Six years after its publication Nechkina’s massive and magnificent biography of Kliuchevskii seems not to have achieved the renown which it deserves. The object of the volume, based primarily upon extensive but not exhaustive use of archival material, was to relate Kliuchevskii’s work, both teaching and publication, to his life and to the Russia of his time. Nechkina convincingly shows that Kliuchevskii was influenced by the political events of late Imperial Russia, although he was rarely a participant in them, and that the evolution of his political views reflected the changing political climate. This dynamic approach is clearly superior to previous static ones which describe Kliuchevskii’s political development as a straightforward shift to the right. She also places Kliuchevskii’s contribution to Russian history within the context of nineteenth-century Russian historiography, describing not only the disparity between his views and those of the political left, but also Kliuchevskii’s battles with the academic right, with ecclesiastical circles over his work on the vitae and with the Juridical School over his social analysis of the Boiar Duma. Nechkina shares the standard Soviet appreciation of Kliuchevskii as a great historian who made enormous contributions to Russian historiography, but who never superceded the limitations of bourgeois historiography. Therefore she also indicates where his views are no longer acceptable in Soviet scholarship, a point to which I shall return.

Nechkina’s attitude toward Kliuchevskii is sympathetic but not uncritical. She rejects the idealization of Kliuchevskii propagated especially in the emigration after 1917, but remains fair and informed in dealing with aspects of Kliuchevskii’s career incompatible with that idealization, such as his polemics with scholars who seemed to be preempting topics about which he was preparing publications. If anything, I would contend, Nechkina is at times too sympathetic to Kliuchevskii, dismissing the gaps in his Kurs russkoi istorii with the glib observation that any lecture course must be incomplete and recording without comment some unfortunate racist remarks about orientals to which Kliuchevskii succumbed during the Russo-Japanese War. Nevertheless this is a balanced and humane piece of scholarship which deserves to be widely read.

To be read properly, however, the strengths and weaknesses of the monograph must be correctly identified and evaluated. I do not believe previous reviewers have always done this. Nechkina is an authority on the period of Russian history in which Kliuchevskii lived, not about which he wrote. The paradox of modern Russian historiography is that the “classical” Imperial Russian historians were all primarily medievalists, but it requires a modernist to integrate a nineteenth-century historian with the Russian history of his lifetime. To be sure this paradox is as applicable outside the Soviet Union as in, as the examples of J. L. Black’s work on Karamzin or K.-D. Grothusen’s on Solov’ev testify. Inevitably, Nechkina is less informed on current research in medieval than in modern Russian history and tends, logically enough, to fall back upon standard Soviet generalizations about such issues as the significance of Ivan IV and the process of enserfment. Unfortunately, in so doing she disregards the diversity and polemic within Soviet scholarship about many controversial topics in early Russian history in order to hypothesize a fictitious Soviet consensus against which to judge Kliuchevskii’s conclusions. One example will have to suffice. It is not satisfactory to denigrate Kliuchevskii’s hypercriticism of the historical utility of the vitae by invoking an alternative Soviet view epitomized by Budovnits, as she does; Chumachenko in a 1970 monograph recognized that Budovnits’ uncritical reliance upon vitae is just as bad as Kliuchevskii’s excessive scepticism, and many Soviet specialists in Old-Russian literature and medieval Russian history would agree.

There is a further difficulty for the Western reader for whom the validity of a conclu-
sion of an Imperial Russian historian is hardly a function of how closely it approximates the current Soviet consensus. While Nechkina devotes considerable attention to the treatment of Kliuchevskii in Soviet historiography, she does not, I think, pay enough attention to such serious pre-revolutionary critics of Kliuchevskii's schemas as Presniakov; moreover, she neglects Western studies of Kliuchevskii entirely and slights emigre publications. The brief article Karpovich published in 1943 in the Slavonic and East European Review is the best critique of Kliuchevskii in English and one of the best ever written; it contradicts Nechkina's generalization that Western historians praise Kliuchevskii for what Soviet historiographers consider his weaknesses. A definitive analysis of the value of Kliuchevskii's work for the contemporary Western reader would have to include an estimate of its reputation among Western specialists in medieval Russian history, something which could best be performed by a specialist in that field. Obviously such an analysis is quite beyond Nechkina's expertise or intention.

Because of these limitations upon Nechkina's evaluation of the substance of Kliuchevskii's scholarship, the most valuable insights to be gained from her meticulous discussion of the development of Kliuchevskii's works are less about the works themselves than about their author. Nechkina's monograph is a fine historiographic analysis, certainly the most comprehensive and illuminating we shall have for a long time, but above and beyond even this achievement it is a brilliant biography, a portrayal of Kliuchevskii as a human being as well as a scholar.

Kliuchevskii's unequalled gift as a lecturer was to enable his students to see Russian history, which he described to them as if he were a traveller recently returned from a trip there. In prose sometimes as evocative as Kliuchevskii's, Nechkina has bridged the multiple gaps separating her from her subject—in time, in world-view, and in personality—and achieved an extraordinary empathy for Kliuchevskii with allows the reader to see Kliuchevskii as clearly as he could let his students see Russian history: the seminary student stifled by an atmosphere which could not satisfy his intellect; the poverty-stricken provincial raznochinenets come to the "big city" of Moscow for the first time; the first-year university student who literally could not afford the indulgence of participation in student politics and who was temperamentally incapable of radical behavior; the genuine liberal, the man of the 1860s, whose antipathy toward the Russian dvorianstvo shaped much of his scholarship for the rest of his life, who found the presence of police on campus onerous and was sympathetic to the fate of student activists whose disrespect of authority he could not share; the workaholic researcher not immune to problems in his personal and love life; the established scholar, under police surveillance, for whom the honor of tutoring the son of Alexander III in the Caucasus was a most unwelcome imposition on his personal and professional life in Moscow, especially since he had no love for this emperor, but who was too insecure politically to refuse and too flattered at the thought of the son of a priest tutoring the son of an Emperor of All the Russians to want to; the senior historian and professor, willing to write obsequious letters to the powers-that-be to secure leniency for student demonstrators whose political opinions he barely understood; the apolitical president of the Obshchestvo istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh compelled against his beliefs to deliver a laudatory speech on the death of Alexander III and then genuinely hurt by the negative reaction of his university students, whose darling he had been ever since he started teaching; the ascetic, shy celebrity, at the height of his fame and erudition, whose increasing honorifics left his melancholy unchanged and many of whose personal habits were glaringly ill-suited to his position in society; and much more. Nechkina punctuates her narrative with perceptive commentary on a series of photographs of Kliuchevskii which grace the monograph and make more vivid the depiction of his life. It is Nechkina's understanding of and sympathy for how things looked from Kliuchevskii's point of view which make this a brilliant and superb biography.