



# The MOTHER

By DAVID H. KELLER, M.D.

Illustrator ADKINS

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

**D***URING the thirties, when he was a regular contributor to the science fiction magazines, David H. Keller, M.D. was twice voted the most popular science fiction writer in America, by a readership poll conducted on two different occasions by WONDER STORIES. This popularity derived from the deep understanding of human nature he displayed in his treatment of characters as well as a high degree of originality and ingenuity in plotting. The stories were related with an economy of words which made the style appear deceptively simple. The Mother was written during the period of his finest out-*

put, at the time he was writing such memorable pieces as *Life Everlasting*, *Unto Us a Child is Born*, *No More Tomorrows*, *The Dead Women* and other literary gems which helped secure his reputation. A similarity in the development of its plot to *Unto Us a Child is Born* prevented early publication of *The Mother*, so when youthful fan magazine editor Robert A. Madle wrote Dr. Keller requesting he donate a story, he received *The Mother* along with another short story titled *Valley of Bones*. Dr. Keller wrote Madle that he could have whichever one he preferred. Bob Madle selected *The Mother* which he published in the Jan.-Feb., 1938 issue of *FANTASCIENCE DIGEST*, a hektographed periodical with a circulation under 60. To his chagrin, *Valley of Bones* was accepted by *WEIRD TALES* magazine after he returned it!

Time has vindicated his selection, however, for despite the years that has passed. *The Mother* still retains the full warmth of humanity and adroitness of presentation that are typical of Dr. Keller's best work. Its previous distribution was so limited that this printing is virtually its first.

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THE young man and woman met for the first time in the office of the Chairman of the N.P.C.B.

The National Population Control Board was in many ways the most important unit in the government. It was no accident that Caleb Carlson was its Chairman. For many years he had devoted his waking moments to an intensive study of Eugenics and sleeping hours to dreams of a better race. He had lived to see the time when the nation's welfare had forced the formation of a Board which had complete power over the production of children.

On his desk were two folders. In front of his desk sat the two

young people. He opened the folders slowly and arranged the papers and then started to speak to them in a kindly, but low and monotonous tone.

"I have sent for you today because there is a matter of great importance to discuss with you. This summer you both graduated from our National University with honors. For years our Board has been following your progress. I have before me a complete record of your lives from the day of your birth. You probably do not know it, but you were born on the same day.

"I not only have your personal histories, but also your family records. Your relative ancestors for three hundred years have

been famous in the history of our nation. They have contributed Governors of the States, Presidents of the Universities, famous scientists, theologians, prominent welfare workers and two Presidents of the Nation. For three centuries there has not been a criminal, alcoholic, epileptic, or abnormal of any kind in either family.

"Your families were destroyed, like so many families, soon after your birth by the Mysterious Disease. You have studied that period in history in your college courses. You know that in a few months we lost over 70% of our population. You two were among the survivors, and became wards of the nation.

"As you know, the great loss of life forced the creation of the board which I head. We felt that since there was bound to be a great reduction in births, the time had come to have better babies. Our new national marriage license law gave the husband and wife the right to have one child. The permission to have more children was only granted to those who showed by the development of their one child that they were fit to be parents of more.

"Naturally our population continued to drop in numbers, but increase in health, intelligence and physical vigor. But we have felt that so far no one has shown

the ability to create families of outstanding brilliancy, such as were the families you two came from.

WE need leaders, powerful, dominant, remarkable men and women such as represented Putnam, and Barnes families for the last three hundred years. For years we have felt this need and for an equal number of years we have hoped that someday we could find the proper answer to the question of how these leaders could be given to the nation.

"That is why you are here today. You have never met. Though you are both graduates of the National University, one was educated in the Pacific Sector and the other in the Atlantic Sector of this University. As you know, you were both trained with the idea that love and marriage were social factors that were not to be considered till you were through with your education.

"We want you to marry, and in the next twenty years give the nation as many children as possible. The records show that twin births have been frequent in both families. You are now twenty years old. By the time you are nearly forty you can become the parents of at least thirty children.

"That will be your life work. The nation has cared for you in

every way since your parents died, and from this was the program formulated for you. Now have you any questions?"

