

M. GORKY



THE THREE



FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
PUBLISHING HOUSE

*Moscow*

E45.5

6072

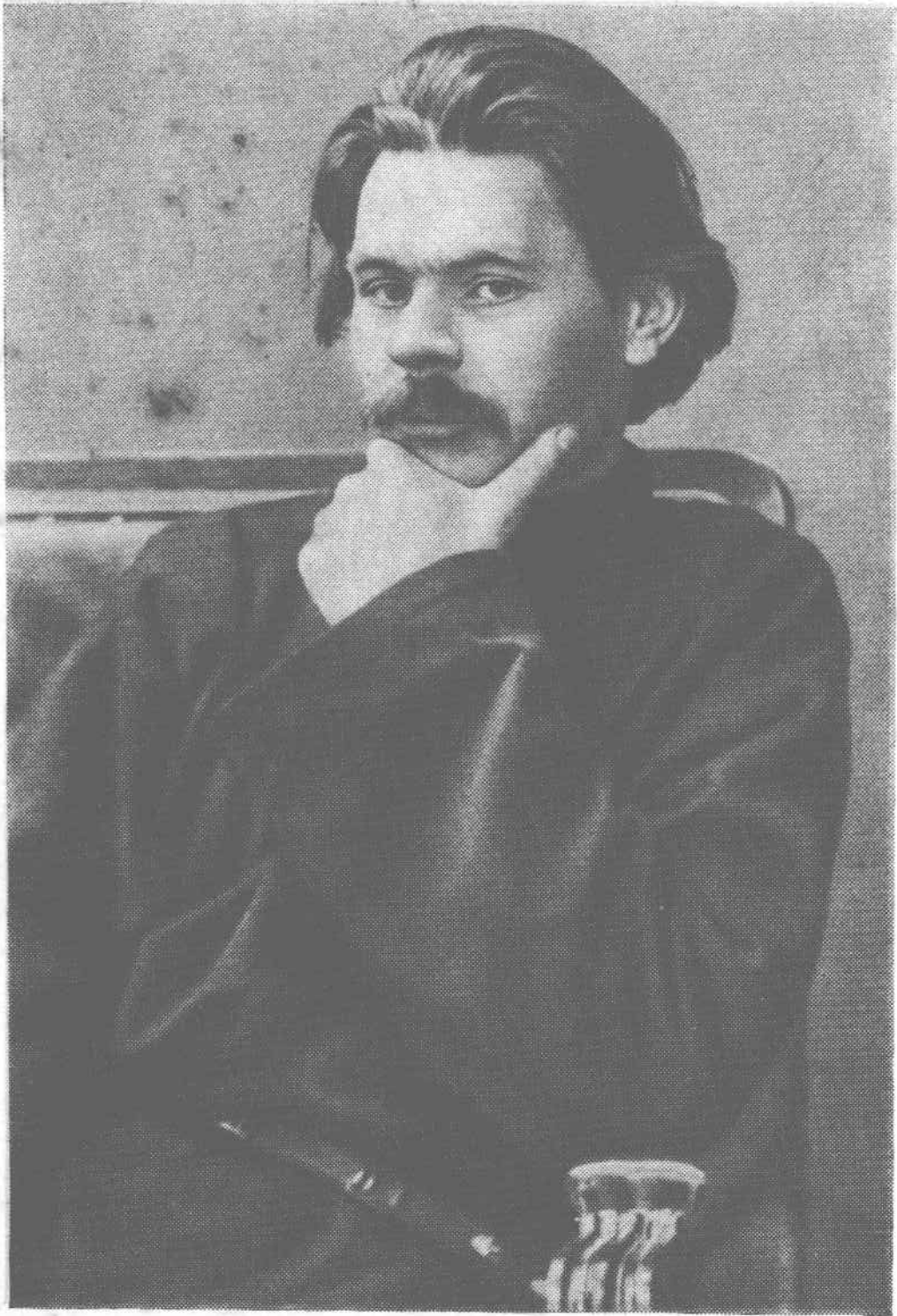
LIBRARY OF SELECTED SOVIET LITERATURE

M. G O R K Y

T H E T H R E E







Jh. Toppsman



M. GORKY



THE THREE



FOREIGN LANGUAGES  
PUBLISHING HOUSE

*Moscow*

Translated from the Russian by *Margaret Wettlin*

Many solitary graves are scattered through the woods of Kerzhenetz. The bones of old hermits, devotees of ancient sects, rot within these graves, and about one such hermit, Antippa by name, the village folk of the Kerzhenetz region recount the following story.

