

## THE PILL SEEKERS

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All through history, fortunes have been amassed by those who take advantage of our weaknesses. In the last few years...advertising skill and the modern media of communication have made this capitalization on human frailty even easier. Vance Packard has made a fortune just writing about the Hidden Persuaders, the Status Seekers, and the Pyramid Climbers. There is one group of fortune-makers who, so far have escaped his pen...These are the "pill seekers"...and last year they purchased nearly fifty million bottles of prescription drugs alone.

Of course people have always sought to reduce mental miseries in one way or another through the miraculous bottle...one now do we seek it in another way...through a smaller bottle. We flock to the drugstores across the country to buy--no matter what the cost--the new, revolutionary, "nearly" harmless bottles of tranquilizers...bottles filled with pills to give us self-confidence, pills to give us self-control, or to give us just one worry-free hour and a half.

One has only to look at the facts concerning the amount of drugs being sold in this country...to see that the number of "pill seekers" is growing. More Americans are turning to tranquilizers to escape from reality. Such facts are alarming. Between 1930 and 1960, sales in across-the-counter drugs of the tranquilizer type rose from 300 million dollars to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  billion. In 1940, the average American family bought about 8 tranquilizer prescriptions per year, now that number has gone up to 12. Now one out of every 7 Americans is taking some kind of peace of mind drug regularly. All of these facts tell us one thing...that more and more Americans are turning to drugs...spending  $3\frac{1}{2}$  billion dollars a year...not to kill pain, not even to lose weight; but to cover up their problems. Not to solve them.....but to escape from them.

Why should the growing use of tranquilizers and increase in the number of "pill seekers" concern us? The answer is not simply because some of the drugs don't do their jobs.....it's not simply because tranquilizers may harm those who take them...for the reason has a much deeper significance for us. Because we are becoming a nation of pill seekers, each of us may have a label placed upon us. Irresponsible.....lazy.....complacent.

The implications are quite clear. They bear witness to the fact that a great many Americans, pressed by the commitments of a hustle-bustle 1963 environment...prefer escape to solution.

A 37 year old business man...worried about his job, and the situation in Berlin, and his teen-age daughter...turns to tranquilizers. For a few hours, he can relax. But the tension returns...and worse...the problems are still unsolved. Sure, as a debate judge, you can forget your worries and the speeches by turning to tranquilizers; but in an hour or two you find the worries and the speakers are still there. We can keep relieving the symptoms of an overpowering environment by becoming "pill seekers;" but the problems are left unsolved.

Sometimes our concern is not with our environment; but with ourselves. Some people begin to dislike what has been called "Their sweating selves." We have replaced the old familiar rule: "To thine ownself be true" for a more popular phrase..."If you can't keep your temper, let a tranquilizer keep it for you." Certainly all of us have personal inadequacies and problems. At least in the past we've tried to solve those problems. With the advent of the "pill seekers" self-improvement is no longer necessary....we don't have to solve our personal problems...because we can run from them....by taking a tranquilizer.

Unfortunately, these artificial escape devices sometimes have a more direct and obvious effect. For instance, in 1959, an airliner with 26 aboard, crashed and burned on the side of a mountain in Virginia. Twenty Six killed...cause Unknown. After an extensive investigation, it was found that the real cause involved the pilot.....he had been taking tranquilizers. Sometimes, people hurt themselves....of the 7500 people studied who had taken drugs...400 developed physical health problems from allergies to liver disorders...700 others showed emotional illness exaggerated greatly...All of these people were adversely affected because they chose an escape route to their problems. Sure all them knew full



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well that self-control is preferable from every point of view to complacency.... but what they didn't realize is that they were relying on that complacency "imposed from without by methods of chemical control....the tranquilizer."

From this point we can easily lose our sense of responsibility. We may tend to let others do our jobs, including letting the Federal Government run our lives. Our philosophy has become "I've got so much on my mind...I think that I'll just relax and maybe somebody else will do the job." So we relax... take a few more tranquilizers...and somebody else does do the job.

- To be sure...tranquilizing drugs often serve a useful purpose...Because of their use, the population of the mental hospitals has dropped in 40 states. Many institutions have now become places where calm patients in quiet wards... can more effectively submit to treatment. Surely all of us realize the gains made by the proper use of such drugs today...and I would certainly not advocate that the Federal Government ban all such drugs.

But the problems still remains...that people turn to this pseudo-solution too often...When the real need is to face reality and conquer its anxieties. Problems that face us everyday...an exam that may make or break a grade, a speech that you wait until the last night to prepare...bills that can't be paid...But we must realize that a "substitute for responsibility" in the form of a tranquilizer..can never take the place of meeting that responsibility head on. Escaping from a problem never solves it.

So, the next time you have an exam.. or judge a debate, or have bills to pay, and you feel an impelling urge to rush for your bottle of tranquilizers.. remember this...relief is much more than a swallow away....!