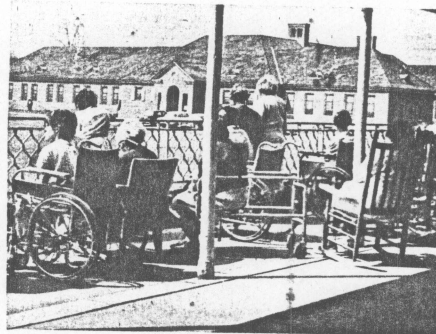




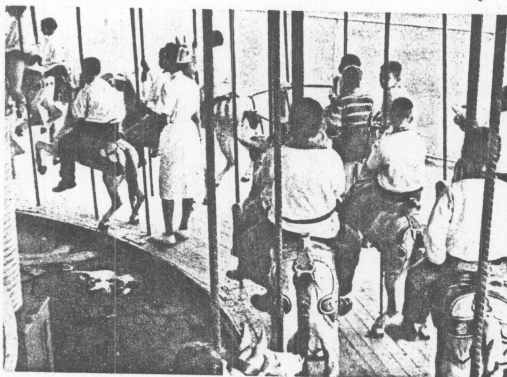
Harold H. Berman, M.D.

THE QUIET ONES

continued from page 19



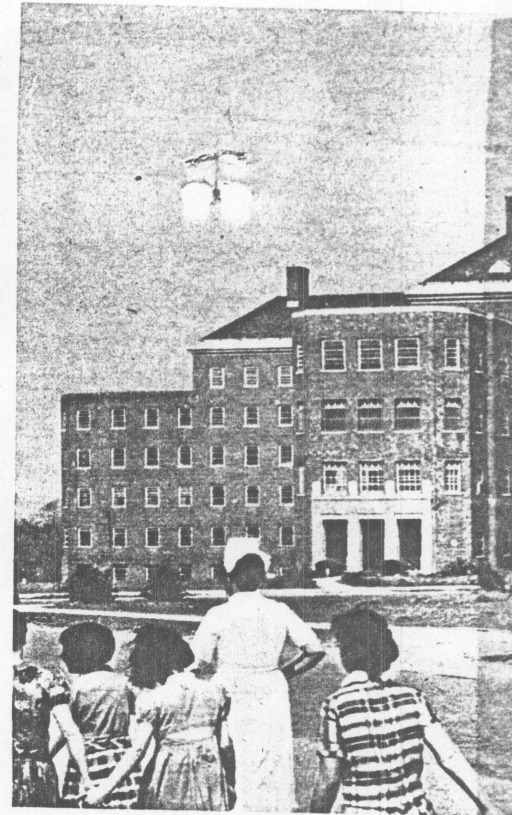
Mental retardation knows no age limits. At Willowbrook there are aged patients as well as babies.



Kids ride carousel at Willowbrook. It was bought by The Benevolent Society for Retarded Children.



Some adolescent girls are trained to take jobs on the outside. They learn sewing and homemaking.



Hospital at Willowbrook has every convenience for

deafness. It can leave a child in a state of coma, unaware of its own existence or the environment in which it grows, innocuous as a vegetable. Or it can have no outward physical signs whatsoever, leaving a child with a normal body and a permanently damaged brain.

What causes this terrible condition? Nobody knows for sure. It may begin during early pregnancy. The mother may get German measles, which invariably affects the unborn child. Difficult or unnatural delivery, postnatal illness of the child; any one of these may lead to the brain damage that once inflicted can never be repaired.

In New York State there are six institutions for mental defectives, who number close to 25,000. This figure does not include retardates in private hospitals, nor those kept at home.

At Willowbrook State School on Staten Island the population is climbing to the 6,000 mark, with severely retarded infants being admitted almost daily. At that school, as elsewhere, these children are divided into three classes: idiots with an intelligence quotient of 0-20 comprise five per cent. Imbeciles with an I.Q. of 20-49 make up 20%, and morons or the undifferentiated groups with I.Q.s. of 50-69 total 75%. Mongoloids who may belong in any of the three groups make up about 10% of all defectives.

For the children in the first two classifications, there is little that can be done except to give custodial care. But for the morons or high grades, much is being accomplished.

At Willowbrook, under Director Harold H. Berman, M.D., a neuropsychiatrist, the problems are attacked from many standpoints. No

child is considered hopeless by Berman. Treatment for infants begins in the rehabilitation center. Tots are taught to sit up, to notice other children, play with blocks, to lace and unlace shoes, dress and undress. It may take months of careful coaching by attendants and nurses to teach a child how to walk. Special shoes or braces and crutches may be needed at first. Frequently these aids are discarded as muscles are hardened and conditioned.

For severely crippled spastics there are classes in painting, drawing or making rugs. The children with normal bodies are helped by psychologists and psychiatrists. Even blind children who are mentally retarded are no longer left to sit in their dark worlds uncared for. Berman has begun classes in which these youngsters work and play together.

A wonder of Willowbrook is its brass band of about 40 boys. These young musicians, many of whom cannot read or write with any skill, have been taught to read music and they play at outdoor civic functions as well as at the annual banquet staged at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel by The Benevolent Society for Retarded Children. This latter group is a volunteer outfit which raises money to buy Willowbrook children luxuries which the state cannot afford.

A special research unit headed by Max Reiss, M.D., D. Sc., is concentrating on the role played by the endocrine glands. Their malfunctioning affects retarded children. Already several underdeveloped boys have been able to mature physically and even to improve mentally by means of hormone injections, and the study is going on daily in the hospital and classrooms.

Adolescents in the high grade range get classroom teaching as well as courses designed to restore them to the outside world, where they can be self-sustaining. They are taught how to make change, act as bus boys or messengers. Girls are taught homemaking and allied tasks.

Willowbrook, as well as other state schools, tries to interest foster parents in these higher grade children. Dr. Berman feels that a mentally retarded child will do better in a home than in the finest institution.

IN THE N.Y. public school system there are several schools which have special classes for these children. Money is desperately needed at Willowbrook and elsewhere both for research and to attract competent help.

Many parents are unaware that their child may be retarded. Early diagnosis is very important and it often needs a skilled pediatrician to discover the sickness. Simple signposts that something is wrong with a child are:

- Failure to sit up or grasp with the hands.
- Inability to walk, talk or develop other personal care habits.
- Seizures or extreme fretfulness.
- Inability to follow simple instructions.
- Slow school progress which cannot be explained.

A marked preference for association with younger children.

There is no cure for the mentally retarded. At least, not yet. But perhaps future research may provide help for these thousands of youngsters who at this moment are sometimes referred to as the quiet ones.