The United States emerged from World War I not merely as a great military and political power, but also as the creditor of the exhausted victors, Britain and France. Through Herbert Hoover’s American Relief Administration, it also provided food assistance and public health support for countries across central and eastern Europe. Inspired by President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, many looked for a radical realignment of the European political and security system, the dismantling of multi-national empires, and the creation or restoration of nation states based on the right of self-determination of peoples. Wilson’s ambitious programme ultimately foundered on the political realities of post-war Europe, particularly British and French insistence on punishing Germany and disputes over new territorial borders in many parts of the continent. It was also undermined by resistance at home. American public opinion, instinctively unilateralist if not isolationist (America was always an “associated power” rather than an ally), balked at the prospect of a prolonged and expensive commitment to European security. Saturday Evening Post correspondent Eleanor Franklin Egan reflected American ambivalence in the articles she wrote during an extended tour of eastern Europe and the Caucasus following the armistice. Proud of America’s new international prowess and its achievements in humanitarian relief, she was deeply sceptical of the Paris peace process and the ability or intention of the Great Powers to bring stability and peace to the distressed populations of the eastern war zones.

The Great War presented American journalist Eleanor Franklin Egan with an unmatched tableau, and by the time of the armistice she had cemented her reputation as one of the foremost international journalists of her day. Her long essays from Serbia, Turkey, Belgium, and Japan were regular features of the Saturday Evening Post war coverage. She had survived near-drowning in the Mediterranean in 1915 after a U-boat attacked the merchant ship she was travelling on. And her breathless accounts of the British occupation of Mesopotamia provided an exclusive glimpse at a war zone in which civilians, and particularly western women, were all but banned. Following the publication
of her book, *War in the Cradle of the World*, in 1918, Egan’s by-line disappeared from the *Saturday Evening Post* for 10 months. But she had been hard at work most of that time. Rather than depriving her of a subject, the end of the war opened up new vistas that had been off-limits during the hostilities. During 1919 alone she journeyed from Paris to Italy and Yugoslavia, to Austria, through Hungary to Romania and Russia, then on to Turkey, and finally to the killing fields of Armenia, publishing a series of 11 articles of eight to 13,000 words each.

Egan was no stranger to these countries; she had visited them all and written about them before and during the war. But what she witnessed now shocked and depressed her. Rather than relief and reconstruction, the armistice had brought filth, disease, and starvation to millions in eastern Europe and central Asia. In many areas it had not even brought an end to war. Her accounts, still spiced with humour, still offering assurances of American exceptionalism and ingenuity, are strangely contradictory. She says she seeks to tell the “truth”; she must tell it, but she recoils from seeing too much. The unflagging spirit that had spurred her to pull every string and overcome every official obstacle in order to get to Baghdad two years earlier has been replaced by reluctance and dread: “I did not desire to go to Armenia”, she writes. “I was quite willing to take anybody’s word for it that condi-