



How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It

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Who formed the first literate society? Who invented our modern ideas of democracy and free market capitalism? The Scots. As historian and author Arthur Herman reveals, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Scotland made crucial contributions to science, philosophy, literature, education, medicine, commerce, and politics—contributions that have formed and nurtured the modern West ever since. This book is not just about Scotland: it is an exciting account of the origins of the modern world. No one who takes this incredible historical trek will ever view the Scots—or the modern West—in the same way again.

How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It Details

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Carolyn says

Very engaging history of Scotland and it's people....detailed, but enjoyable. I was amazed at what the Scots endured, but more so with what they accomplished. I was surprised at the people who were Scottish: John Paul Jones, Alexander Hamilton, Sir Walter Scott, Alexander Graham Bell, Andrew Carnegie, Dr. David Livingston, James Watt, Robert Louis Stevenson, Andrew Jackson, James Polk, Jim Bowie, Daniel Boone, Sam Houston, Samuel Morse, just to name a few.

I wanted to read this book because I am of Scottish blood, and wanted to learn more about where my ancestors came from. I am very proud to be of Scottish descent! (from the Highland clans of Sutherland and Lindsay) It gave me a desire to be better and accomplish more than I have.

Matthew says

The first three quarters of this book are absolutely amazing, showing how the Scottish Enlightenment period essentially created all modern political and philosophical teachings in the modernized world.

The book goes in to wonderful historical detail about brilliant individuals who were the product of a social program to bring education to everyone at a time when most people in Europe were illiterate. It discusses such brilliant philosophers as David Hume and Adam Smith, as well as great inventors, such as Watt (well, Watt didn't TECHNICALLY invent the steam engine. He merely improved on the design of Thomas Newcomen's engine.).

However, I felt that the book fell apart towards the end. It felt less like a great historical presentment and more like a shoddy list made for bragging rights. As the book progresses through time, so do the characters involved in the stories, eventually reaching a more modern time when the people discussed were not nearly as interesting as in the early portions of the book. It felt as if the author became tired with describing Scottish history and fell in to a groove of saying, "This guy invented this, and this other guy invented something else."

Still a brilliantly done book and well worth the read.

John Pattillo says

An unsatisfactory read. The author fails to define what he means by "the modern world", so anything that any Scot did can be thrown into the hopper. And his reasoning fails at a very basic level. If he says (to make up an example typical of how he looks at the subject), "By 1900 30% of Canadian doctors were Scottish," then he must concede that 70% were not Scottish. And they probably were English. So why doesn't that mean that the English invented the modern world?

If the book's title were "How some Scots did some things that influenced how we live today along with some interesting facts about Scottish history," it would be much more accurate. And would never sell.

EJ Johnson says

I found this book on the library shelf when I checked out *How the Irish saved Civilization*. I enjoyed this book mostly but I did skip over some of the sections on philosophy which was unfortunate because he refers to them repeatedly in the rest of the book. Herman shows the Scottish ideas in things good and bad and how those ideas helped develop philosophies of democracy, slavery, socialism, Marxism, and freedom. He gives credit to Scots for most important discoveries and many of our words. My favorite was: John McAdam figured out a cheap and efficient way to build a sturdy road bed out of crushed rock. This was badly needed especially in the Highlands. This new road got better with more traffic from horses and wagons because their weight pressed the rock closer together and made it firmer. So the idea caught on and "macadamized" roads were built all over England and Scotland. They were improved on when tar was added making tarmacadam roads or "tarmac".

The Scots were heavily involved in the British Empire too. They helped to change social problems around the world. My favorite in this section was Charles Napier who, as governor of Sind in India, banned the practice of sutee, (burning a widow on her husband's funeral pyre). When the local Brahmin priests protested that this was interfering with an important national custom, Napier replied, "My nation also has a custom. When men burn women alive, we hang them. Let us all act according to national custom."

While I thought some Scottish connections were stretched a bit thin, and I figure most nations or cultures could come up with their own claims, I really enjoyed this book and would recommend it, in fact, I would like to own this book, which from me is a high recommendation.

