

TURNING BACK THE HUNS

down to the river at Vaux. Then by the canal-locks in the river valley, at Eclusier, another famous French African force, the Colonial Division, with which General Pétain had conquered the Hand of Massiges in Champagne, extended southward towards Fontaine-les-Cappy, where a fine Breton force was arrayed against the enemy.

SOMME RIDGES AND MARSHES

The crux of the position was the dividing line of the Somme Valley, separating the Ironsides from the Colonials. The small split stream of the Somme ran through marshes from one to two miles broad, the marshes being cut by a canal as well as by the river. Above the wide, winding zone of the marshes rose on either side a rampart of chalk. The river cliffs were in turn dominated by ridges, from three hundred to four hundred and fifty feet high, occupied by the Germans northwest and south. All the hamlets, woods, and fields in the large southern angle of the Somme running to Péronne were dominated by the main German heavy batteries on the slopes of Mont St. Quentin north of Péronne; and at Villers Carboneel, four miles south of the town, there was another important mass of long-range German siege-guns. The consequence was that, although Péronne was only about six miles from the trenches of the French Colonial Division, there was no chance of storming into the town by a direct frontal attack. For the great, curving, marshy river valley turned sharply south by the old, grey, lovely, walled city, and if the French troops had there crossed the stream, canal