Antippa Lunyev, a rich peasant of stern disposition, having enjoyed the iniquitous life of this world to the age of fifty, suddenly gave himself up to meditation, grew melancholic, left his family, and took to the woods. There, on the edge of a ravine, he felled logs for a cell in which he lived for eight years, summer and winter, allowing no one to enter it, neither friend nor kinsman. Occasionally people who lost their way in the woods came upon Antippa's cell and caught sight of him there kneeling at prayer in the doorway. He was a fearful sight to behold: he had withered away with fasting and praying and was as overgrown with hair as the beasts of the field. When-



ever he laid eyes on a human being he would rise to his feet and make a low bow. If he were asked the way out of the woods, he would point to the path without a word, bow to the earth once again, retire into his cell, and lock the door. Many had seen him in the course of those eight years, but none had heard his voice. His wife and children visited him; he accepted the food and clothes they brought, bowed low to them as to all others, but uttered not a word.

He died in the year when all hermitages were destroyed, and his death took place in the following manner.

Into the woods came a police officer and his men, and there they saw Antippa on his knees in his cell praying silently.

“Hey, you!” cried the police officer. “Come out! We’re going to tear down your den.” But Antippa did not hear him.

Shout as the police officer might, the recluse answered not a word. The police officer ordered his men to drag Antippa out, but his men, seeing that the old man went on praying fervently, oblivious of their presence, were confounded by his strength of spirit and refused to obey the police officer. The latter then ordered them to tear down the hut. Cautiously, lest they do the old man harm, they began to take apart the roof.

Hatchets hacked away over his head, boards split as they were thrown down on the ground, the dull sound of

the blows carried into the woods, sending the birds circling in alarm above the cell and making the leaves tremble on the trees. The old man went on praying as if he neither heard nor saw. The workmen began to remove the logs of the walls; still the hermit knelt there motionless. When the last log had been hauled away the police officer came up to the old man and seized him by the hair.

“Father, forgive them!” said Antippa in a low voice, rolling his eyes up to heaven. And, falling on his face, he gave up the ghost.

At the time when this happened Antippa’s elder son, Yakov, was twenty-three years old, and his younger son, Terenty, was eighteen. While still in his teens, Yakov, a strong and handsome lad, won for himself the nickname of Harum-scarum and by the time of his father’s death he was known as the most dissolute and incorrigible youth in the region. Everyone complained of him—his mother, the neighbours, even the elder of the village. They kept him in solitary confinement, thrashed him in public, beat him without so much as a trial, but none of these things curbed his wild spirits and it grew more and more difficult for him to live in this village, among the *Raskolniki*, people as industrious as beavers, abhorrent of anything new, fanatically devoted to the precepts of an ancient faith.

Yakov smoked tobacco, drank vodka, and wore clothes of a foreign cut. He did not attend mass, and when the village elders remonstrated with him and reminded him of his father, he only laughed contemptuously.

“Wait, good folk,” said he. “Everything in good time. When I’ve had my fill of sinning, I, too, will repent. But the time hasn’t come yet. Don’t hold my father up to me—he lived a life of sin for fifty years and repented for only eight. My sins are as the down on a fledgling; when they become black as a raven’s feathers it will be time enough for this young blood to repent.”

“Heretic!” the villagers called him, and they feared and hated him.

Some two years after Antippa’s death Yakov got married. No one in his native village (where everyone knew he had squandered all the means it had taken his father thirty years of hard labour to acquire) would give his daughter to him in marriage. And so he took to wife a pretty orphan from a far-off village, selling his father’s apiary to pay for the wedding celebration. His brother Terenty, a weak, taciturn hunchback with dangling arms, did nothing to oppose his way of life; his ailing mother spent most of her time lying on the stove-bunk, from where she would call down to him in hoarse, menacing tones:

“Wretch! You might at least spare your own soul! Think what you’re doing!”

“That’s all right, Mother. Father will intercede for me in heaven.”

For almost a year Yakov lived with his wife in peace and quiet. He even began to work, but then his bestial nature got the better of him again and for whole months he would disappear from home, returning to his wife ragged and bruised and hungry. His mother died. At the funeral feast the drunken Yakov pummelled his old enemy, the village elder, and for this he was put into a prisoners’ company in the army. When he had served his term he came back sullen, vengeful, and with a shaved head. The villagers hated him more than ever and their hatred carried over to the members of his family, especially to the meek hunchback Terenty, whom the young folk had made the butt of their jokes from earliest childhood. They called Yakov a bandit and a jail-bird, Terenty—a cripple and a wizard. Terenty accepted their jokes and imprecations in silence; Yakov hurled threats at them.

“Just you wait!” he would say. “I’ll show you yet!”

He was about forty years old when a dreadful fire broke out in the village. He was accused of having started it and deported to Siberia.

Terenty was left to take care of Yakov’s wife, who had gone mad during the fire, and his son Ilya, a grave, sturdy, black-eyed lad of ten. Whenever Ilya appeared

out of doors the little boys would chase him and throw stones at him, and the grown-ups would call out:

“You little demon! May you dry up and blow away, you son of a convict!”

Before the fire, Terenty, who was incapable of physical work, had sold tar, thread, needles, and other trifles. But the fire, which destroyed half the village, burned down the Lunyevs' hut along with all Terenty's stock-in-trade, so that when the fire was put out the only thing he had in all the world was a horse and forty-three rubles. He knew he would never again be able to make a living here, so great was the hostility of the villagers, and so he turned over his brother's wife to the care of a lone woman for a ruble and a half a month, bought himself an old cart, put his nephew in it, and set out for the biggest town in the district to seek aid from a distant relative named Petrukha Filimonov, who worked as barman in a public house.