Leah says

'A man's a man for a' that'

Although there are a few chapters in this book dedicated to explaining the ideas of the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, the bulk of the book is an examination of how those ideas spread and changed not just Scotland or the UK but, in Herman's view, the Western world. As with Herman's more recent book, *The Cave and the Light*, this is a hugely readable and enjoyable history – Herman writes in a way that makes his books very accessible to non-academic readers.

Starting in the century or so before the Enlightenment period, Herman explains the various factors that led to the Union of 1707. He shows the stranglehold that the Kirk had on Scottish society, but that out of this grew the idea of man as a free individual – that monarchs were not absolute and that tyrannies could and should be challenged. He gives the Kirk the credit for the idea that education should be for all, making Scotland one of the most literate societies in the world, with an appetite for books other than the Bible. And he explains very clearly the impact of the Darien scheme on both the financial state of Scotland and on its self-confidence as a nation. In Herman's view, the Union was a resoundingly positive development for Scotland, despite its unpopularity amongst ordinary people, since it opened up opportunities and access to the rest of the world via the rapidly developing British Empire, hence revolutionising Scotland both economically and culturally.

In the next couple of chapters, Herman deals in some depth with two of the earliest and most influential figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, Hutcheson and Kames, showing how their ideas developed, where they contrasted and overlapped, and the influence that each had on those thinkers who followed them. He highlights Hutcheson as the altruist, the first liberal, who developed the idea of the ‘pursuit of happiness’ with man as a free individual choosing to work together for the common good. Kames is portrayed more as a hard-nosed realist (cynic?) believing that societies come together primarily to provide protection for their property from external threats. In these chapters, Herman also shows the beginnings of what we would now call the ‘social sciences’ – the scientific study of human society and social relationships.

The rest of the first section of the book is taken up with a wide-ranging history of eighteenth century Scotland. Herman discusses the reasons behind the Jacobite rebellions, showing that the divide was much more complex than the simplistic picture of Scotland v England, so beloved of nationalists and film-makers alike. He discusses the clan culture of the Highlands in some depth, stripping away much of the romanticism that has built up over it in the intervening years. He shows how Lowland Scotland, what we would now think of as the Central Belt, was much more in tune with its English partners, particularly as the two main cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh began to reap major economic benefits from access to the Empire. Throughout these chapters, he continues to show how Enlightenment thinking was developing via such huge figures as Hume and Smith, and influencing not just Scottish society, but attracting students from the UK and Europe to study at Scottish universities.

The second half of the book is largely devoted to showing how the Scottish Diaspora, forced and voluntary, meant that Scottish ideas were disseminated throughout the Empire, particularly to the white English-speaking Dominions. From educators to scientists and engineers, Herman’s position is that Scots were responsible for the birth of what we would now think of as ‘modernity’. Being an American, Herman lays particular emphasis on what he sees as the huge contribution Scots and Scottish ideas made to the founding and Constitution of the US, physically, politically and intellectually. He shows how, in his opinion, the inbuilt ‘gridlock’ of the American political system rose specifically out of Scottish Enlightenment ideas, to provide protection for individuals and communities from the power of an overweening government. He explains the huge influence that Scots had in creating and developing the early American system of education and universities such as Princeton. And, of course, he credits the great Scottish economists with the creation of the capitalist system he so clearly admires.

While I found this a most informative and enjoyable read (who doesn’t enjoy having their national ego stroked?), I did feel that at points, particularly in the latter half of the book, Herman was stretching his argument a bit. I would be the last person to belittle the huge contribution of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers; or of the Scottish engineers, scientists, writers, religious leaders and statesmen who spread the Enlightenment ideas throughout the colonies and dominions of the Empire. But sometimes Herman gives the distinct impression that the Scots are really the only people who have ever done anything – the rest of the world seems to have rather passively sat back and let the Scots get on with it. (And frankly I’m not sure if I want to be held responsible for America!) If a man of another nationality is credited with something, Herman trawls his background to give him a Scottish connection – he studied at a Scottish University or his grandfather came from just over the English border so was nearly Scottish...or his grandmother once ate haggis. (OK, I might have exaggerated that last one a little.)

