



# Letters from an American Farmer and Other Essays (The John Harvard Library)

*J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur*

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*Letters from an American Farmer* was published in London in 1782, just as the idea of an “American” was becoming a reality. Those epistolary essays introduced the European public to America’s landscape and customs and have since served as the iconic description of a then-new people. Dennis D. Moore’s convenient, up-to-date reader’s edition situates those twelve pieces from the 1782 *Letters* in the context of thirteen other essays representative of Crèvecoeur’s writings in English.

The “American Farmer” of the title is Crèvecoeur’s fictional persona Farmer James, a bumpkin from rural Pennsylvania. In his Introduction to this edition, Moore places this self-effacing pose in perspective and charts Crèvecoeur’s enterprising approach to self-promotion, which involved repackaging and adapting his writings for French and English audiences.

Born in Normandy, Crèvecoeur came to New York in the 1750s by way of England and then Canada, traveled throughout the colonies as a surveyor and trader, and was naturalized in 1765. The pieces he included in the 1782 *Letters* map a shift from hopefulness to disillusionment: its opening selections offer America as a utopian haven from European restrictions on personal liberty and material advancement but give way to portrayals of a land plagued by the horrors of slavery, the threat of Indian raids, and revolutionary unrest. This new edition opens up a broader perspective on this artful, ambitious writer and cosmopolitan thinker who coined America’s most enduring metaphor: a place where “individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men.”

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