickel's worth about whom he loved or did not love. There was a mild revolution in the sales record of this book when it was advertised as *Casanova, History's Greatest Lover*! Witness the figures—8,000 before the change: a yearly sale of 22,000 after it! A similar example is Ralph

Oppenheim's *Life of George Sand*; it is now called, with a gain of 6,000 copies a year, *The Love Life of a Frenchwoman*. Which proves, if anything, that the public would rather buy a book about an unknown Frenchwoman, when reminded that she is French, than one about someone whose name suggests neither nationality nor familiarity.

Scientific titles have also needed elucidation and popularization from time to time. Science has the reputation, with the general public, of being very dry reading. A few magazines, featuring the strange and bizarre, particularly in mechanical inventions, have managed to make science commercially popular as reading matter. But among books there is still great progress to be made. The "outlines" did a great deal to remove the stigma, and now the "stories" of this and that phase of knowledge are helping us all to progress in the humanizing of scientific knowledge. In passing, I might say that the titles of the individual numbers of my Key to Culture series have been carefully chosen with this point in mind.

There has always been a market for books which make things plain, such as *Evolution Made Plain*. Then I tried "introductions" to this and that, and scientific subjects "for beginners," but neither of these variations of title has been quite so successful as "the facts you should know" caption. An important secret of successful titling is to be imperative, to insist in the very name of the book that the reader should have it! Now *Life Among the Ants* was much improved in its distribution by extending it thus: *Facts You Should Know About Life Among the Ants*, or sometimes, when less space is available, *Fascinating Facts About Ant Life*. I took a tip from the

“Fact Compendiums” of some years ago, and from the “Handy Books of Facts” which are still commercially profitable reference books. The public of today wants facts, and it likes to be told that it is getting facts.

But there is no general rule applicable to all cases. There is always room for experimentation, and I have changed a title of one book as many as half a dozen times. What works in one place is just as likely to be a failure in connection with some other book. For example, *Facts About the Moon* does not have nearly the selling value of *Is the Moon a Dead World?* The latter has romance in it, adventurous suggestion in it, and all the force of the continual controversy about whether or not there is life on other globes besides the earth. The same characteristics may be discerned in this title: *Solving the Mystery of the Comets*. Maynard Shipley, the author of the last-named two books, deserves a great deal of credit for his work as a popularizer of such subjects. . . .

While discussing titles, I should give some answer to the question sometimes put to me whether the length of a title makes any difference. I am not able to give figures to bear out any of my opinions on this point, and I can only present my own ideas—though these ideas are born, even if unconsciously, from constant experience with the publishing and selling of *Little Blue Books*. There are, too, some definite strictures determined by the nature of the *Little Blue Books* themselves, and by mechanical limitations as well as advertising costs.

First of all, I state flatly that there is a great deal of nonsense in the notion that brevity is the soul of wit or anything

else. In naming certain commodities, such as cigarettes, an attempt has been made to use a short name that will easily roll off the tongue. Thus, "Camel" was decided upon, no doubt, with the idea that the man who wants a package of Camels will step into the shop and say one word: "Camels." That is highly theoretical, and anyone knows it is not proved by what actually happens. The man goes in and delivers a lengthy speech something like this: "I want a package of Camels," or, "Give me a pack of Camels," or, "Fork over some Camels." The human animal is incapable of being so brief and wordless as to say merely: "Camels."

As applied to books, it is necessary to consider other things. If the book is going to be given plenty of advertising space the title does not make so much difference. Descriptive phrases, catchwords, slogans, sales talk, and so on, can be plastered all over the advertising and even on the jacket of the book. The title sinks into obscurity, except when ordering the book or asking for it in a bookshop. Even then the purchaser is likely to use some advertising phrase in lieu of the title, and the clerk who handles the order is expected to be up on his stuff sufficiently to interpret the customer's jargon and get the right book for him with the least possible delay.

I recall a case in point from my own experience. By stuffing circulars in outgoing packages of *Little Blue Books* listing some carefully selected clothbound books, usually picked to appeal to readers of *Little Blue Books*, I sell a surprising number of more expensive books in the run of a year. *Havelock Ellis*, the recent biography by Isaac Goldberg, was one of

these, especially since Goldberg is known to *Little Blue Book* readers. On the circular advertising this book, however, the headline was used: "The man who debunked sex!" Beneath this catchline the title of the book and the author were given in large type—but the name Havelock Ellis, without explanation, meant little to many people. Several orders came in for the book entitled *The Man Who Debunked Sex!* Now to me that is a better title for the book than the man's name.

