

the last word

Jamie Buckingham

Carl Lomen, the reindeer king of Alaska, once told the story of a certain Greenland Eskimo. The Eskimo was brought to New York City for a short visit. When he returned to his native village near the North Pole, he told stories of buildings that rose into the clouds, of streetcars which he described as houses that moved along the trail with people living in them, of huge bridges, lights that have no fire and burn at night, and other dazzling miracles of civilization.

His people looked at him coldly and walked away. They changed his name to Sagdluk (the liar). He carried the name in shame to his grave.

Years later, Knud Rasmussen traveled from Greenland to Alaska. He was accompanied by an Eskimo named Mitek (Eider Duck). Mitek visited Copenhagen and New York. Upon his return to Greenland he remembered the tragedy of Sagdluk. He decided it would not be wise to tell the truth. Instead, he would narrate stories that his people could grasp and save his reputation.

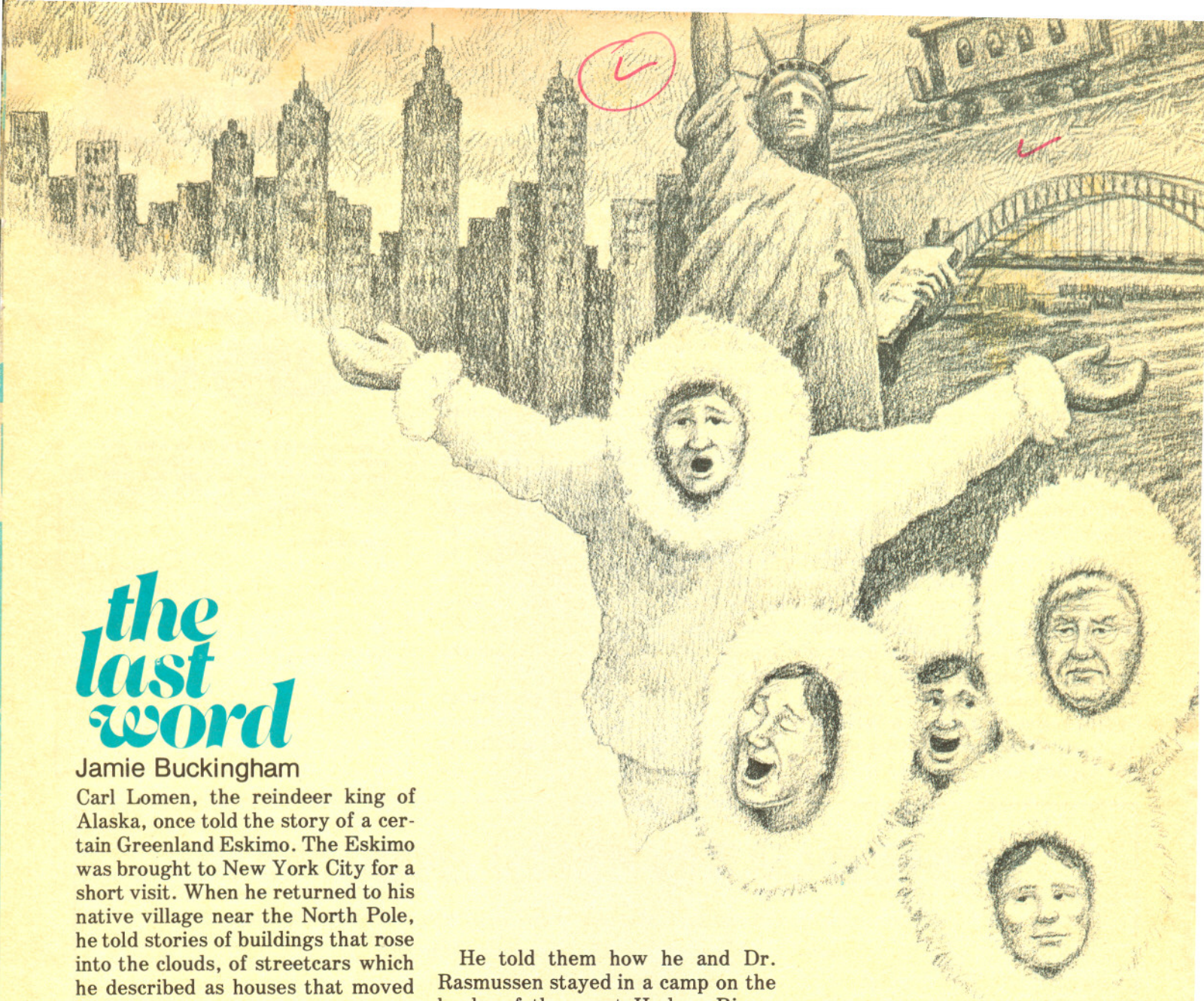
He told them how he and Dr. Rasmussen stayed in a camp on the banks of the great Hudson River. Each morning they would paddle their kayak out and hunt ducks, geese and seals. Mitek, in the eyes of his countrymen, is a very honest man. Even though he knew the truth he was thoughtful enough not to offend his friends by speaking it. Therefore his neighbors still treat him with rare respect.

The road of the teller of new truths has always been rocky. Socrates was forced to drink hemlock. Isaiah was fastened between two planks and "sawn asunder." Stephen was stoned. John Huss was burned at the stake. Galileo was terrified into retraction of his solar verities. Jesus was crucified—as were many of his followers. The bloody trail runs throughout the

pages of history and is caught up in Jesus' almost pathetic words, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent thee..." (Luke 13:34).

Most of us resent the impact of new ideas and look with suspicion on whomever imparts them to us. We hate to be disturbed in the beliefs and prejudices that have been handed down with the family furniture and church tradition. Concepts, even though found in the Bible, that God works through men to heal miraculously, that the gifts of the Spirit (including tongues) are for the church today, that most church

please turn page



government is of man rather than God—are all rejected. When such new ideas invade our congregations we rise up snarling from our winter sleep to chase them away.

The Eskimos may have had some excuse. Their simple minds were unable to visualize the pictures drawn by Sagdluk. But there is no adequate reason why modern man, especially one “made new in Jesus Christ,” should ever close his mind to a fresh new “slant” on life.

The old Baptist deacon used to pray, “Lord, make me right the first time because you know I never change my mind.” And when the Methodist preacher prayed, “Lord, light a spark of revival in this dead church,” one of his laymen chimed in with, “Amen, Lord, and we’ll water that spark.” Too true, too true!

Last year there was a great out-pouring of the Holy Spirit on a mission compound deep in the heart of the Amazon jungle. Some of the old fundamentalists spoke in tongues. Others resisted. Then at a Wednesday night believers’ meeting one of the mission leaders rose to his feet.

“The Bible speaks of a great latter rain which shall fall on the people prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus,” he said. “This rain is now falling all over the world, and here in the jungle as well. Some of you conservatives have raised your theological umbrellas, trying to ward off the torrent. But the power of God’s Spirit is going to demolish even your umbrellas. If you’re not careful, you’ll find yourselves standing out in the rain, poking your stick at God.”

Today’s “charismatic” revelations are not “new” truths—they are simply a reenactment of truths which were evident in the first century church. Those hamstrung by prejudice and tradition will continue to stone the prophets. Too lazy to stretch their minds, they will forever water down the truth to keep from offending and thus remain satisfied with visions of kayaks on the Hudson River.

Others, perhaps, will go see for themselves and discover the houses that move along the trail and lights that have no fire.