

The fen country was wet and flat as stale beer, and almost of the same colour. The red twisting road was narrow and built up like a railway embankment, and all across the level distances wound other lifted roads where passing motors and vehicles looked curiously unsafe. In the drained low fields by the canals men were cutting the faded grass, and windmills helped to make the scenery yet more un-English.

On the far right stood up the old Abbey walls of Crowland, and in the centre of the little narrow-streeted town was squatted the three-arched bridge, dry with the dust from unnumbered generations of feet in the street about it, and hoary with an antiquity beyond knowledge. Peggy climbed the rough steps to the tread of the bridge itself; paved with coarsest stones, humped clumsily in the centre, and shaped very like the three legs on the device of the Isle of Man. Tradition says it was once the boundary between the two counties, but the present boundary is five miles away. Tradition says also that it was built about the end of the tenth century in the time of Edward the Martyr or that Edwy the Fair who followed him. It says, moreover, that the very ancient crude figure hewn out of rough stone against the bridge wall is a monk with a loaf of bread, a Saxon King, and William the Conqueror, but it can give no hint of the time when the water beneath the bridge ran dry for ever and its strange squat hog-backed strength became a matter for curiosity only.

Beyond it were very worn, very crooked steps for mounting to the pillion, and at the street end the grand arches of the ruined Abbey rose against the sky. Many of the figures still in the niches were boldly fine, but the general architecture seen from the front gave the suggestion of two coffin-boards, one upside down. Guthlac, a Saxon hermit, is said to have been the original founder of Crowland Abbey, but Surrey knew the present building for twelfth century at earliest. It was little more than a mask; a brave front hiding ruin behind it, and through the darkening