According to a research chemist, the potential life span of man has not been approached. The utilization of human organs to the maximum will mean an average life span of 120 years. The famous biologist, J.B.S. Haldane, anticipates that, within the next 500 000 years, man's life span will reach several centuries while his youth and adolescence will last 40 years, and only at the age of five will he begin to talk. At the same time the I.Q. of the common man will average that of the genius of today (All this assuming that man has not blown himself to pieces in the meantime!).

Naturally a host of science fiction writers and journalists are busy giving us a "history of the pots and pans" of the future. Among their intellectual forebears we find the medieval friar, Roger Bacon, the Renaissance artist, Leonardo da Vinci, and the late novelist-prophet, H.G. Wells. Popular science forecasting warns us that, within a decade "true ocean-hopping and transpolar bombers will be spraying quantities of highly lethal, radioactive dust or gases" or "lethal toxins, bacteria and viruses that can kill or produce disease or cause growth changes in men, animals, and plants". More pleasant to read is the announcement that, by 2000, people will wear weather-conditioning belts and lightweight or glass clothing all year around. Helicopters and rocket-propelled cars with television and ice cubes will end commuter problems.

Educators and parents are told that "by 2000, schools as we know them will have disappeared and all formal education will be completed before a child reaches his teens. The classroom of tomorrow will find children napping (this does not strike one as so revolutionary!) while learning subjects far more advanced than today's by means of the Dormiphone, which pipes in knowledge to their subconscious" (this idea was first suggested in 1932 by Aldous Huxley in his Brave New World). For 1960, Kiplinger promises that electronic controls will perform many jobs, such as regulation, transfer, and inspection operation, while industry will be experimenting with automatic factories in which men push buttons and watch instrument dials while machines do the rest. Around 1955 an experimental plant in West Milton, N.Y., will have succeeded in generating electricity, but it will take at least another decade for atomic power to replace other power sources.

III

Such forecasting of technological inventions and developments is least reliable because we may be faced with the sudden emergence of new factors and ideas. Sheer novelty may be imagined, but cannot be deduced from existing conditions or trends. Only regular patterns - cycles, linear trends, pendulum movements, etc. - can be foreseen.

This is why predictions in the study of population and business are most reliable and are to be taken more seriously. As early as 1798