But it can never be decided once and for all that a short title or a long title is the best. It is seldom a question of length. The real difference is one of appeal—of what the title tells, of whether it gives a clear idea of the nature and contents of the book. As I have said, if there is space to add a description of the book, the title matters much less than if the book must be sold by its title and author alone.

I think of Will Durant's *Story of Philosophy*. Here is a title in three words, or with the definite article, four. This book could have a shorter title, for it could be called *Philosophy*. Yet the difference between the short and the long title is not one of words: the longer one clearly is better because it suggests a continuous, interesting narrative (story). To go to the other extreme, this book could have a longer title, for it could be called *A Comprehensive Survey of Various Systems of Philosophy from Antiquity to the Present*. Here, the difference is again not one of words: the shorter title is better because it avoids any suggestion of pedantry, and emphasizes that philosophy as a whole has a story behind it which can be told in a fascinating and informative way. The effectiveness of titles cannot be measured with a yardstick!

As for the *Little Blue Books*, the cost of advertising per agate line (the space occupied by a line of agate or 5 1/2 point type [14 lines to an inch] set a column wide, the unit of measure in advertising space) has always been an important consideration. Now there are 1,260 *Little Blue Book* titles. If all these are listed in one advertisement, and each book is allotted one agate line, for the listing alone 1,260 agate lines are required! In this case the titles of the books in this advertisement are automatically limited to the number of words that can be set in

I have indicated many of my conclusions—the lessons I have learned—from my experimentation with titles. I pointed out that there are magical words like Truth, Life, Love, How to, Facts You Should Know, etc. I think I have made it clear that titles with hazy poetic haloes will not work, and that titles which state the plain facts about a book are in almost all cases the best.

In general, my own rules for titling a book are few, but they are much to the point. Particular books often demand particular treatment, but there are one or two lessons of general application that I have learned at some cost, and that I am glad to pass on to others for whatever they may be worth. For even though a book will have a large and lurid blurb, and plenty of bolstering with advertising space, I see no harm in giving it a title which will carry it alone if necessary. If the title does describe the book it will help to eliminate confusion in the minds of prospective readers, and clarify for them just the boor; they may decide to buy.

In that last sentence is my first rule: Make the title de-

scribe the book. The title should contain some dominant word which clearly indicates the subject of the book. If it is biography or criticism, I think the title should also indicate what the man stood for or what the matter criticized chiefly represents. If human nature can be put into the title, well and good. Every effort should be made to tie up the book with real life, or with the average person's desire for romance, adventure, and fun.

My second rule is: Make the title as distinctive as possible, so as to compel attention and awaken interest. I subordinate this to the descriptive requirement. But I have a notion that many publishers put my second rule first—they seem to prefer the bizarre and startling to the suggestive and revealing. But by putting this first it is necessary to add the description on the flap of the jacket or in the body of the advertisement. I cannot do this, so I am obliged to consider the description of first importance, and distinction second.

In a series such as the *Little Blue Books*, description can be given first importance for another reason. Any publisher is aware that there is a constant demand for certain books of information, education, and such. That is to say, there is a fairly constant interest in a manual of Parliamentary Law. Several of these are always on the market, differing chiefly in price. There is a *Little Blue Book* on Parliamentary Law, and here the title is descriptive only. It is not necessary for it to be distinctive, since any attempt to distinguish this *Little Blue Book* manual from other manuals is obviously superfluous—the distinction lies in the fact that this is a *Little Blue Book*

for five cents, whereas the others are bigger books costing much more money. The first rule only is necessary in titling such books.

As a final word, I might hint in a loud whisper: Take a leaf out of the page of the movie titler's ritual. Titles of books and stories are nearly always changed for the motion picture version—due undoubtedly to the necessity to make a much wider appeal. Allow me to ignore the merits of the photoplays themselves, and cite two of the titles as examples. John Barrymore began work on François Villon, but this was released under the much more popular title of *The Beloved Rogue*. Or consider that other Barrymore film, from Antoine François Prevost's *Marion Lescaut* (which would have been a total failure as a movie title), which was called *When a Man Loves*. Considered merely as titles, these are both more descriptive and distinctive than the originals.