

EDUCATIONAL TOPICS.

"TWO THEORIES OF EXAMINATION." A REPLY.

In last month's issue of the RECORD appeared a short article professing to point out the difference between two systems of Examination, styled respectively English and Canadian. This difference is there stated as follows:—"In setting his papers a Canadian is careful to take his questions from the text-book and from that only," but in England "the questions marked most highly are those that test, not the memory but the general mental power of the pupil, those that require him not only to get up his text-book, but generally to read outside of it." Without going so far as to stultify this distinction, we venture to think it superficial in so far as it pretends to be national. The writer has scarcely gone far enough below the surface to realise the true purpose of examinations. Examinations have two fundamental functions, separate if not antagonistic, which nevertheless correspond with and explain the two so-called national systems. They serve as educational appliances and as instruments for selection. In the former sense they need be in no respect competitive, but are simply convenient means of classifying pupils and testing competent or incompetent teaching. They stimulate the teacher to keep himself abreast of the progress of educational science; by periodically testing the acquirements of those under him, and therefore they form a part of every efficient educational system. But let it always be remembered that so soon as they became so prominent a feature of any system as to induce an educator to subordinate his individuality to their results, their effect is directly pernicious. For this reason alone examination papers set to schools should not overleap the text-books, or pick out questions or things not generally known. Such papers, moreover, are not only apt to make the schoolmaster sacrifice his class by working it up to them, but discourage the boys themselves, as they demand knowledge digested and crystallised from those, who being still in a state of pupilage, read rather to recollect than to reflect, examine, and judge. Certain subjects, however, (e. g. mathematics) which endow a pupil with the faculty of *doing* something he could not do before, may allow greater scope for experimental examination.

But if we turn from the purely educational aspect of the ques-