Madrid, Jany 19th 1844

My dear Sarah,

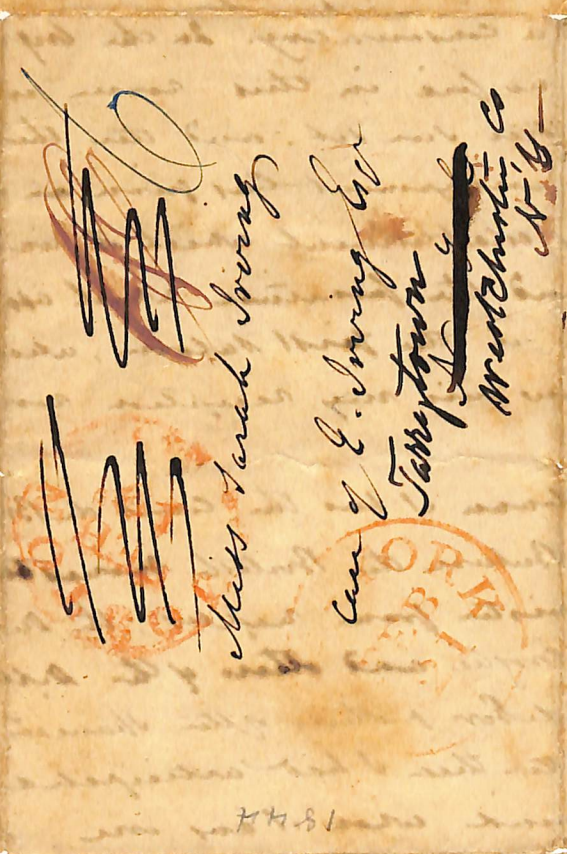
I have to thank you for your letter of Nov: 26: which had all the flavor of dear little Sunnyside about it. It gives me great satisfaction to find that all things go on smoothly and pleasantly at the homestead; but they could hardly do otherwise under such excellent management. I am looking for accounts of the Christmas holydays, and trust to hear of the cottage being duly decked with evergreens, and that you all danced to your hearts content: though it grieves me that I could not be there to have my annual waltz. The account of Nancy the cooks marriage to Michael the gardener, is certainly a very eventful chapter in the chronicles of the cottage: I never shall look forward with confidence to that match which Helen Pierce used to predict for Nannette: but what the very mention of which used to excite such indignation in Charlie. I hope you all will make your contemplated visit to Sutherlandville in the course of the winter: it will serve to break up the monotony of the season — though, for my part, if I could only be in my little cottage, looking out from its snug warm shelter upon the broad expanse of the Tappan sea, all bristled with snow and ice and tempest, I think I should be loth to leave it for the city — but then what would suit a philosophic old gentleman, who has seen enough of the world and grown too wise for its gayeties, would hardly be to the taste of a bevy of young ladies for whom the world has still some novelty.

As you and I always talk over household affairs I must tell you how I passed my Christmas. My diplomatic family now consists of Mr Hamilton, and Mr Jasper Livingston attached to the legation. The latter is a son of the late Brockholst Livingston of New York: in whose office I once read law. He is an extremely genteel young man: highly prepossessing in his appearance and manners, and politely accomplished. There happened to be two americans in Madrid. Mr Delafield of New York and Mr Partridge of Baltimore. These formed my dinner party both for christmas and new year day. We had no ladies to grace and enliven the table, or to dance with us in the evening; but it had something of a home feeling that we were all Americans. Had I been well enough I should have asked Madame Calderon de la Barca and Madame Calderon, the latter being half an American; but I was still too much of an invalid to play the gallant host. I must not omit to tell you that, under the directions of Mr Hamilton my cook succeeded in getting up some capital mince pies on these festive occasions, and served them up with a sauce boat of brandy sauce, in blue blazes, that would have horrified the temperance society.

Since these little social sprees I have had to give a diplomatic dinner in consequence of the accession of the French ambassador and the ministers of Great Britain and Naples to our diplomatic corps. This was an arduous undertaking for one in my half disabled condition; but I have a kind friend in Madame Calderon; who acts the part of a niece towards me, and who came and superintended the whole arrangement of my table, and my apartments. You must know that by her advice, and under the suggestions of her good taste, I have made quite a change this winter, in the arrangement of my rooms: if you look to the plan I once furnished Charlie you will understand it. The pink saloon, which used to be ~~[illegible]~~ half sitting room, half study, and furnished in an ordinary style, is now my saloon of reception; being newly papered, ~~[illegible]~~ with checked out with pea green paper, and the blue silken furniture and curtains that used to figure in the first, or yellow, saloon. It makes a delightful winter room; the large folding windows which descend to the floor, opening into the great glazed Verandah; which is like a conservatory. In the bright sunny winter days we need no fire in this room except early in the morning, and after sun set; and the thermometer often rises to 70. This arrangement has given an air and a reality of comfort to my establishment which it wanted before in the winter season: and the furniture which appears to be both elegant & rich, in the first saloon, which was a mere passage room, now gives my reception room a decided air of elegance.

At my dinner diplomatic dinner I had the Count de Bresson, ambassador of France. Mr Bulwer the British minister; the Prince de Carini, minister from Naples; the Duke de Glucksburg the Prince de Broglie and others of the diplomatic corps, with the Duke de Frias & others of the Spanish nobility. The dinner went off better than I had anticipated, and I felt greatly relieved in mind when it was over, but so fatigued in body; or rather so worried in my limbs from having too much on my legs; that I ~~[illegible]~~ was almost knocked up for a day or two. I have now, however, got over the effects; and, as I decline all invitations, and shall give no more big dinners, I shall be able to remain quiet and attend to my slow, but gradually advancing recovery.

I cannot at present take exercise a foot, but I daily drive out in the carriage. I have a pair of excellent young horses, coal black. I wish you had as good and handsome a pair at the cottage. My domestic concerns are under the management of Lorenzo, the best and most faithful of servants, under whose superintendence every thing goes on regularly, and at much less expense than formerly.



There my dear Sarah, I have given you a detail of my house-keeping, knowing it to be to much in your line; and only ask in return that you will give me further accounts of the internal affairs of the cottage; which I regard as peculiarly under your charge.

Give my love to all its dear inmates and believe me ever, my excellent little girl, your affectionate uncle

Washington Irving