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A Man Who Knew

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Abstract: This article is about Edward King or Viscount Kingsborough, author of a nine-volume work *The Antiquities of Mexico*, believed that the ancient Americans were members of the house of Israel and at some time in their history they had been visited by Jesus Christ.

a man who knew

By Derek Dixon

● In 1837, when the first Latter-day Saint missionaries landed in England, a member of the peerage died of typhus in Dublin debtors prison, but his life's work was to go hand in hand with the truths of the Book of Mormon brought by those Latter-day Saint missionaries.

His name was Edward King, though for many years he had been known as Viscount Kingsborough. He was born November 16, 1795, the eldest son of the third Earl of Kingston. His father died in 1799, and Edward succeeded to the earldom and was given the courtesy title, Viscount Kingsborough.

Though a studious man, Edward was not distinguished by his academic attainments. He entered Exeter College, Oxford, in 1814, and in 1818 he gained a second class degree in classics, but he did not graduate. Instead, he left the university and returned to Ireland, where he was elected Member of Parliament for County Cork. But politics was not his forté, and at the end of eight years he resigned his seat in favor of his brother, Robert.

Sometime prior to his resignation Kingsborough had seen an ancient Mexican manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, a manuscript that changed his life. From that moment on he determined to devote his life to a study of the antiquities of Mexico.

And so his work began. He scoured the world for manuscripts and codices of the pre-Columbian Mexican civilizations and for documents pertaining to post-conquest Mexico. As he collected and compared these ancient relics, he became convinced that not only were the ancient inhabitants of America members of the House of Israel, but also at some time in their history they had been visited by the Lord Jesus Christ.

This knowledge obsessed him, and he became determined to prove it beyond all dispute.

In 1830 he began publication of nine immense folio volumes containing copies and facsimiles of the major items he had collected. Many of the codices were reproduced in their actual colors at enormous expense. In fact, the whole work was to cost a fortune—his fortune!

The title pages of the nine volumes read: "THE ANTIQUITIES OF MEXICO comprising facsimiles of Ancient Mexican Paintings and hieroglyphics preserved in the Royal Libraries of Paris, Berlin and Dresden, In the Imperial Library of Vienna; in the Vatican Library; in the Borgian Museum at Rome; in the Library of the Institute at Bologna; and the Bodleian Library Oxford."

Four of the sets were printed on vellum, one of which was presented to the British Museum and another to the Bodleian Library. The whole work cost \$89,600 to publish—a sum so great in those days that it exhausted Kingsborough's fortune. He became oppressed by debt until, at the suit of a paper manufacturer, he was thrown into a debtors prison in Dublin. And there he died. But he died still hoping to prove the visit of the Master to the world of the ancient American people.

His work was to go on, despite his death. *Antiquities of Mexico* has become a standard source for historians. Dr. James E. Talmage quoted from it in *The Articles of Faith*, and William Prescott referred to it in his epic works, *The Conquest of Mexico* and *The Conquest of Peru*. Few sets of the work are now available, and those that do appear on the secondhand market are very quickly auctioned off. In order to see a copy, one would have to visit one of the larger reference libraries. Kingsborough's work lives on, not only as a monument to his independently acquired belief but as a testimony to the truth of the Book of Mormon. ○