

December 12, 1948

Dear Mrs Washington,

I am sorry you opened my tender and most sincere verses with such rabid racial prejudice. And I think If you reread them you will find in the verses of Sleeping Child a simple statement of a verity I believe to be true -- that a child's security is in his Mother's arms at a certain age. Also behind this poem is the memory of talking to Arthur Kober, Mrs Kober who had been brought up as very rich little girl, Jerome Weidman who had had the happiest childhood of us all combing the gutters of the lower east side with his brother for firewood every evening, and myself who had been brought up with lots of animals and a few other children in the woods of Long Island and sometimes in the South. We concluded that for a young child money, race education, meant nothing compared to the essential harmony of his parents together and of their tenderness for him.

As for the Black White Red and Yellow form of the poem - when I went to school I was told that there were three kingdoms Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral; that there were four races of men - Red, Yellow, Black, and White. I believe these divisions are still true. I was taught that there were seven continents, and that the black people in Africa lived in certain different ways, the Indians in their tents lived in certain different ways in the West of America, and that many Chinese children lived in certain different ways some enviable ones on river boats, and that our skyscraper civilization was unique with us. By the way, I deplore it. And I am sure that most imaginative little children would love to be in that grass hut or floating down the river. As for the father's snore, that merely said - the child had nothing to fear from the lion when his father was so near to protect him and it rhymed with roar.

When your anger cools at what you so eloquently define as "blah blah" give these verses another glance from an unprejudiced child's point of view.

As for ever hurting the colored people, Mrs Washington, I couldn't. I love them. I am much identified with them. And I have many friends among them. See my dedication and preface to Brer Rabbit stories published by Harper Brothers.

As for your threatening the rest of the Little Golden series and keeping a great many fine books away from children who could afford to buy them for a quarter, because of my own personal view of tenderness and the primitive quality of child's identification, that is autocratic mania and nonsense. And who is to say who is right, except for the unbiased response of children under five. In this alone I believe and to those children I submit my verses.

Sincerely.