But with that small reservation aside, I would heartily recommend this book to anyone who wants a clearer understanding of the history of this period, both as it affected Scotland and the wider world. And, in this year of the Scottish Independence referendum, a useful reminder of the reasons behind the Union and the early economic benefits of it, providing food for thought for either camp as to whether those reasons and benefits are still relevant today.

David Huff says

This was a Christmas gift from my son Matthew, and an incredibly informative and enjoyable read. Any Scot, or anyone with even a trace of Scottish heritage, will naturally feel a kinship with, and love this book -- but it's also a fine work of research that any lover of history will enjoy.

Historian Arthur Herman has written a comprehensive and well-detailed account of the many ways that notable Scots have had a special influence on world events. Not only is there a ton of information here, but it's written with a skilled and fascinating narrative that holds the reader's attention and interest. In many places, it's a work of history that reads like a novel. So many historical fields are covered -- politics, medicine, philosophy, science, and literature, to name a few.

You will spend time here with the likes of Adam Smith, Patrick Henry, John C. Calhoun, Andrew Carnegie, Sir Walter Scott, David Hume, John Witherspoon, David Livingstone, and many more. Loved this book, and learned a lot from it!

Rowena says

Fascinating book about the impact Scotland has had on the world.

Most Scottish people are familiar with the poem, Wha's Like Us, which lists many Scottish inventions and innovations. Link here : <http://www.aboutaberdeen.com/whaslike...>

Reading this book made me appreciate even more how much the Scots have impacted the world with the little they had and with the tragedies they experienced. I learned a few interesting facts:

- One thing that the Scottish, Irish and English could agree on was their hatred of Oliver Cromwell.
- Scotland was the first modern literary society in Europe
- Scotland had the world's first lending library (made me love the Scots even more).

It wasn't just inventions that the Scottish brought to the world, but ideas too. Some were even radical. For example, in 1777, slavery was already banned in Scotland; an African slave who had escaped from his English master was set free by the Scottish courts who stated "no man is by nature the property of another." I was impressed greatly by the fact that the Scottish did not believe race determined culture, mainly because their own history was viewed as savage and barbaric by others. It's amazing that they realized that nurture, not nature, was to blame for human behaviour (as opposed to skin colour). I think the olden-day Scots could teach us a thing or two about that.

This book also tells the negative parts of Scottish history; the revolutions, uprisings, famines etc.

To me, it's still amazing that such a small country affected the world so greatly.

A great book to read for all history lovers.

Bikewriter says

"How the Scots ..." is one of the most interesting non-fiction books I've read in a long time. "Huh? How," you ask, "can history be interesting?!" Not every author can make it interesting, for certain. But here's how to come up with such a winner, Arthur Herman-style:

1. Gather all the players, important events, places and timelines and put them on the canvas.
2. Arrange and join those pieces on the larger background of historical context to create a vital story -- that is, show how all that potentially-boring data relates to earlier, contemporary, and later events, persons, etc.
3. Flesh out the achievements of the great and small with ample and interesting personal anecdotes, viewpoints, quotes and failures -- all supported by thorough research.
4. Tie it all together -- not in boring straight-line fashion -- but with analysis of philosophies, trends and other factors that complete the historical context in high-def living color, a story worth reading because of its intensity.
5. And finally, render it down to a digestible set of things to be learned and applied from the story.

Arthur Herman nailed it with this one on all counts.

Were I in charge of curriculum design at a high school, college or university, I would put this volume on the 'must-read' list for its historical importance in the grand scheme of things, especially for students of world history.

Ron says

Consider the title of this book: *How the Scots Invented the Modern World: The True Story of How Western Europe's Poorest Nation Created Our World & Everything in It.* (The word "true" is something of a give away.)

