Malthus had ventured the hypothesis that food supply would increase in arithmetic progression only, while population would grow geometrically. Since his time predictions about the effect of particular variables on the growth of the world's population as a whole and on particular countries have become ever more numerous and accurate. In 1928 Sir George Handley Knibs published his study of "The Earth's Population Possibilities and the Consequences of the Present Rate of Increase of the Earth's Inhabitants" under the striking title of The Shadow of the World's Future, since he believed that "the menace of the present rate of growth of those inhabitants is most serious."

In our days a heated discussion is raging between the Neo-Malthusians and their opponents about the danger or opportunities of a growing world population. While Voigt and Osborne have stressed that Our Plundered Planet will not be able to support a population double or treble that of today, others have been more hopeful in view of the achievements of chemistry and scientific farming. The new findings about photosynthesis, i.e. the growth of organic substance in living green plants under the influence of light, they assure us, will reveal the function of the catalysts that nature uses for this process. The chemist of tomorrow will be in a position to produce synthetically these catalysts. Thus he will be able to create foodstuffs directly out of the cheapest raw materials. Hence we are assured that the world's production of foodstuffs could be more than doubled without excessive effort. Indeed, one author goes so far as to expect science and technology to produce ample food and clothing for a population of no less than 18 billion people. Moreover, human fertility is said to decrease with the intake of greater quantities of proteins. Thus the population problem, so President Conant of Harvard said, will be in hand before another 100 years have elapsed, for biochemists will provide us with cheap harmless anti-fertility compounds. Dr. Conant also anticipates a change in the negative attitude of many religious leaders of the world towards birth control.

As long as this great controversy is not resolved, we can only vaguely gess the number of men in the future. Provided the world's population now numbering 2,4 billion continues to grow at the present rate, it will have reached the figure of 18 billion by the year 2160. For the immediate future, the World Health Organization predicts a total population of 4 billion by the year 2049, while another forecast speaks of 3,8 billion by the year 2000. In Europe, the quantitative point of gravity of the population is expected to shift eastward beyond the Warsaw-Belgrade line, owing to the decline of population in Western Europe and the growth of population in the Soviet Union. By 1970 Russia is expected to harbor around 250 million people within its pre-1939 borders. That even any population trend prediction is to be taken with a grain of salt, is shown by the recent increase in the population of the United States, surpassing