



Bunter, The Cricketer!

*An Amusing Story of
Greyfriars School*

Narrated by TOM BROWN

BILLY BUNTER, the plump Falstaff of the Greyfriars Remove, was wearing, in addition to his Etons, a worried look.

Bunter was not given to worrying over-much about anything as a rule; but he certainly looked worried now.

It was a sunny morning in July, and most of the Greyfriars fellows were looking very merry and bright. Their faces matched the morning. But the fat countenance of William George Bunter was sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

The fat junior rolled disconsolately up to the notice board in the hall. He had a hope—a very remote hope, it is true—that his name would be down to play for the Remove against the Fifth that afternoon. And he blinked through his big spectacles at the list of names which Harry Wharton had posted up.

But if Billy Bunter imagined that his illustrious name would figure on the list, he imagined a vain thing.

Harry Wharton's name headed the list, as a matter of course; then followed the names of the other members of the Famous Five. Vernon Smith's name was down, and Peter Todd's, and Mark Linley's; and Penfold and Field and Russell completed the eleven. There was no mention of William George Bunter, not even as first reserve, or umpire, or scorer, or roller of the pitch!

"Rotten!" grunted the fat junior. And he began to look, more worried than ever.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came the dulcet voice of Bob Cherry, who appeared on the scene with his chums. "Wherefore that worried look, old fat man?"

Bunter pointed to the list of names with a fat forefinger.

"I'm left out!" he said, more in sorrow than in anger.

"Why, of course you are," said Johnny Bull. "Wharton's still got a glimmering of sanity left. He'd need to be clean off his rocker before selecting a fat duffer like you!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"If we were playing a kindergarten, instead of the Fifth, I might give you a show, Bunter," said the captain of the Remove. "But [in the cirs., I'm afraid you must take a back seat."

Billy Bunter blinked at the speaker. He was still looking worried—desperately so.

"Look here, Wharton," he said, "you've simply got to play me this afternoon!"

"What?"

"You've got to!" said Bunter. "I must insist!"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"You silly cuckoo! Do you imagine I'm going to take my orders from you?"

Billy Bunter plunged his hand into his breast-pocket, and produced a letter.

"I say, you fellows! This is from my Uncle Peter," he said. "He's coming to Greyfriars this afternoon for the express purpose of seeing me play cricket."



With Billy Bunter—strutting along in flannels—on one side and smiling Sammy on the other, Uncle Peter was escorted to Little Side.

“Oh, my hat!”

“Uncle Peter’s been abroad for years—gold prospecting, or something.” Bunter went on. “He naturally wants to look me up. He’s heard what a ripping cricketer I am——”

“Who told him that?” asked Nugent.

“Ahem! I mentioned the fact in my last letter to him,” said Bunter. “I told him I was the best cricketer in the Remove, and he’ll naturally expect to see me play. If he comes here this afternoon and finds I’m not playing, he might think I’m not good enough for the eleven and that I’ve been exaggerating my abilities.”

“Ha, ha! That’s just what the old boy will think!” said Bob Cherry. “You shouldn’t have told him such whoppers.”

Billy Bunter turned appealingly to Harry Wharton.

“You can see how I’m fixed,” he said. “Uncle Peter will be awfully ratty if he comes all the way from London to see me play and finds I’m not even in the eleven. Try and squeeze me in. Wharton. there’s a good

fellow! You could stand down and let me take your place——”

“What?” shouted Harry.

“Or Bob Cherry could stand down. He’s a very feeble sort of player.”

Bob gave a roar which the celebrated Bull of Bashan could not have equalled.

“You—you cheeky fat toad! If you dare to call me feeble, I—I’ll burst you!”

“Ha, ha ha!”

“Perhaps Johnny Bull would give me his place?” suggested Bunter.

“Br-r-r!” growled Johnny.

“Or perhaps Inky will do the decent thing and stand down?”

“Nothing doing, my esteemed and ludicrous Bunter,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his weird English. “I have no intention of surrenderfully giving up my place in the eleven.”

Billy Bunter blinked at his school-fellows in despair. There was such a woebegone look on his face that Harry Wharton & Co. were moved to compassion.

