



From the *North Queensland Register*, December 10, 1900

One of the old school rough and ready Western squatters had the pleasure the other day of having his death announced in the local skiter – a circumstance which annoyed him very much. And you can't blame him. I can sympathise with the old gentleman, because I have had the pleasure to have my death announced by Mulga wire on three different occasions. Once when trekking along the Darling River, N.S.W., I came to a traveller's hut. None of the swaggies knew poor me, and when my name cropped up in conversation, one of them said "6 x 8? Oh yes, I know him well. He dropped out on the Warrego a few months ago." The announcement sent a cold shiver through me, but I didn't contradict the news. People don't like to be told that dead people are alive. So I know how the old squatter must have felt when he read his own funeral notice. He called on the backblocks editor next day and stoutly demanded that a contradiction of his death should be inserted in the next issue of the paper, adding that failing that he would come down with all his stockriders and wreck the office. The editor had apparently been in such predicaments before, and didn't seem a bit frightened.

Quite cool and collected-like he said: "That, Mr Merino, is quite out of the question. No matter what your threats may be, and what may happen to our office in consequence, we never apologise, and we never withdraw a statement no matter how wrong it may be. Our paper is run in the interest of democracy and hard labour, and we must stand by our trenches once they're dug. Going back and apologising isn't in our line. But I tell you – now, dear sir, don't get excited – what we'll do for you. We'll put your name in the Birth Column next week.

The old sheep-grower surged for a while, but the coolness of the editor cooled his rage, and he went away satisfied and agreeable to the proposal. How must he have looked when in the next issue he found himself born again? Being reported dead is bad, but to be born again and have to go through all the strife and troubles of this life anew is hardly bearable.

From the *North Queensland Register*, November 20, 1905

We often hear people ask the questions, "What are we going to do with our boys and girls." Well, goodness only knows. Half of them would be well treated with a hard blow on the cranium. However, we have nothing to do with boys or girls. What we would like to know is what are we going to do with our swagmen. Year by year the swaggies are accumulating. Go where you may, from Wilson's Promitory to the Gulf of Carpentaria, and you'll bump up against a brace or two of knights of the swag. If this increasing game is not stopped our sunny land will have to be renamed Swagland. Everybody will be humping a bundle of rags about this continent looking for the elusive crust or the still more elusive job. Something will have to be done soon.

Mayne suggests to make soldiers out of 'em, and keep a standing army ready to fight the Japs or any other would-be intruder. The very sight of a regiment or two of whalers and sundowners, and other citizens of the billabong would scare away any enemy no matter how powerful. That wouldn't be a bad way of settling the swag question – that is if you could muster and yard them. Most of our wandering brethren would

go into hiding until the trumpets knocked off calling. Soldiering isn't a line to the average swaggie's fancy. Mayne and I are among the average.

A better and more congenial plan would be to make Sunday policemen out of a few thousand. Publicans everywhere are at our friend Peter Airey, the Home Secretary, for having a bobby in plain clothes standing all day at the front door and back door at some of the swankey mills to prevent the thirsty beer-chewer from satisfying his gnawing hunger on the Sabbath, while at other pubs, a roaring trade in snake juice is done. The Home Secretary admits that may be so, and he would gladly alter it if he had sufficient police forces to carefully watch every pub. Pubs are plentiful, and they cannot be all kept under the eagle eyes of the force, and therefore must take their turn. Of course it must naturally rile a beer-pumper to see people freely go in and come out wiping their mouths on the day of rest and peace, while he himself cannot pull a single long sleever without the risk of parting up five lovely quid for it. Now if Mr Airey enrolled about nine or ten thousand swagmen, every pub could have its own guardian both at the front and back doors. It would employ a lot of men, and not a drop of swankey would be consumed by anybody but the swagsome guardians of the law themselves. It is to be hoped some teetotal member will bring this plan before the Ministry as early as possible, as a lot of us want an easy job badly before Christmas.