Terenty drove away from the smoking remains of his home secretly, after dark, like a thief in the night. As he drove he kept glancing back with his big black calf-like eyes. The horse moved at a slow pace, the cart jerked over the ruts, and soon Ilya, who was lying behind in the straw, fell into the fast sleep of childhood.

He was awakened in the middle of the night by a hair-raising cry that resembled the howling of a wolf. It was

a bright night, the cart was standing at the edge of the forest and the horse was snorting as it munched the dewy grass. In the middle of the fields stood one lone pine that looked as if it had been driven out of the forest. As Ilya's sharp eyes roved anxiously in search of his uncle, the occasional stamping of the horse's hoofs came to him with a distinctness heightened by the silence of the night; the animal's snorting sounded like deep sighs, and the strange and desolate howling vibrated in the child's ears, filling him with fear.

"Uncle," he said softly.

"Eh?" replied Terenty, and the howling suddenly stopped.

"Where are you?"

"Here. Go back to sleep."

Ilya saw his uncle, a black shadow that might have been an uprooted stump, sitting on a little mound at the edge of the woods.

"I'm afraid," said the boy.

"What are you afraid of? There's nobody here but us."

"Somebody was howling."

"You dreamt it."

"Honest-to-goodness!"

"Maybe it was a wolf. Far away. Go to sleep."

But Ilya could not sleep. The silence was terrifying and the howl kept sounding in his ears. He gazed intently about

him and noticed that his uncle was staring in the direction of a five-domed white church that stood on a hill deep in the forest with a big round moon shining brightly above it. The boy knew this was the Romodanovsky church, and that, two versts on the other side of it, their native village of Kitezhnaya stood on the edge of a gully in the midst of the forest.

"We haven't gone far," he said pensively.

"What?" said his uncle.

"I said we'd better be on our way. Somebody might come from there."

Ilya nodded apprehensively in the direction of the village.

"We'll be going in just a minute," murmured his uncle.

Again everything was quiet. Ilya leaned on the dashboard of the cart and gazed in the same direction as his uncle. The village was indistinguishable in the deep dark shadows of the forest, but Ilya fancied he could see it, with all its huts and people and the old willow-tree beside the well in the middle of the road. Under the willow lay his father in a torn shirt, his hands and feet bound with ropes. His arms were twisted behind him, his naked breast arched forward, his head seemed to have grown fast to the trunk of the willow. He lay as motionless as if dead, staring wild-eyed at the muzhiks gathered round

him. There were many of them and they all shouted and swore at him. The memory of this saddened the child, making a lump rise in his throat. He felt he was about to cry, but, fearing to disturb his uncle, he stiffened all his muscles to hold back the tears.

Suddenly the soft howling began again. First there was a long-drawn sigh, then a whimpering that turned into this unspeakably plaintive howl:

“O-o-o-o!”

The child gave a shudder of fear and grew utterly still. The sound quivered and grew stronger.

“Uncle! Is it you howling?” cried Ilya.

Terenty did not answer, did not stir. The boy jumped out of the cart, ran over to him, fell at his feet, and began to cry. Between sobs he could hear his uncle saying:

“They squeezed us out. Dear God in heaven, where are we to go now?”

“Just you wait, when I get big I’ll show them!” said the boy, choking back his tears.

When he had cried himself out he fell into a doze. His uncle picked him up in his arms and put him in the cart, then went back and began to howl again—a prolonged, plaintive howl, like that of a puppy.

...Ilya remembered well his arrival in the town. Early in the morning he woke up to see a broad and turbid



river, on the other side of which rose a steep hill dotted with houses having red and green roofs and surrounded by orchards. The houses scrambled up the hill in picturesque clusters, and on reaching the top marshalled themselves into a straight line to gaze proudly out over the river. Above the roofs rose the golden domes and crosses of the churches thrusting deep into the sky. The sun was just coming up; its slanting rays were reflected in the windows of the houses, and the whole town was ablaze with colour and aglitter with gold.

“Ai-yi! Look at that!” exclaimed the lad, and fell to gazing at the marvellous sight in silent ecstasy. But soon a disturbing thought came into his mind: Where would they live here—he, a little shock-headed boy in trousers of sacking, and his clumsy, humpbacked uncle? Would they let them into that rich, clean, enormous town sparkling with gold? He supposed it was just because they would not allow poor people into the town that their cart was standing here on the bank of the river. His uncle must have gone to ask permission.

With a sinking heart Ilya looked about in search of his uncle. He was surrounded by other carts. Some of them were loaded with wooden milk casks, others with sacks of potatoes and baskets of cucumbers, onions, berries, and fowl. Muzhiks and their wives were sitting in the carts or standing beside them. They were not like the