Bunter was certainly in a tight fix. He had represented to his uncle Peter that he was a splendid cricketer—a sort of schoolboy edition of Jack Hobbs—and Uncle Peter was coming down from London for the special purpose of seeing his plump nephew perform. If he found that Bunter was not even in the eleven, he would undoubtedly be angry. He would consider that he had been fooled.

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful. He was pondering the advisability of giving Bunter a game. After all, the match was not an important one; and the Fifth, though a higher form, had a very mediocre team, which was considerably weakened by the inclusion of Horace Coker, the comedian of the form.

“Why not play Bunter?” said Wharton, at length. “The Fifth are playing Coker. That will be one clown on each side.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“But Uncle Peter will have several sorts of a fit when he sees the sort of cricket that Bunter serves up.” said Nugent.

"That will be Bunter's funeral," said Wharton. "Are you really keen to play, Bunter?"

"Of course!" said the fat junior, his eyes glistening. "I'm certain I shall hit up a century; I feel it in my bones. And when Uncle Peter sees me take a hundred off the Fifth's bowling, he'll be tremendously bucked. He'll tip me a fiver, most likely."

The Famous Five grinned. They did not anticipate a century from the bat of William George Bunter. Bunter's contribution to the Remove total would probably be a "big round nought."

However, it was arranged that Bunter should play; and Dick Penfold sportingly agreed to stand down, and make way for the fat junior.

Bunter was so grateful to Penfold that he would have hugged him, had not Pen backed away in the nick of time.

There would be no disappointment for Uncle Peter, now. He would come, and see, and marvel. He would gaze on his plump nephew with admiring eyes, while Billy Bunter flogged the Fifth Form bowling to all parts of the field. And he would have the satisfaction of seeing Bunter make a century and also the winning hit!

In his mind's eye, Bunter saw all these things coming to pass. He was not likely to see them with any other eye but his mind's eye; but in his mind's eye he saw them with crystal clearness.

Uncle Peter arrived at Greyfriars shortly after dinner. He was a stout, amiable-looking gentleman, and he seemed to ooze prosperity. He turned up in a magnificent car, and his suit was the last word in smartness. It seemed that Uncle Peter's ventures in gold-prospecting had not been altogether barren of result.

He greeted his plump

nephew, who was in flannels, very cordially. And he had an avuncular embrace for young Sammy Bunter, of the Second.

"I am delighted to see you, my dear boys!" said Uncle Peter warmly. "Am I in time for the cricket match, William?"

"Yes, rather, uncle! We're just going to start. I'll take you along to the ground."

Flanked by his two nephews Uncle Peter was escorted to Little Side. He was piloted to a deck-chair, beneath one of the old elms, and he settled down to enjoy the cricket.

It was to be a single innings match. Blundell of the Fifth won the toss, and elected to bat first.

There was a cheer as Harry Wharton led his men out to field.

"Where would you like me to field, Wharton?" asked Billy Bunter. "I'm rather good at silly point, you know."

"And better still at stupid mid-off!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton turned to the fat junior.

"You'd better get as far away as possible," he said. "Somewhere where there's no



Bob Cherry was standing behind Bunter, when the fat junior started to bowl, and Bob Cherry thought he was safe. He wasn't! The ball flew in precisely the opposite direction to that in which Bunter intended it to go, and it caught Bob Cherry full in the chest.

chance of a catch being sent for you to muff ! ”

“ Oh, really, Wharton—— ”

Billy Bunter rolled away into the deep field, and Blundell and Bland, padded and gloved, and looking capable of doughty deeds, came in to open the Fifth's innings.

Uncle Peter, comfortably ensconced in his deck-chair, gazed out over the green playing-fields, dotted with flannelled figures ; and he sighed contentedly.

Blundell opened against the bowling of Hurree Singh. The captain of the Fifth found his form at once, and started to open his shoulders.

“ Look out, Bunter ! ”

A mighty hit sent the ball soaring away into the “ deep.” Billy Bunter saw it coming—saw the ball hang in the air for a brief second, and then dive suddenly towards him. But Billy Bunter didn't shape to catch it. He gave a yelp of alarm, and ran away from the swiftly descending sphere. Bunter had been hit on the head by a cricket-ball before, and he didn't want an encore ! He dodged away, and the ball thudded harmlessly into the grass.

