

present time. But it is not the predominating sentiment on this new continent of ours. The popular mind, constantly stimulated by an omnipresent printing press, has become not merely curious, but intrusive, and every day of its life it exhibits an audacity in regard to fixed systems of all sorts — whether of government, philosophy, or religion — which, with scarcely two exceptions, would not be tolerated an hour in the older countries of Europe. Open-eyed and sensible persons of all classes in America appear to accept the existing state of things, in this regard, as a fixed fact, and to have come to the conclusion that no system or institution has any proper business here, which is not ready to hear and answer questioning, and render its reasons.

As a proof of this, we have only to look at the perfect *frèedom* of teaching which exists every where. Any man may open any manner of school, to teach any manner of doctrine, sound or false, political, philosophical, or theological. There may be some among us who would strongly desire to interfere and prevent such perfect freedom, but the inevitable progress of events has put it out of their power so to do. Any attempt to close a church, a school, a lecture room, or a printing office, because of the doctrines promulgated there, would have no chance of success, — provided, always, there has been no violation of public decency. As we pass through our streets, we see the open doors of all these. No one compels us to enter any of them. We may make our selection, and go in where we please, avoiding all the others. Thus retaining our own freedom, while we leave all else free.

Now our general reading rooms fulfil their proper function only when they become the reflected image, on a reduced scale, of our general community. We refer here to our general reading rooms, and not to any others more special and limited. A society of merchants, to serve their commercial purposes, may open a reading room, where they may accumulate for their common conveni-