The reader can't take it seriously, and apparently neither did its author. As Herman admits (page 278), "an important secret in publishing, that information is made more memorable when it is tinged with bias." *How the Scots* was marinated in bias. For all that, it's an entertaining romp through modern history as seen through tartan-tinted glasses. Fun at times.

Early on, Herman tells us how the Scots invented the writing of history. (Herodotus will be shocked.) But what he's really talking about--demonstrating, in fact--is not history but historicism. The difference is that the latter uses the details of history to make a point, grind an ax or sell an agenda. (Think: Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*.) Herman's point seems to be that, having "invented the modern world," the Scots at least merit home rule.

He makes his case well. Since the Enlightenment, which took a distinctive flavor in Scotland as opposed to the continental version, Scots have led or participated in much of the good and evil perpetuated by English-

speaking peoples on the rest of the world, even when the language they spoke was hardly recognizable *as* English. They led in thought, word and deed the development of western culture and spread it . . . pretty much everywhere.

It has the usual broad generalizations and assumptions to be expected of such an encyclopedic work, though even as a metaphor for how low Scottish culture has sunk James Bond hardly merits three pages of the final chapter.

Still, a good read.

D?nnis says

Though it was curious to read about Bonnie Prince Charles's ill-fated adventure and the beginning of Great Britain, the next chunk on David Hume etc. was really tough so i fast forwarded to Walter Scott, mostly skimming through yet pausing to read about the august visit of George IV to Scotland and it's unbelievable repercussions that followed Sir Walter's cunning machinations with the image of Scots. Until i finally hit upon what was most interesting in and what i expected most of the book- not theoretical foundations of modern world but rather practical betterments to humans' lot introduced by or with the help of Scots. Alas, this part occupies only less than a third of the book. Good thing is that it is jam-packed with multiple events and inventions that brought in Industrial revolution and many other changes, which indeed made our world what it is today, more or less. There we meet interesting types (known and unknown) and learn who of those brilliant people was in fact a Scot (for example, James Cook ;). Names and stories of Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Lipton (tea magnate), Tommy Dewar and John Walker (both whiskey kings) and the two guys, who actually instigated Opium Wars make it all a very interesting read. And dozens of names are just mentioned in passing (Dunlop, McIntosh) hinting at most enjoyable Wikipedia detours :) Yummy!

Theresa Leone Davidson says

The Scots did more for modern education than a lot of other people, especially the idea that all people, regardless of race, gender or social or economic class, deserve one, and should have access to higher education. What they accomplished for the world in terms of education, as a teacher, is what I appreciated most about the book. I also learned more about key figures in history, all from Scotland, like Alexander Fleming, Alexander Graham Bell, James Watt, James Lind, Erasmus Darwin and his grandson, Charles Darwin, Thomas Telford, and Adam Smith, someone I thought I knew a lot about from the two elective courses I took in economics in college - turns out I might have learned a lot about his theories but I didn't know much about the man. However, the man I learned most about is one whose name I knew only, Francis Hutcheson, a teacher of Adam Smith's at the University in Glasgow, and a great philosopher and humanist, who in his writing inspired abolitionists not only in Scotland but from London to Philadelphia. He believed in economic, political and religious freedom for everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or race. "How do human beings become moral beings, who treat one another with kindness, regard and cooperation, rather than brutality and savagery?" This is what Hutcheson was most interested in, and his writings and teachings live on today - remarkably inspiring. Scotland's immense contributions to science, philosophy, commerce, medicine, literature and politics are all covered here and make for an excellent book. I originally bought this as a gift for my husband, who is of Scottish origin, and he loved it. I did as well. Highly recommend!

Barbara says

This book covers about 5 centuries of Scottish history. I was most interested in the description of education in Scotland. I was unaware that Scotland provided universal education for children long before Britain did. I would argue that this is what led to the flourishing of creativity and invention. I would critique the author in this respect as readers could be left with the idea the Scots are superior as a "race" or ethnic group, rather than considering the factors that enabled people of this nation to achieve their potential. At the same time, as critically important as the availability of education, including universities to virtually everyone, there seem to be some cultural values, such as perseverance and a strong work ethic, that came together to allow this flourishing of genius.