"I have several," sharply replied John Barnes. "How do you know the young lady wants to marry me? How could we support a family of that size? How about my training as an expert in the Conservation of Natural Resources?"

Caleb Carlson smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I think these are all proper questions. In regard to the lady's willingness to marry, perhaps we had better leave that to her to answer. As far as supporting the children, that will be the happy task of the government. On your future home in Michigan you will find a bird sanctuary of three thousand acres of land of every kind. There are many acres of virgin timber, lakes, and swamps. Animals, fish, and birds live there in great variety. You are to study their lives and habits and write on proper methods of conservation. It is your hobby. You will be provided with all the necessities of life and many luxuries.

"Your future wife, Caroline Putnam, has specialized in cottage industry and feminine handiwork. We have selected a library of five hundred volumes dealing with every form of handcraft known in America, since its set-

tlement. We would like to have her spare the time to teach the subject to a very few, carefully selected young women who will in their turn organize schools in various parts of our country. It is believed that the brilliancy of our feminine minds in the past was due to the intensive use of their hands in sewing, knitting and weaving. She will have ample time because she will not be asked to care for her children. A large home is being built for them where they will be housed and cared and educated from the day of their births. The best leaders in medicine, sociology, and education will be entrusted with their future welfare. We hope to raise to adult life all of your children, but we are asking you to assume no responsibility. In fact, we feel that they will grow into better leaders of our future society if they are raised in this way rather than with their parents. They will be wards of the Nation.

"Your future welfare and security will be provided for in every way. From the time you marry and move into your Michigan home, you can be assured that for the rest of your life you will have no financial problems. Even your social life is provided for. If you have a few good friends you can have them come and live with you. You may play bridge, golf or tennis."

"In some ways the future is an attractive one," whispered the young man, "but we still do not know what Miss Caroline Putnam thinks about it."

"Suppose I leave you to talk it over."

The old man slowly walked out of the room.

JOHN BARNES turned to Caroline Putnam and said one word.

"Well."

She smiled.

"A most unusual proposition, but it seems we are living in an unusual age. I have always wanted three things, a husband, a home and babies. For years you have been my dream man. I have a scrap book filled with everything I could find out about you. That is that. As for the home? It seems to be ideal in many ways. And the babies? Not just what I longed for, but at the same time we do owe the nation something."

"It is all very strange," commented the man. "For the last five years I also kept a scrap-book and in it are newspaper pictures and clippings and my personal comments and hopes concerning Caroline Putnam. I have met many girls, but you were the only one I ever wanted to marry, and I simply know you by reputation. Perhaps all this is fate. We could start a family library with those two

scrap books and a new book for each of the children. They would send us pictures, and their school reports and Intellectual Quotient tests, and thus year by year the library would grow. We may live to see our children form a new social order leading the men in every way worth while. I have given a great deal of thought to babies of birds and fishes and little wild animals, but I never anticipated having babies of my own. I also am not sure of some parts of the program, but perhaps the men who have worked it all out know more than we do about the wisdom of it all. What shall we say to the Chairman of the N.P.C.B.?"

"I think we better say 'YES'."

"It will take courage and sacrifice on your part."

"Yes, but I will have much of what I wanted and, after all, a woman cannot have everything, and I will have you, and now that I have seen you and heard you talk, I know that many of my dreams can come true."

John Barnes walked to the door, opened it, and asked Caleb Carlson to come in.

"Our answer is 'YES'", he said with a smile.

"Good. I almost knew it would be. The scrap books worked."

"What do you know about the scrap books?" asked Caroline.

"Everything, my dear child.

We have been furnishing you for years the material you put into them, but that was a part of the plan. We wanted you to know and love each other before you met. Now suppose we sign the papers and take the first plane to Michigan. Your new home is ready for you in every last detail. Some of your friends are waiting for you there. From them you can select those you wish to share your life with."

TEN years later John Barnes came in from the woods, bathed and put on his flannels and hunted up his wife. At last he found her where he thought she would be, in her private library. She was at her desk surrounded by scrap books, papers, pictures, and paste pot.