A yell of laughter and derision rang out.

“ Yah ! ”

“ Funk ! ”

“ Why didn't you catch it ? ”

Billy Bunter felt very foolish as he gathered up the ball. What would Uncle Peter think of that deplorable exhibition of funk ? He was certain to be disgusted with his plump nephew.

“ I shall have to make amends for that,” murmured Bunter. “ I'll ask Wharton to let me bowl presently. And when Uncle Peter sees the Fifth Form wickets falling like ninepins, he'll forget all about that muffed catch.”

Bunter's request to be allowed to bowl was not granted until the tail-end of the Fifth's innings.

Horace Coker was the last man in, and Bunter was permitted to bowl to him. It was, as Bob Cherry said, a sight for gods and men and little fishes. Coker was probably the worst batsman at Greyfriars ; Bunter was certainly the worst bowler ! It was not a case

of Greek meeting Greek ; it was a case of freak meeting freak !

Whizz !

Billy Bunter spun himself round like a catherine-wheel, and the ball fairly flew from his hand. There was a fiendish yell from Johnny Bull, who was fielding at silly point. The ball flew straight for Johnny, catching him a terrific crack under the chin.

“ Yaroooo ! You—you fat villain ! You've nearly fractured my jaw ! ” hooted Johnny.

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

The rest of the fieldsmen seemed to find it a matter for merriment. But Johnny Bull didn't. The glare he bestowed upon William George Bunter was almost homicidal.

“ Sorry, old chap,” said Bunter cheerfully. “ Ball slipped, you know.”

“ Bowl up ! ” said Coker.

Bunter tried again. This time, the fieldsmen jumped well back out of the danger zone. When Bunter was bowling there was really no knowing in which direction the ball would travel. It was safe to wager that the batsman would see nothing of it !

Bob Cherry was standing behind Bunter, and Bob fondly imagined that he was safe. But nobody was safe, when Billy Bunter was let loose with the ball. The leather flew from the fat junior's hand—flew in precisely the opposite direction to that in which it was intended to go. Bob Cherry received it full in the chest, and it bowled him over like a skittle.

“ Yowp ! ” gasped Bob, as he collapsed in the grass. “ Chain that fat madman up, somebody ! He's out to kill ! ”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! ”

Exactly what Uncle Peter thought of his nephew's bowling feats was not known. Perhaps it would be made clear later !

Even Bunter, with all his inflated conceit, realised that he had not exactly covered himself with glory. But he consoled himself with the reflection that he would make ample amends, when it came to his turn to bat.

The Fifth were all out at last, through Coker sitting on his own wicket. They had scored 98, and the Remove would have to be at their best to win.

“ Let me come in first with you, Wharton,”

said Bunter. "We'll knock off the runs between us."

"Ass! You'll go in last," grunted the captain of the Remove. "While you're waiting your turn, I should advise you to go and make peace with your uncle."

From the pavilion, Billy Bunter could see Uncle Peter taking his ease in the deck-chair. But he hadn't the pluck to approach him. That muffed catch, and that wildly erratic bowling, must have annoyed Uncle Peter intensely. Certainly it did not bear out what Bunter had so often said in his letters—that he was the finest cricketer in the Remove.

Bunter deemed it prudent to give Uncle Peter a wide berth, until he had made a century, and won the match for his side, thereby wiping out his previous failures.

The Remove batted strongly and well, against some indifferent bowling. Harry Wharton hit up a useful 24 before being taken at the wicket; and Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent carried on the good work. Hurree Singh, who was last but one on the batting list, made the winning hit amid shouts of applause; so that the game was already won when William George Bunter waddled forth to the wicket.

There was a very grim expression on the fat junior's face. If he wished to redeem himself in the eyes of Uncle Peter—and he did wish to, most fervently—here was his opportunity. He would help himself to a century from the tired bowling, and then retire, bearing his blushing honours thick upon him.

That was Bunter's fixed intention. But the

way back to the pavilion is paved with good intentions. Every batsman fondly hopes to make a century; but only a very few find their hopes brought to fruition.

