

One \$10,000 law suit.

And, in spite of this startling example, the Wisconsin legislature at the last session, slipped through a law providing for the sterilization of "mental defectives," this law becoming operative this month.

Fearing legal action to prevent the operations upon the 21 men picked for victims, selected from among patients of the Chippewa Falls State Home for Feeble-Minded, the state board of control refuses to give their names or the day set for the experiment to the public.

In fact, there are few citizens of the state who are aware such a law is on the Wisconsin statutes. And of those few there are probably not more than a dozen who have heard of the tragic and appalling results of the sterilization of John Rehfeldt.

Rehfeldt is 36 and is the father of six children, three boys and three girls. In April, 1910, he was committed to the state hospital for insane at Oshkosh and a year later was removed to the Appleton asylum. Here, despite excellent physical condition, he was sterilized at the recommendation of George Downer, superintendent of the asylum, by Dr. J. V. Canavan, a former mayor of Appleton.

In August, 1913, he was released from the asylum as cured and returned to his wife and family sterilized.

Married life was impossible. Mrs. Rehfeldt asked a divorce. It was granted. And Rehfeldt, broken in spirit and health by the loss of his family and the sterilization, struggled against the inevitable until last June, when worry brought back insanity and he was returned to the asylum.

In the meantime Rehfeldt had filed suit for \$10,000 against Dr. Canavan and Downer.

Canavan died. Report was general, though it never appeared before in print, that worry over the Rehfeldt affair had hastened his end.

Then, last April, Downer, worried to desperation, committed suicide.

The children of Rehfeldt—all heal-

thy and mentally, as quick as most children of their ages—are now living with their mother on a farm near Appleton. And they, too, are innocently paying the price.

Now sterilization is having more trials.

Not one of the men who are its victims could be proven incurable. Not one of the men who may not leave the mad house some day, like Rehfeldt, mentally cured—but sterilized.



John Rehfeldt, sterilized while a patient at the Outagamie county asylum at Appleton and later released as mentally cured, only to lose his wife and family because of the operation, worry over which drove him to insanity again.