"Busy?" he asked, kissing her.

"Always, but not too much to stop and talk to you. A lot of mail came from the home today and I am putting it into these baby books. There are ten of them now. Think of that! Three sets of twins and four solitaires. Look at those ten pictures on the wall. Do you remember when there were only two there of the first little twins? They are older now, and we have any number of changing pictures in the baby books, but just ten little baby pictures on the wall. I like to think of them just as babies. I saw them once, kissed them and

said goodbye to them, but they will always be my babies. Somehow I cannot think of them growing up."

"Four years ago," replied her husband, "I found a baby beaver with his paw caught under a log. I rescued it, but the paw was ruined. I saw that beaver today. He is a big fellow and has a family. I think he knew me; at least he sat still long enough to enable me to identify him. Beavers grow up; foxes and deer and birds and fishes grow up. Do babies grow up?"

"They must. Do you ever feel that you would like to see our babies? Do you ever dream about them?"

"Sometimes."

"When you awoke crying?"

"Yes. I thought I was there, and little Angelica, the little one was crying, and the nurses and doctors could not find out what was making her cry. But I knew, and I tried to tell them, but they did not understand and when I tried to make her stop, a great chasm came between us and there I was on one side, and the little one on the other side, and that was when I awoke."

"Let's go and golf!"

"Sorry, but the doctor suggested that I had better not golf for the next two months."

"Well, how about a rubber of bridge?"

"In an hour. I really must fin-

ish Maud's book. Bring it up to date. Then I will come down to the card room. I am really very happy, John. You have been very wonderful."

TEN years brought 10 more babies. Magdalena at one end past eighteen and almost through college. Rose and Philip at the other end, the last of the celebrated Barnes twins. Twenty baby pictures on the wall. Twenty large scrap books in the book case, with two more of John and Caroline. The parents were twenty years older, but did not look it. Time had aged them very, very gently. John came in one evening later than usual. All that day he had been watching, through his field glasses, a pair of American eagles feeding their young ones.

The butler met him at the door.

"There is a radiogram for you, Mr. Barnes," he said softly. Your wife opened it and read it and then said that I should give it to you, and you were to meet her in her private library."

"Anything wrong?"

"I am afraid so."

Barnes took the envelope. He looked at it, but did not open it. Then, holding it in his left hand, he walked to the little library which, for twenty years, belonged to Caroline. She was at her desk and the desk was

cleared, except for one baby book. She was bent over the desk, her face buried in her arms, silent, motionless. The man walked over to the desk and looked at the book before him. On one side was the picture of a young, rather beautiful woman. Under it, in his wife's handwriting,

"MAGDALENA PUTNAM ENTERED THE SENIOR CLASS OF THE NATIONAL COLLEGE WITH HIGHEST HONORS."

The opposite page was blank. The man took the radiogram out of the envelope, and read,

"Mr. John Barnes:

Your daughter Magdalena killed in an airplane wreck today. The National College extends deepest sympathy to Mrs. Barnes and yourself.

Signed,

Joseph George, Pres."

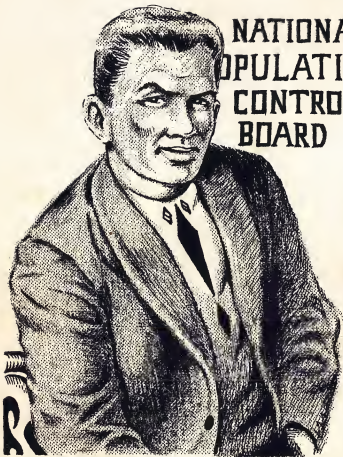
Barnes looked at the radiogram and then at his wife. The letter trembled in his hand, but his wife remained motionless. He slowly reached over, opened the paste pot, and securely fastened the message on the blank page. Then he closed the book and replaced it on the shelf. Then he dropped one hand on his wife's shoulder.

"Perhaps," he said very slowly, stopped and started again. "Perhaps we might adopt a baby."

The woman started to cry.

THE END

# NATIONAL POPULATION CONTROL BOARD



*"In a few months, we lost 70% of our population."  
(see *The Mother*)*