Billy Bunter patted the turf very carefully, as he had sometimes seen County players do; and he kept the field waiting for quite two minutes before he was ready.

Blundell was bowling, and he contemptuously tossed up a lob. It was a soft, simple ball, that pleaded to be hit out of the ground. Bunter would willingly have granted its plea, but he could not. He shut his eyes and smote blindly, mistiming the ball hopelessly.

Crash!

As falls the giant oak, so fell Billy Bunter's wicket. The stumps were spread-eagled, and the batsman, losing his balance, crashed heavily to earth, sitting amongst the wreckage.

"Yarooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How's that, umpire?" grinned Blundell. "I've a faint shadow of a suspicion that it's 'out'!"

Certainly it was "out." Of that—as the gentleman in the "Gondoliers" observed—there was no shadow of doubt, no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever!

Billy Bunter's cup of humiliation was now full. It was brimming over, in fact. The fat junior quaked at the knees, at the prospect of the coming interview with Uncle Peter. It seemed only too probable that the vials of that gentleman's wrath would be poured over the head of his plump nephew.

Bunter had boasted that he was the



"A splendid win, my dear boy!" said Uncle Peter, gripping Bunter's hand. "Your batting was excellent; only equalled, in fact, by your remarkable bowling!"

Remove's champion cricketer—the juvenile Jessop of Greyfriars. But, instead of living up to the part, he had failed, utterly and ignominiously!

What excuse could he offer to Uncle Peter? It would be no use saying that this was his "off" day. It would be equally futile to pretend that he had been the victim of bad luck. He had had his chances, and he had bungled them. And now he must face the music!

To Billy Bunter's great astonishment, however, there was no music to face.

As the players were coming off, Uncle Peter rose up from his deck-chair, and came across the greensward to his nephew. The air rang with cheering for the Remove's victory.

"A splendid win, my dear boy!" said Uncle Peter, gripping the astonished Bunter by the hand. "You batted magnificently, by Jove!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, crimson with confusion.

Uncle Peter smiled.

"Don't be so modest about it, William," he said. "Why, you are blushing like a girl! Your batting was excellent, my dear boy, only equalled, in fact, by your remarkable bowling."

Billy Bunter blinked at his uncle in wonder. Was the old gentleman being sarcastic at his nephew's expense? Apparently not, for he seemed genuinely delighted.

"I expect you are feeling hungry, William, after your strenuous innings?" said Uncle Peter.

"Yes, rather!"

Bunter was certainly hungry. Some fellows experience a sudden loss of appetite after making a "duck's-egg." But the only effect of such a calamity on Bunter's appetite was to make it keener. He trotted gleefully away to the tuckshop with Uncle Peter, scarcely able to credit his good fortune.

Bunter had expected scowls and reproaches, after his inglorious exhibition on the cricket field. Instead of which, he got smiles and congratulations—and an excellent feed into the bargain!

The truth of the matter was that Uncle Peter had not seen a single ball bowled!

It had been so cosy and restful in the deck-chair that the old gentleman had dropped into a doze, from which he had not been awakened until the salvo of cheers from the pavilion had announced the Remove's victory.

Uncle Peter simply dared not confess to his nephew that he had seen nothing of the game. He would not have wounded Bunter's feelings for words. He had come down to Greyfriars for the special purpose of seeing his nephew perform prodigies of valour. Actually, he had seen nothing; but he took it for granted that those prodigies of valour *had* been performed. He assumed that his nephew had bowled well, and batted well, and won the match for his side. And, as Bunter did not attempt to deny it, Uncle Peter felt that he was on safe ground.