Herman works hard to dismantle the romantic vision many have of the clans and clan system, and appears to do so objectively. His description of the developing schools of thought during the Scottish Enlightenment, and figures like Adam Smith etc. provide an interesting look at how various and conflicting views of society and humanity evolved.

The history of religion in Scotland is central. John Knox, the Scottish Presbyterian church, the conflicts with Catholics supporters of the Jacobite cause, and the Anglican church are described in good detail. There are many many references to Ulster, and Ulster Scots, and the history of the development of these churches in Scotland are essential for understanding the religious landscape of modern Ulster.

According to Herman, the United States of America probably wouldn't exist without the Scots, and Ulster Scots ("Scotch Irish"). The Constitution, structure of the federal government, and more, he seems to claim, were primarily the creations of either Scottish immigrants or descendants. At times, he seems to go overboard with this idea. However, when I realized at the time, Europeans living in the 13 colonies were all either British, Scottish, German with a few Irish (mostly Ulster Scots so he would consider them Scots of a sort), it isn't surprising that Scots played a big role. The French were in Canada and Louisiana, the Spanish and Portuguese were further south, and after the Vikings, Scandinavians stayed put for a few centuries, as did the Italians (Romans of old) and Greeks.

The book lives up to the subtitle "created out world and everything in it" though towards the end I felt the author might be overreaching to prove his point. I didn't "buy" his analysis of James Bond and argument that the character possesses just those characteristics that are soooo Scottish, and these are what makes JB so spectacular. Luckily this was in the last few pages of the book or I might have thrown up my hands.

This is a 'must read' not only for those interested in Scotland and its history, but readers interested in Ulster as well as early American history.

Sarah Finch says

I was very disappointed by this. It's a solid and mildly entertaining book, but Herman's title and thesis are woefully inadequate. When he says "How the Scots Invented the Modern World" it is more like "How Scottish Men Made Great Contributions to the English-Speaking World." Any definition of the modern world that rests solely on Britain and America (with cursory nods to Canada and Australia) is one that is

laughable. Herman doesn't even frame Scottish contributions by luminaries like Adam Smith or David Hume in terms of other European nations, whether to compare or contrast or demonstrate how Scottish influence permeated the Continent. And several chapters are simply indulgent asides, such as one on Sir Walter Scott that does nothing to show any "invention" that influenced the world. I also found some of what was written about Scottish influence in America to be dubious. Andrew Carnegie and John Witherspoon were both well worth writing about, however I found the notion that Andrew Jackson, born to immigrant parents who died when he was young, would have credited his success to his Scottish bloodlines to be slightly absurd.

Jake says

To be completely honest, it's hard to find a better written book out there, regardless of the obviously hyperbolic title. This text was so fastidiously researched, so utterly fascinating, and so easy to read that I can't fathom another work that could do the job better. Herman backs up his incredible title with myriad evidence that really supports how Scottish blood has invigorated and established some of the best concepts and inventions that have come out of the past three centuries or so. He stretches a bit at the end when he discusses Scottish descendants in America and Canada, but the intent is true and the rest of the book makes up for this slight weakness. Yes, the thesis is far-fetched and basically impossible to prove, but Herman really tries his hardest and at least entertains. Besides, anyone who takes the title seriously shouldn't be reading academic texts in the first place.

Basically, this is one of the best books I've ever read in my life. Seriously.

Kelly says

This is written in the same vein as Cahill's How the Irish Saved Civilization. I learned about Scottish history but really the entire world. From inventions to famous people, this book explores how Scotland and its citizens contributed to the modern (by what they did in the 1700 and 1800s) . It took me a while to get into the writing style, but this is a worthwhile read. I liked the history in the book (I had taken 4 Brit Lit courses for my undergrad and grad English degree and had learned about the relationship between England and Scotland then, so it was good to revisit some of that).
