

For a quarter of a century Woolwich has kept the supply of field material entirely in its own hands; we do not believe that half a dozen batteries have been ordered from outside contractors in the last generation. "Why should we go to outsiders when we can do the work ourselves?" is the War Office argument; but even assuming that the Arsenal can furnish the ordinary peace supply (and experience has shown how inadequate a supply will pass muster), it is patent to every one that it will always need the help of outside firms in case of war. But that help, to be effective, is very largely a question of plant and practice; and common prudence would suggest that manufacturers should be induced to hold themselves in readiness for immediate supply by some system of continuity of orders (on however modest a scale) to be given in peace time. It is unreasonable to expect a large plant for making field material to be kept always ready, but always idle, when an outside order for an English field gun is rarer than snow in harvest.

Crises have been the politician's excuse for ill-advised and unconstitutional action ever since the world began; and if we refrain from saying that the present crisis has been intensified, if not brought about, by the improvidence of those who now use it as an excuse, we only do so on the broad principle of not flogging a dead horse. For years past manufacturers ought to have been trained up in the way they should go; for years past reserve stores of material should have been established and kept constantly replenished; and it is unfair to disparage English production and say its resources are exhausted because it cannot make good in a moment the deficiencies of a decade.

We are far from saying that exceptional circumstances do not sometimes justify exceptional measures; and given a sufficiently critical position, it might obviously become the duty of those in authority to buy material from a foreign country. But to justify such a course it should be clear, first, that the material which it is proposed to purchase is good, and secondly, that similar material could not be supplied equally quickly from