

Now, we hold no brief for the English firms in question, and are no more inclined to find excuses for their shortcomings in the matter of delivery than we are to find excuses for the improvidence and supineness of the War Office which has brought the country to so necessitous a condition. But the suggestion by a responsible Minister that the resources of English manufacture had been exhausted by an order for some two hundred field guns seems to us so misleading, and under present circumstances so peculiarly mischievous, as to warrant a serious attempt to rebut it. Could anything be more damaging to our manufacturing reputation in the eyes of Europe than that the Secretary of State for War should admit that after three months of a second-rate war he was at the end of his resources, and had to turn to Germany for help?

And first it may be well to clear the way by stating that the sources upon which the Government can draw for war material are three: the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich, the manufactories of Messrs. Vickers at Sheffield, Barrow, and Erith, and of Messrs. Armstrong at Newcastle and Manchester. Though the number of cannon-makers is thus limited because the capital and the technical experience involved in such works are enormous, their capacity of output is much greater than might be supposed, for Armstrong's works are undoubtedly larger and better equipped than the Royal Arsenal, and Vickers have not shrunk in the last few years from a prodigious outlay in putting themselves on an equal footing with their rivals.

We have no hesitation in saying that the capacity of Woolwich, in conjunction with the properly used capacity of these two firms, is more than sufficient to meet any needs of this country, even at a time of the greatest pressure. But there is reason in all things, and extravagant and impossible demands may very easily make the most ample resources appear inadequate. The best of watch-makers cannot make a watch in five minutes, no matter what stock of gold or mainsprings he may have prepared, no matter what amount of fine machinery he may have laid down. Yet this is what the War Office expects.