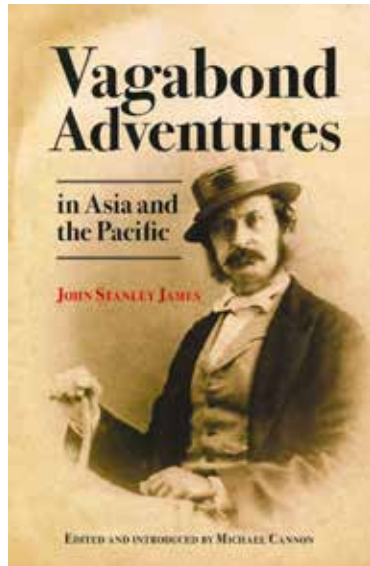


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## Vagabond Adventures in Asia and the Pacific

By John Stanley James, edited and introduced by Michael Cannon

2018

Michael Cannon

Paperback, 222 pages

RRP: \$20.00

Reviewed by Paul Michael Donovan,  
Federation University

In this book, Michael Cannon follows the life and work of prolific colonial journalist John Stanley James (also known as Julian Thomas, alias 'The Vagabond'), from his beginnings in England—where he left his middle-class home at age twelve in 1855, lived as a tramp and soon became a freelance journalist in London—to his rise to wealth and marriage in America, and onward to the height of his career in the Australian colonies where he changed his name to Julian Thomas and worked in high-profile journalist roles for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the Melbourne's *Argus* and the *Melbourne Punch*. Cannon follows the Vagabond's work through Polynesia, China, Japan, British Columbia, San Francisco, Hawaii, New Zealand, Vanuatu, New Guinea, Norfolk island and New Caledonia, from where he wrote and sent his journalism back to Australia to be published through the newspapers.

The Vagabond was critical of corruption in the colonial governments and the upper-class while being vocally supportive of the free market by criticising protectionist economic policies. He also criticised the poor as lazy and slovenly people who had too many children, drained resources by using hospitals, prisons and asylums, and suffocated society with its 'moral sewage'. He aired strong and often controversial opinions on the protection of Indigenous peoples in Australia and the South Pacific, and argued for the protection of colonial interests, criticising the Exeter Hall movement and philanthropic charities and denouncing Indigenous populations as brutal cannibals. He was a British Empire loyalist who petitioned Queen Victoria to curtail French colonialism in the South Pacific.

He also battled bouts of poverty, debt and alcoholism, which had an adverse effect on his career and brought him into personal strife.

Characteristic of Michael Cannon's work, this book presents the transcript of the primary sources largely intact, offering an authenticity to the information presented. Through the editor's introduction and subsequent introductory comments to each chapter, Cannon weaves a narrative and adds context among the texts. Cannon's placement of correspondences and other primary documents side-by-side with the writings of J. S. James contextualises The Vagabond's thoughts and adds flesh to the narrative through primary sources. This book contains original photographs from the period of the individuals and places discussed, which adds accessibility to the text.

This text offers accessible insights into the thoughts and cultural climate of the late nineteenth century in terms of Indigenous-settler relations, and highlights the complexity and diversity of attitudes, world views and the political agendas of class and race relations in the colonial world. It offers snapshots of the cosmopolitan societies of the colonial world, revealing how people moved from Europe to America and Australia to chase opportunities. It gives a taste of the flavours of international politics between colonial empires. It offers intimate glimpses into the real lives of people from every level of the colonial hierarchy.

This book would be useful for teachers wanting to improve their social history knowledge on Europeans in the colonial world in the nineteenth century.