

also authorized Fairbank to provide for the despatch of letters posted at his house, and addressed to places abroad. He was licensed to receive letters from the citizens of Boston for transmission across the sea; but the ordinance laid it down carefully that "no man shall be compelled to bring his letters thither unless he please."

This proviso is quite in keeping with the spirit of the time. At present and for more than two centuries past, the exclusive right of the post office to engage in the conveyance of letters is conceded without question. But at that time, its claims to a monopoly in letter carrying were contested on all sides.

Indeed anything presenting the appearance of a monopoly found small favour. The natural jealousy with which every claim to exclusive privilege is viewed, was heightened to the point of hatred during the struggle for constitutional government, by the fact that trading monopolies which were granted to courtiers, not only enhanced unreasonably the price of many of the necessities of life, but also furnished the means, which enabled the king to pursue his illegal and arbitrary courses in defiance of parliament.

The privy council in England had adopted in 1635 a scheme for the administration of the post office, one of the features of which was the bestowal upon it of the sole right to carry on the business of conveying and delivering letters in England. This was contested in the courts, and in 1646 was pronounced illegal.

The claim had received an earlier blow at the hands of the long parliament, which in 1642 condemned the post office monopoly. The arguments for monopoly, however, were not long to be gainsaid; and when Cromwell took up the question of the post office, and passed a comprehensive act on the subject in 1656, the monopoly as regards the conveyance of letters was conferred on the post office in express terms.

This act was confirmed after the Restoration in 1660; and the post office has remained undisturbed in the enjoyment of its monopoly since that date. In the North American colonies, the post office monopoly was never popular, though, owing to the ease with which it was evaded, it was regarded with indifference until close upon the war of the Revolution.

In 1663, the English government began to see the necessity for a postal service between England and its colonies in America. On the 1st of June of that year, the king wrote to the governor of Barbados¹ that it had become a matter of daily complaint that

¹ *Calendar of State Papers, America and West Indies*, 1661-1668, no. 463.