

*The Star and Garter, Richmond.*—Mrs. E. Crowther.

*Brundall Aux. Hosp., Norwich.*—Miss H. M. Cottingham.

*Aux. Mil. Hosp. Littlehampton.*—Mrs. E. A. Godby.

*Boultham V.A.D. Hosp. Lincoln.*—Miss E. Egan.

*Yately Mil. Hosp. Hants.*—Miss M. B. Gilmour.

*Aux. Hosp. Nethercourt, Ramsgate.*—Miss D. Gear.

*De Walden Court, Eastbourne.*—Miss A. Calder.

*St. Matthew's Hall, Willesden.*—Miss M. E. B. Wetherup.

*St. Mary's Hosp., Worthing.*—Miss S. Connachie, Miss M. Connachie.

*Aux. Mil. Hosp., Portal Tarpoley.*—Miss F. Stearman.

*V.A.D. Hosp., Westerham.*—Mrs. A. M. Bowyer, Miss E. Jackson.

### THE LADIES' COMMITTEE, ORDER OF ST. JOHN.

Few meetings can be more interesting to those absorbed in war work than the monthly meetings of the Ladies' Committee of the Order of St. John, held at "the Gate," when the members in charge of sections report progress, and, on the invitation of the Chair, Adeline Duchess of Bedford, others engaged in outside activities for the welfare of our glorious sailors and soldiers attend and tell of their progress. Thus most interesting information has been available during the past year on wide personal experience. Last week Lady Davidson told of the interest in the Order and the War of the women of Newfoundland; and Mrs. Gaskell, the Hon. Sec. of the War Library at Surrey House, aroused wide sympathy in its wonderful work. The majority of nurses dearly love books, and never have enough time for reading, and our military nurses report from far and wide the delight given to the troops, in health and in sickness, by picture papers, magazines, and novels. It was to meet this need that the War Library was started—but let Mrs. Gaskell speak:—

#### THE WAR LIBRARY.

By Mrs. Gaskell.

It is very kind of you to ask the War Library to give you a short account of its existence, and I think that there is a certain justice that we should know one another more closely for I believe that when war broke upon our astonished and unprepared country the Order of St. John Ambulance was the first to respond with admirable swiftness to the large Government Hospital demands, and the War Library in its humble way was first in the field of private organisations, having started work August 10th, 1914. The idea was

born in the mind of a woman, the night after war was declared, whose long illness and convalescence had been made bearable by books. A telegram was sent to her kind friend Lady Battersea, for the loan of Surrey House, the answer to which was not doubtful, as anyone knowing Lady Battersea can tell.

An appeal in the Press—the first of anything of the kind—brought, not volumes, but whole libraries. We struggled valiantly for days with the endless streams of vans which deposited hundreds of thousands of books at our horrified feet. Feet did I say? The cases mounted far above our heads, and filled the big rooms and blocked the wide stairs. The generosity of the public knew no bounds, and with each fresh day our gratitude and despair increased. I fled for advice to Mr. Hagberg Wright of the London Library, who brought a band of expert workers, and reduced chaos to order. The War Office approved the scheme, the Admiralty asked us to supply the Navy with a book a man before autumn changed to winter. This was done. Small libraries ready for emergencies were sent to all permanent Hospitals and Hospital ships, and soon we breathed freely, ready for what might come.

Gradually the hospitals in France grew from 10 to 145, which we have supplied since their beginning with monthly packages. The numbers of permanent and cross-channel ships increased, ships overwhelmed with wounded from the Mediterranean clamoured for thousands of books, destroyed each voyage for sanitary reasons. Malta swallowed literature until even we were astonished. Lemnos was a sink of literary voracity. Egypt gets a steady supply of thousands a month. Mesopotamia is fed week by week, in the hope that some books may drift to their destination. East Africa gets plenty; Salonika ought to have a large growing library; and Great Britain's 1,800 odd hospitals have all read War Library books, many having weekly supplies. About three months after the War Library began, the Camps Library was started under the management of Sir Edward Ward and Mrs. Anstruther, to provide the fighting and healthy soldiers at home and abroad. In the opening of 1915 bankruptcy for books stared us in the face, from which we were saved by the excellent Post Office scheme originated by Mr. Samuel, then Postmaster-General. In the autumn of 1915 the War Library was nearly bankrupt of money, for the two friends who had financed us up till then were unable to continue the heavy expense. In this difficulty the Red Cross and Order of St. John took us into their generous fold—since when we have enjoyed an existence much freer from care. We have tried to repay their generosity by prompt regard to their wishes, which has taken the form of more than 80,000 books being given to them since October last, besides supplying their hospitals.

We receive weekly about 10,000 books and magazines from the Post Office scheme. I wish I could tell you how devotedly our voluntary

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)