

Is the Growing Independence of Women a Good Thing?

THE first thing I want to say on this vast and living subject to-night is a word as to the method in which it ought to be treated. People sometimes seem to think that mere personal and local observation is enough to qualify them for pronouncing judgment on living social movements. But a little thought ought to dispel such a delusion. In every science the individual investigator must make use of the results of other investigators. Particularly is this the case in the social sciences. Snap-shot judgments, based on hurried local observations, have little value in these subjects. The mind must be kept open, prejudice must be suppressed, a conscientious effort must be made to get at all the facts, if the complex problems of society are to be discussed intelligently and practicable suggestions made for their solution.

For various reasons the subject on which I am to speak to-night arouses the prejudices of both men and women. Everyone has an opinion on it. Violent feelings are aroused wherever it is eagerly discussed. And the very violence and dogmatism which men and women exhibit on the one side or the other justify one in feeling that on this subject beyond most others the patient, historical, evolutionary method of treatment must be followed. If the opponents of woman's growing independence would