

## *The Problem of World Population and Food Supply*

IT WAS 161 years ago, in 1798, that the great English economist, Thomas Robert Malthus, first promulgated, in his "Essay on the Principle of Population", what has become known as the Malthusian Doctrine. Cut down to its bare essentials, the Doctrine held that, since population increases at a faster rate than does the means of increasing subsistence, the time would come when world population would be of such magnitude that world production of food would be insufficient to meet the world's needs, and either many would starve or all would be ill-fed. Malthus and his followers argued that the biological possibilities of growth in population are of such a nature that any given population is capable, in a very short period of time, of doubling its numbers. In new countries, where the maximum is most nearly approximated, populations have actually increased 100 per cent in twenty-five years. It was admitted, of course, that there are certain checks and balances tending to reduce this rate of increase, such as war and disease. In the 19th century the doctrine tended to fall into disrepute as, on the one hand, the Industrial Revolution revealed the hitherto undreamed-of productive power of agriculture, and on the other hand the willingness of people in certain areas of the world to control the rate of birth voluntarily became apparent. Nevertheless, in parts of the world, particularly in the Far East, population has tended to keep close to the maximum permitted by the means of subsistence.

Ironically enough, the technological and scientific advances associated with and following upon the heels of the Industrial Revolution, particularly those connected with medicine, have once again focussed attention on the Malthusian Doctrine. World population is growing at a rate faster than ever before. From 1650, the population of the world took 200 years to double itself. From 1850, it took only 100 years. In the first half of this century, despite two of the world's most devastating wars, the increase in population was 60 per cent. At the present rate of growth, the population of the world will double itself during the second half of the century. The advances made in preventive and curative medicine have been mainly responsible for this increase, as diseases which once decimated mankind have been eradicated or brought under control and as man's life expectancy has been steadily advanced.

The Tenth Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which was held in Rome in November, devoted considerable attention to this problem of world population and food supply. The celebrated English historian, Arnold Joseph Toynbee, in delivering the first McDougall Memorial Lecture (inaugurated this year to commemorate the memory of Frank Lidgett McDougall, an Australian citizen and one of the leading figures in the Food and Agriculture