What the old gentleman's feelings would have been had he taken a peep at the score-book, may be left to the imagination. For the score-book contained the following dismal entry:

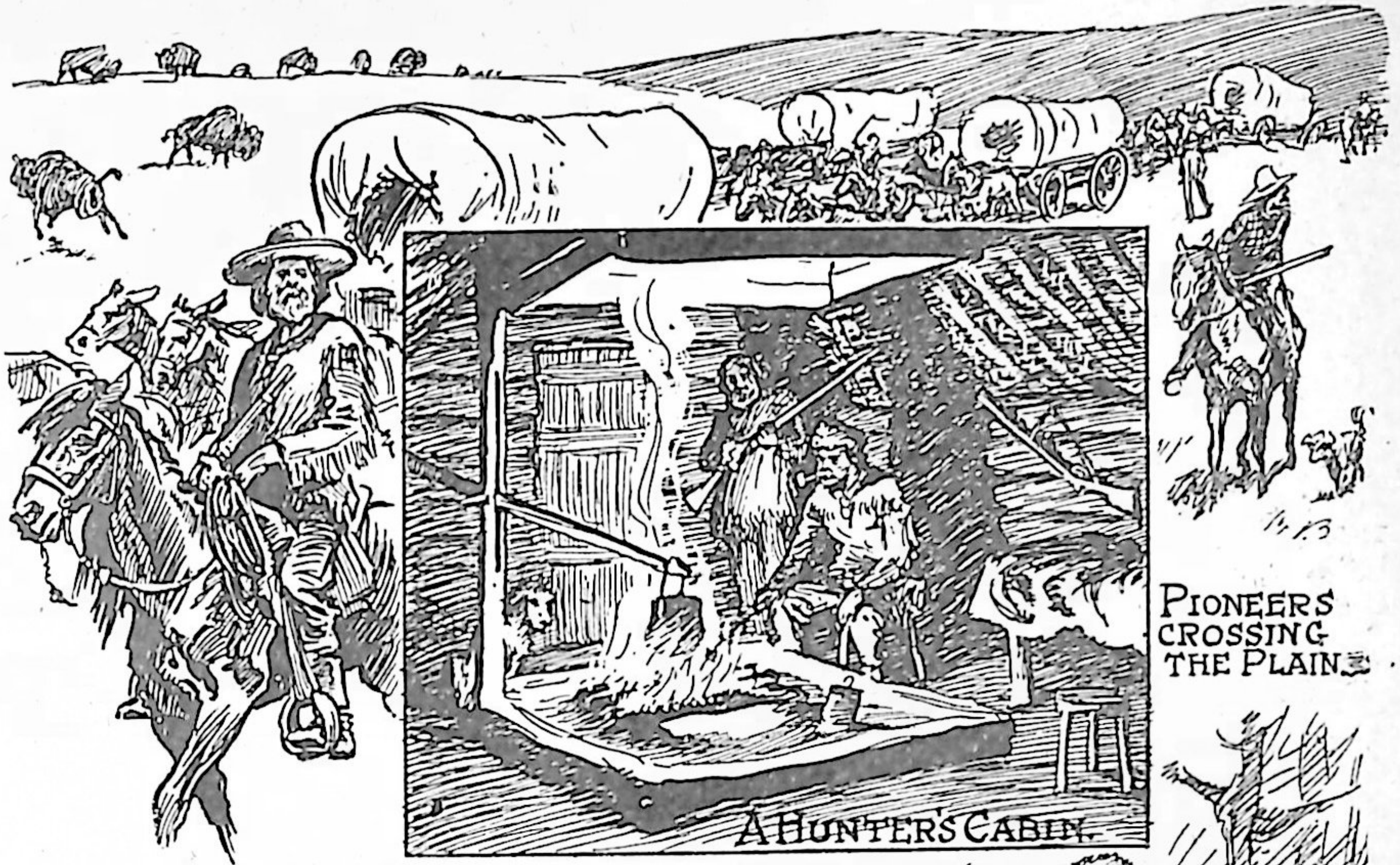
"W. G. Bunter, b. Blundell. 0."

Before leaving Greyfriars in his car, Uncle Peter bestowed quite a lavish "tip" upon Billy Bunter; and he left the school under the impression that his nephew was a wonderful cricketer, who would one day assist his country to fight Australia for the "Ashes."

Uncle Peter never learned how Bunter had really disported himself in the match with the Fifth. And Bunter, for his part, never learned that Uncle Peter had slept solidly through the match. Which was just as well for the peace of mind of both!

THE END

In the Days of the Old-time Frontiersmen



PIONEERS
CROSSING
THE PLAINS.

A HUNTER'S CABIN.



A MOUNTAIN
HUNTER.

A FIGHT WITH INDIANS.