THE BOSTON WATERMEN.—A writer in the Atlas of Tuesday has undertaken to excite the sympathy of the public, in behalf of the association of Watermen, who have heretofore been engaged in the upply of water to the shipping of this port. The watermen know very well, that the Water Commissioners endeavored to make an arrangement with them by which they should continue in the pursuit which they have long followed, under which the city should receive a reasonable renumeration for the water supplied and the ship owners should be supplied on reasonable terms. The only question between them was, what terms were reasonable. The watermen were desirous of obtaining a monopoly of the supply, as the only condition on which they would enter into any engagement. In consideration of their situation from having previously enjoyed such a monopoly, by means of their association, their liberal provision of water boats, and their general fidelity in meeting the demands of the shipping, the Water Commissioners were willing temporarily to grant them this monopoly on the conditions above stated.

Accordingly, after a prolonged negotiation, and after the watermen had received the water from a hydrant at Winnisimmet Ferry for some time gratuitously, a written agreement was made with the members of their association, and signed by H. H. W. Stimson, John Williams, Elijah Gould, Paul Knowles, Charles Smith, and Augustus Stedman. By this agreement, which was limited to a period of six months from January 1, 1849, the associated watermen were to enjoy the exclusive privilege of receiving the Cochituate water for the supply of sailing vessels requiring it, within the district of Boston and Charlestown, and for steam purposes at East Boston and Charlestown, on the payment to the City Treasury of $150 per month—their charge for the supply of shipping not to exceed 50 cents per hogshead of 120 gallons. The regular charge previously had been 75 cents in winter and 62½ cents in summer. The water was to be taken from the hydrant at Winnisimmet Ferry until other convenient places should be provided.

This agreement was limited to this short period, for the reason that convenient hydrants for the supply of water had then been provided at a few only of the wharves, and that when more satisfactory arrangements should be made, it was the opinion of the commissioners that vessels ought, in consideration of the ease with which water was obtained, and the comparative low rates at which it was supplied from the works for other uses, to be supplied at a lower rate than that demanded by the watermen. The commissioners were confirmed in the correctness of this view by the fact, that at New York the privilege of supplying shipping is farmed out at $5,000 per annum, on the condition that the price demanded by the watermen shall be but 25 cents per hhd.

It is unnecessary to go into a detail of the repeated discussions which took place in reference to a modification and renewal of the above mentioned contract. The result of these discussions was a continuance of the contract, without material alteration, to the end of the year, the parties to it being notified, that as far more ample arrangements had been made, and were still making, for the more convenient supply of water at the principal wharves, more favorable terms to the city and to ship owners would be expected.

For the purpose of satisfying the associated watermen, with whom alone the water commissioners had negotiated, that the contract would not be again renewed on the same terms, an advertisement was inserted in several newspapers as early as the 19th of November, inviting bids for the privilege of supplying shipping with water during the ensuing year.

Although the desire of the commissioners to reduce the charge made by the watermen below 50 cents per cask, was repeatedly expressed, they ultimately, in consequence of the repugnance of the watermen to such reduction, authorized the Registrar to negotiate with them for a renewal of the agreement, on the basis that they should enjoy, for a limited period, the exclusive privilege of supplying all sailing vessels, from such hydrants as should be agreed on, or from other hydrants on any of the wharves where the consent of the wharf proprietors should be given—that the charge made by the watermen should be 30 cents per hhd, when supplied directly from the hydrant, and 50 cents when supplied in any other way—and that for this privilege they should pay to the city treasury, monthly, a sum to be agreed on.

A paper containing these conditions as drawn up by the commissioners, having been submitted to the watermen for their consideration, with a request for a bid on those conditions, was returned to the Registrar some days afterwards, with a proposition to pay 100 dollars, only, per month; and to charge 50 cents per hhd for water supplied by boats, and 37½ cents instead of 30 cents, for all supplied directly by means of hose from hydrants. This reply was accompanied with the assurance that these were the best terms that they could afford.

It was subsequently to this reply to the formal application of the commissioners that they resolved to apply directly to other parties, and in consequence application was then made to Captain Gifford.—They were willing to renew the former contract with a slight modification, for a limited period, but were not willing to accept a less rate of compensation per month to the city. After Captain Gifford had taken the proposal made to him into consideration, a second proposition was received from the associated watermen, the purport of which was that they would pay 120 dollars a month; or 150 dollars on condition of certain other privileges being granted them, including a supply of 200 feet of hose, and a right to charge 50 cents in all cases, except that where 50 hogsheads or upwards were supplied at once from the hydrants, they would make a deduction of 12½ cents.

On the 31st of December, after the agreement with Captain Gifford was matured, and nearly closed, a third proposition was received from them, "to pay 150 dollars a month, for the exclusive privilege of supplying, with Cochituate water, all the sailing vessels in Boston, East Boston, and Charlestown, together with a privilege to supply the English steamboats, as long as they shall continue to take water from water boats,"—the contract to be for one year, no other person or persons to use the water for the purposes above named—the charge for water to be 50 cents per hogshead when supplied by water boats, and 37½ cents when supplied directly from hydrants.

Captain Gifford having in the meantime obtained the strong recommendation of many of the large ship owners, and officers of insurance companies, by whom he had been employed, the arrangement with him, referred to in the final report of the commissioners, was formally concluded on the 1st inst., and he entered immediately upon the discharge of his duties under it. Under this arrangement the entire receipts for water furnished to shipping, after deducting expenses, are to be paid into the city treasury. The price of water is fixed, for the present, at 37½ cents per hogshead, in whatever mode supplied. This may be further reduced hereafter, if thought expedient.

From the great number of vessels requiring supplies, (6,721 having cleared during the last year, and a great number having sailed under coasting licenses) and the large quantity demanded by many of them, there is reason to believe that the city will realize from the arrangement, after the payment of all expenses, not less than $5000 per annum.

We do not deem it necessary to notice particularly the many errors into which the writer of the article referred to has fallen. It will be seen from the above, that unless the Water Commissioners were greatly mistaken in their estimate of the value of the entire supply of water, to the vast shipping of this port, and of the compensation which the city ought to obtain for it, the associated watermen have lost a contract which they might have obtained on liberal terms, entirely by their own fault. There was certainly no want of a kindly feeling towards them, on the part of the Commissioners, or of a desire to provide for their continuance in their employment, on any terms consistent with the rights of another class of citizens, and of the city itself. Nor was the case decided upon, without a patient and thorough consideration of all its circumstances. It is not surprising that opinions differ, when one is formed, perhaps, upon a moment's consideration, and on an exparte statement, and the other is formed upon a full investigation of the facts, during a year's observation, and under the sense of official responsibility for the decision.